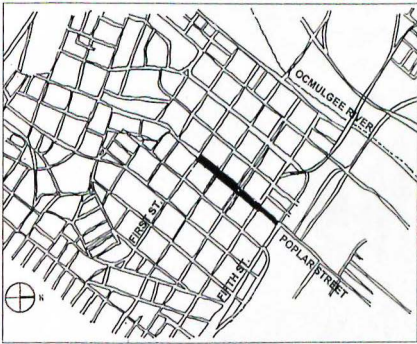
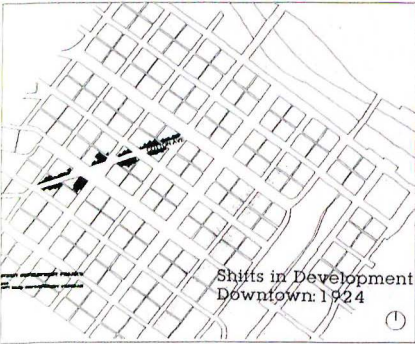


twelve

storing memories in the yard

REMAKING POPLAR STREET, THE SHIFTING BLACK CULTURAL LANDSCAPE



(top left and right) African-American urban settlement patterns, downtown Macon, 1924; downtown Macon, 1997.  
(bottom left and right) Existing view of Poplar Street, 1997.

NARRATIVE I

Time

1926

Setting

Downtown:  
Cotton Avenue

Characters/ Locations

The Walton family,  
(notable black  
Victorian family)  
The Hutchings family,  
(funeral home owner)  
The Duvall family,  
(upholsterers)

Rep. Jeffrey Long,  
(first black elected  
to U.S. House of  
Representatives.)  
Iola Bailey,  
(beauty parlor owner)  
Mile's Café  
Kyle's Drug Store  
Mose Miles,  
(pharmacist)



African-American businesses along Cotton Avenue, 1930s. Reprinted from *Macon's Black Heritage*, Tubman African American Museum (Macon, GA, 1997).

Macon, Georgia is a city of boulevards. Wide canyons made of brick. They form a pattern that resembles an 'H.' If we assume lore and tale are true, then the ancient city of Babylon emerges before our eyes. The boulevards only fill up when people come out with their objects and transport. They empty when people go away, taking their things with them. The most magnificent sight is when bales of cotton come to town. Bound in burlap, they instantaneously metamorphose, occupying the middle of the boulevard.

The only street that follows its own path is Cotton Avenue. They say it was a native Indian trail that led to the Ocmulgee River. It cuts the terrain, slashing deliberately through the orthogonal city grid. As you stand at the highest point along Cotton Avenue looking downhill toward the river, you see that a bustling black aristocracy has built churches, law offices, and commercial businesses. Standing in opposition to City Hall's neoclassical girth, the site seems to be consciously overlooking the industrious freedmen and women.

**MACON YARDS** Macon is situated in the once mighty agricultural black belt of middle Georgia. The city's architecture is a mix of old and new buildings featuring the highest percentage of antebellum buildings in the American south and the recently constructed State of Georgia's Music Hall of Fame and Sports Hall of Fame. Macon's black history is chronicled in literature and local museums highlighting its indigenous musicians; namely, Little Richard, Lena Horne, and Otis Redding. But between the lines of historic texts, museum exhibitions, and rhythm and blues lyrics and licks, and in the stones of new and old buildings, reside deeper memories of a city where cotton was king. De Certeau characterizes this juxtaposition of old historic relics and the common rituals of daily life as a haunted landscape—one that can tell a story through its memory.<sup>1</sup> As it turned out, the kings were white and the paupers were black. Racial and social injustice prevailed; strong black businesses thrived and failed as the landscape of urban blacks became characterized by instability and mobility. A shifting black landscape emerged from institutional displacement of the black working class and gentry. This landscape of work and play can be documented over time, revealing causal effects of racial injustice, planning, and class perpetuated fears. Contemporarily, the shifting landscape has come to rest on Poplar Street in downtown Macon. I characterize this as the backyard of downtown Macon. Whether cotton bales, markets, fire stations, clubs and bars, or parking occupied the street, Poplar Street's functions have remained a place for storing the city's everyday rituals and memories. These histories and events create a different lens to observe the contemporary black street life of Poplar Street that is organized around public parking and a meager transit system.



(left) View of Poplar Street with parks, 1910.  
(above) Cotton bales down middle of Second Street,  
Macon, Georgia, 1905. Both photos reprinted from Vickie  
Leach Prater, *Macon in Vintage Postcards* (Charleston:  
1999).

<sup>1</sup> Michel De Certeau, Luce  
Giard and Pierre Mayol,  
*The Practice of Everyday Life*,  
Garnneapolis: University of  
Minnesota Press, 1998).

The analogy of Poplar Street as the city's backyard provides a framework to better understand cultural transformations that have a direct influence on the design and use of Macon's urban landscape. The yard, as a landscape type can be examined within this context, focusing specifically on its cultural attributes and utility, while serving as the link between the past and present. The southern yard typology is employed as a cultural vessel and receptacle in the current re-making of the street's public landscape. This appropriated landscape type is the vehicle for an improvisational design process that is at once gesture and archive. Utilizing this gestalt in the design process it is possible to uncover the city's cultural past while rehabilitating present and future memories within a familiar context—stabilizing the once shifting landscape in which blacks and others occupy Macon's downtown.

**YARD AS ARCHIVE** The yard is particularly endemic to the understanding of everyday southern life and domestic landscape. The yard in southern culture hosts common and everyday rituals in connection with the home. The southern yard can at once be a garden, a place to while away the day, a landscape of cultivation and utility, and a landscape where personal objects are collected, displayed, and sometimes forgotten. The yard is seen as an archive. De Certeau writes, "Gestures are the true archives of the city, if one understands by 'archives' the past that is selected and reused according to present custom." They remake the urban landscape every day. They sculpt a thousand pasts that are perhaps no longer namable and that structure no less their experience of the city.<sup>2</sup> Although the yard is an abstract concept when we think of the urban street, its many meanings and functions can be reused as a framework for making new histories.

Reviewing the etymology of yard we ascertain that it is derived from the Old English word "geard," which meant "to enclose," and in Old High German its derivation was "gart"—meaning "garden". Cultural geographer Paul Groth writes, "by the 1500s, urban writers in England commonly used the phrase 'house and yard,' and noted that one could keep dogs or a cow in the yard."<sup>3</sup> He further states that there are historic English examples of yards adjacent to aristocratic houses in the 1500–1600s and that by the early 1700s the term yard also described great sweeping spaces around

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 141–142.

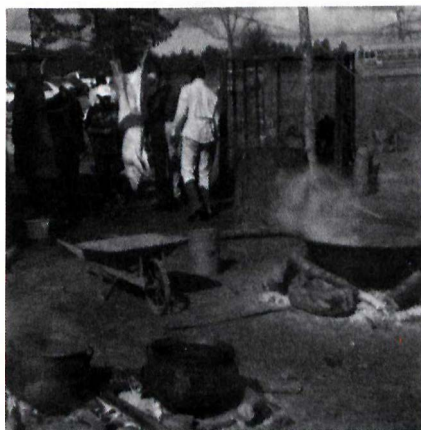
<sup>3</sup> Paul Groth, "Lot, Yard & Garden," *Landscape* 30, no. 3, (1990): 29.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 30.



country houses. His description reinforces the yard's etymological transformation. Most importantly, Groth suggests that yard is situated in the triad of American urban landscape types: the lot, yard, and garden. "When we call something a yard, it generally implies more value than something called a lot. In turn, we often treasure something called a garden."<sup>5</sup> In the southern landscape this triad is not always clear as seen in Richard Westmacott's seminal study *African-American Yards and Gardens in the Rural South* (1992) and Richard Wilhelm's *Dooryard Gardens and Gardening in the Black Community of Brushy, Texas* (1975). Both studies describe a hybrid meaning and use for the yard, inferring that it is a landscape valued for functional purposes and also a treasured garden landscape.

The yard's importance as an everyday cultural landscape coupled with the ephemeral nature of Macon's black cultural landscape is further diffused by particular memories of a segregated Macon. However, particular episodic narratives from the past can force a bond with new memories by articulating the yard's spatial and social construct within a new setting. Moving from archive to gesture, it is possible to activate the site's history, altering the cultural backdrop from which to engage a collective and not segregated past. Aldo Rossi quotes Halbwachs's *La Mémoire Collective*, stating, "When a group is introduced into a part of a space, it transforms it to its image, but at the same time, it yields and adapts itself to certain material things which resist it. It encloses itself in the framework that it has constructed. The image of the exterior environment and the stable relationships that it maintains with it pass into the realm of the idea that it has of itself."<sup>6</sup> Thus, the yard as archive is a tangible landscape that holds specific cultural memories. The yard as archive weaves new black cultural narratives with the old, rendering a new gesture to remake the Poplar Street landscape.



Hog gutting in a southern yard. Reprinted from Richard Westmacott, *African-American Gardens and Yards in the Rural South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Aldo Rossi, *The architecture of the City*, trans. Diane Ghirardo and Joan Ockman, (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1982) 139.



Blind blues guitarist in downtown Macon. Reprinted from *Macon's Black Heritage*.

**STREET AS ARCHIVE** “Can you imagine people no longer making music, painting, making pictures, dancing ... ? Everybody would answer no to this.”<sup>6</sup> Rob Krier ponders this question, addressing the street as an urban typology. Surely, this is a question more relevant to the European community than for American communities. This is not to say that American cities do not contain streets where people act out artistically and socially. Most American cities feature special or counter-cultural streets where true democracy can be found: South Street in Philadelphia, Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley, Bourbon Street in New Orleans, and almost any street in Manhattan. But these are far from the norm in most city neighborhoods. Contemporary American streets have been de-democratized, redesigned by modern engineering practices in order to facilitate our penchant for the automobile. The car has become more important than people. We can imagine people no longer making music, painting, making pictures.

Aside from the streets mentioned above, there are others that can be examined for their rich cultural life and everyday expressions. These are the streets that pass through ethnic enclaves. They portray social patterns usually deemed unsightly, disorderly, and counter to the norm. They are street landscapes where democracy is practiced in the everyday. Whether Latino, Asian, or in black working-class enclaves, the streets are cacophonous landscapes where cultural patterns and practices win out. In contrast,

<sup>6</sup> Rob Krier, *Urban space* (New York: Rizzoli, 1979) 20–21.

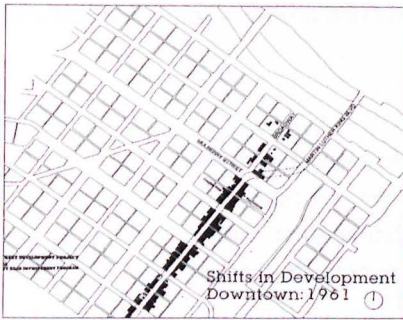
they are not Elm Street, the tree-lined bucolic ideal with picket fences and neat lawns, or the commercial street with ubiquitous site elements. Our tendency in the last century has been to clean up this democracy by legislating their design, in order to reform human use. Under the pretext of streetscape design, use is standardized and subordinated to the automobile's circulation and storage.

Idiosyncratic use and appropriation of the street by common folk is the true archive. For many Americans similar practices were abandoned at childhood. In association with the yard, street use in ethnic enclaves represents an archive that is slowly disappearing. In Macon, Georgia, Broadway Street existed in the mid-twentieth century before becoming Martin Luther King Boulevard. Looking at specific time periods the street in this ethnic enclave is a lens to understanding the tragic life and death of a black cultural landscape, but most of all, Broadway as archive uncovers what was, and what most Maconites still remember.

NARRATIVE II	Time	Characters	Butterbeans
	1950	Little Richard	and Susie
		James Brown	Cab Calloway
	Setting	Otis Redding	Duke Ellington
	Downtown:	Bessie Smith	
	Broadway Street	Ma Rainey	

Broadway is a black nexus. A cacophony of movement and sound fill the muggy August night. It is a landscape of filling stations, motels, hotels, theaters, dance halls, clubs, bars, flop houses, and used car lots. White Maconites go out of their way to avoid the density of blackness.

This is the black side of downtown. People strut their stuff, unconstrained by the predicament of segregation. As soon as people arrive from the train and bus, they are entertained by the melodious rhythms of everyday activities. By day everyone seems to be preparing for the night, getting haircuts and straightenings, shopping, or working. They anticipate when the work will be done.



(left) African-American urban settlement patterns, downtown Macon, 1961. (right) 1959 view of Douglass Theatre on Broadway. Reprinted from *Macon's Black Heritage*.



On Broadway you find the Douglass Theatre. They say that Bessie Smith sang here. On any night names synonymous with blues or R & B grace the stage. It is a southern version of New York's 42nd Street—hot blues to go with hot nights.

Broadway Street's transformation reveals urban redevelopment under the guise of progress as the tool for dismantling black cultural life. Regional transportation routes between Savannah and Atlanta emphasized Macon's geographical location along the I-75 corridor, a corridor that eventually replaced train and bus service. Here, suggestions of the processes responsible for urban restructuring are illuminated. Suburbanization, the emergence of the rent gap, and demographic changes in consumption patterns eventually led to the erosion of Macon's urban core. Housing and business divestments in the city center increased as money shifted to new edge developments. Racial strife was exacerbated by new visions of the city modernizing at the expense of the black community. In addition, the rural to urban migration patterns concentrated on urban areas speeding their erosion by overcrowding and intensified use. Tensions increased further as fewer jobs existed for unskilled workers—jobs moved to the urban edge where cheap land facilitated the building of factories for efficiency. Retail followed the move to suburbia and, coupled with the systematic dismembering of mass-transit, made travel impossible without an automobile. During this time period development in Macon stretched across the Ocmulgee River east of the city center and along Interstate 16 connecting to Interstate 75. Public spaces and dwellings overrun-



ning with black citizens and thriving businesses were prime targets for redevelopment utilizing blight as a rationale. To blacks, Broadway was their entertainment district, but to city fathers it was a slum that needed cleaning up.

The landscape of Broadway was reconfigured, beginning with the redesign of the street. The street was increased in size and buildings deemed blighted were removed. A two-lane paired roadway was inserted, breaking away from the city's historical grid. A large suburban style intersection was created at the intersection with Mulberry Street, connecting Broadway to 5th Street and onto Interstate 16. Most of the businesses along Broadway were impacted by this development, leaving only one major building that city leaders saw as the most important memory worth saving, the Douglas Theater. The theater eventually closed and later would be refurbished and renovated as a historical and civic building.

Black businesses along Broadway never regained their physical and spatial form and pattern. The mix of entertainment, commercial, and residential uses that sustained and created a distinct cultural episode in the black history of Macon would be lost forever—giving way to an automobile landscape. Broadway's name would eventually change to Martin Luther King Boulevard. As in other cities the street that bears King's name is central to redevelopment and modernization projects that were prevalent after the time of his assassination. They became places that were structurally improved at the expense of cultural life.

Etched in black Americans' memory are streets and places such as Birdland on 42nd Street, Slim Jenkins on 7th Street, the Fillmore district, Harlem, and Beale Street to name a few. They were streets and places where black culture acted out in a time of segregated rule. They were black landscapes. When the landscape shifted, the music stopped. The ghosts of Bessie Smith, Duke Ellington, Ma Rainey, and Little Richard haunt Martin Luther King Boulevard in Macon, Georgia. It is no longer a street. The engineers call it a connector. Driving through this landscape it is visually and physically impossible to imagine the heyday of black cultural life. Gone are the continuous building walls along the street and, in their place, large parking lots and post-modern buildings occupy large lots. But the memory of Broadway lives on in the minds of most black residents. The contemporary black nexus has moved to Poplar Street. But

unlike its predecessor the street has failed to bring back the music. Each chance has been thwarted by aggressive politics and deep-seated prejudice that remembers Broadway Street. But, more important, it is a different street... it is a boulevard, 180 feet wide. Times have changed; Poplar Street is a parking lot and the buildings are empty. Utilizing the street archive as a link to the past, Poplar Street can be remade to reflect an understanding that streets are for people. Streets are the last democratic public space. Merging the yard and street archive into one landscape brings the past forward into the present day, thus exorcising the ghosts that haunt the city landscape.

Narratives emerge from the cultural context that haunts Macon's urban fabric. The yard and street as archive hold past memories that reside deep in the subconscious; as gesture, it binds previous episodes, current use, and future dreams. It is possible to interpret Macon's physical landscape through the research of Sanborn Fire Insurance maps. Once the physical remains of Macon's black cultural heritage are uncovered, they can be pieced together to tell a story that begins with the city's origins and its transformation to the current-day landscape. In contrast, written and oral histories and archival photographs present story and tale, illuminating the other cultural landscape that exists in the subconscious of black Maconites. Selected narratives can reveal liminal episodes that actively contribute to the city's story through remembering.

**LANDSCAPE AS MEMORY** The prospect of uncovering a particular episode from the past relies on the ability to trigger the mind to remember what was. "In our everyday lives, memory is a natural, perhaps automatic, by-product of the manner in which we think about an unfolding episode."<sup>7</sup> Unfolding implies that episodes are not static but dynamic recollections. They are encoded and retrieved, evoking the exploration of stored memories.

Henri Bergson suggests that "whenever we are trying to recover a recollection, to call up some period of our history, we become conscious of an act sui generis by which we detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves, first, in the past in general, then in a certain region of the past—a work of adjustment, something like the focusing of a camera."<sup>8</sup> Memory, like a camera, zooms in and out of focus and

<sup>7</sup> Daniel L. Schacter, *Searching for Memory: The Brain, The mind and The Past* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 45.

<sup>8</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer, (London: G. Allen & Co. Ltd., 1929), 133.

frame of reference; images and place unfold from the subconscious only when present day events, places, and things trigger past episodes.

Landscapes inhabited by blacks in downtown Macon, Georgia, during the last hundred years represent meager holdings in the present-day city surroundings. Their sum does not constitute a landscape to trigger particular environmental episodes from the cultural past. Dismantled and erased, the black landscape is shadowed by Macon's more formal and more grand Victorian and neo-classical landscapes. As well-preserved memories, the formal landscapes are set aside like cherished family portraits. Collectively, they are framed and in focus, reconstructed for us to remember a particular past. The other landscapes, inhabited and created by blacks, are nothing more than a scattered set of memorials and disparate historic buildings. They are not included in the family portraits. A collage of discrete artifacts, these remnants stand in odd juxtaposition to their evolving built surroundings and preserved antebellum memories, a telling tale of fragmented cultural and social change. Though meager landscapes and artifacts remain, we can encode their specific past from the social and built memory of Macon's black inhabitants. These dynamic episodes live on through story, tale, and historic artifacts and archives. Blacks have labored in Macon as artisans, builders, and professionals; their contributions are literally in the stones and mortar of the built landscape. Old cotton warehouses, asphalt streets that suppress beneath them hand-made bricks from the local kilns, restored vaudeville-era theaters, and single-bay office buildings bear testimony to Macon's black heritage. **The shadow of their past life haunts the contemporary built environment.**

Kenneth Foote explains in *Shadowed Ground* that the "concept of memory provides **an important bond between culture and landscape, because human modifications of the environment are often related to the way societies wish to sustain or efface memories.**"<sup>9</sup> The dominant society in Macon throughout the twentieth century effaced the landscapes created and maintained by blacks. This speaks directly to cultural fragmentation and racial segregation. Its implicit impact and manifestation in the landscape is separate landscapes, one black and the other white. Modification and change to Macon's downtown in the twentieth century are manifested within the context of segregated societal views and memories.



Tourist brochure  
cover page

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth E. Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 33.

Most notable from a review of these landscapes is that the dismantling of black institutions and businesses follows the story of many black southern communities during the same time period. The causal agents, primarily economics, class, and racism, precipitated the movement of blacks to grounds unoccupied and unwanted by whites. This created the beginning of a shifting cultural landscape. Emblematic of the fragmentation caused by steady migration and uprooting, the black cultural landscape today is represented by selective memories and histories drawn from artifacts left behind. However, they present a skewed nostalgia. Macon's black heritage is preserved in the landscape exogenously. Only particular physical landscapes and artifacts were deemed important for preservation by the city's administration. Everyday landscapes that hold the memories of blacks were not preserved.

This story is not an isolated one; it is true for many urban landscapes inhabited by blacks throughout the twentieth century in America. Borchert describes the northern migration of blacks to the back alleys of Washington, D.C. and their successive demise and change;<sup>10</sup> Crouchett describes the demise of the 7th Street entertainment and commercial centerpiece in West Oakland, California, due to infrastructure development.<sup>11</sup> In both cases urban blacks shifted their place of residence. The shifting urban landscape, by its very nature, makes difficult the accretion of collective memories. Sites are scattered and lost, leaving the concentration of shared memories diluted.

Macon's black cultural landscape is dynamic and episodic despite a history of obstacles. The region has a long history of slavery and racial discrimination. Institutional planning and urban restructuring processes physically fractured the black downtown community. These conditions were further exacerbated by the decline of the southern agriculture economy, the boll weevil infestation, and the great migration<sup>12</sup> as people moved north for better means of income. Modern urban renewal, aggravated by race and class based planning, led to the further dismantling of the city's everyday black landscapes along Cotton Avenue, Broadway Street, and Poplar Street. In the end, simply because specific memories were not shared by all, the black landscape was modernized and improved, erasing a century of black occupation and progress. A patchwork of pawn shops, boarded-up buildings, and check cashing stores supplement a bakery, barber, and beautician. Only one club is left on the street—Grants

10 James Borchert, *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850–1970* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

11 Lawrence P. Crouchett, *Visions Toward Tomorrow: The History of the East Bay Afro-American community 1852–1977* (Oakland: Northern California Center for Afro-American History and Life, 1989).

12 Donald L. Grant, *The Way It Was in the South: The Black Experience in Georgia* (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1993).

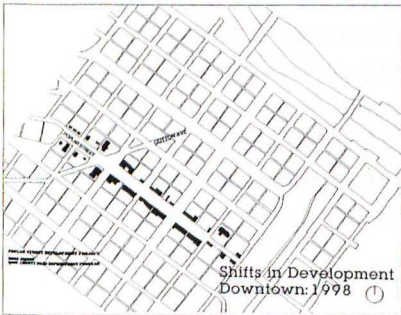


NARRATIVE III	Time	Characters	Doctors
	2000	Barbershop	Bus riders
	Setting	Club owner and son Bakery	
	Downtown:	Marco Denese	
	Poplar Street		

Lounge. Inside, polaroids and snap shots define the Wall of Fame. The musicians and clubs are long gone—the polaroids are the only documentation.

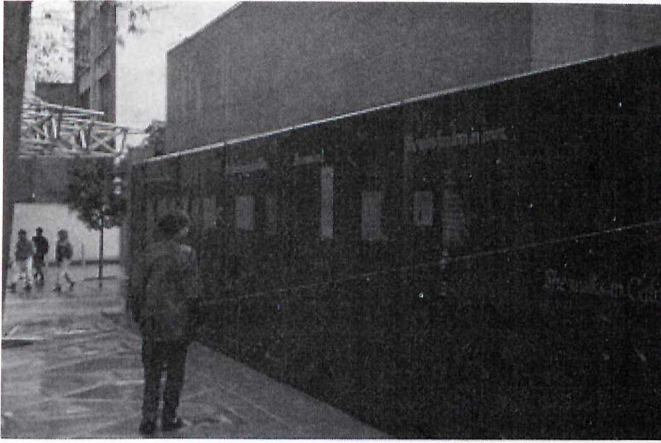
The street is a parking lot from sidewalk to sidewalk, all 180 feet; 210 cars in all can be parked over three blocks. They say that pecan trees were planted here once; that a market and fire station graced the street; that parks flowed up the street's center; that a creek sprouted in the lower block; and that the mayor once brought a tank down the street to quiet the club rousers. It is hard to imagine these things when the sun is beaming down on you in July with no tree in sight. It is hard to imagine these things today.

Most of the people on the street are black. Most of the people on the street are waiting for the bus, under the wooden shelter, for good times. When I first visited downtown, my hosts never drove down Poplar Street. Instead we toured the mansions on the hill. I think they were ashamed to show me the street with the Daughters of the Confederacy obelisk and the black folks.



African-American urban settlement patterns, downtown Macon, 1998. (right) Poplar Street bus shelters, 1996.





View of Biddy Mason Wall,  
downtown Los Angeles,  
1994.

**GESTURES IN THE LANDSCAPE** The small number of landscape projects recalling and interpreting episodes from the American black cultural landscape have been futile in their attempts to prompt memory of past events or episodes. Those created are static monuments and memorials that bear didactic displays in lieu of real landscape experience. The Biddy Mason Park and Art Wall in downtown Los Angeles, for example, document the homestead and life of California's first midwife. The story is an important one to California's black heritage and Mason's family. An eighty-one-foot wall of narrative and images provides visitors with a historic account and placement of the homestead. An image cast in stone of Mason's home and picket fence graces the wall. Her portrait, which is also placed on the wall, is still clear in my memory. But within the existing context, adjacent to a parking lot, the juxtaposition and setting contribute very little to induce any episodic memory of a particular place and time. Hayden writes, "set against a Masonic skyline, this small place devoted to history encouraged a viewer to contemplate change on Spring Street in both space and time."<sup>13</sup> The juxtaposition does force you to come to terms with the transformed landscape. However, the simple fact that Mason's homestead has been effaced, reduced to a wall, leaves us to ponder why this ground, important enough to be singled out, does not contribute to the contemporary landscape in a more integrated and interactive way. Could the stones be assembled not as a static monument in time but as a part of that new mid-block landscape?

<sup>13</sup> Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 187.

Nothing can replace real landscape experience. When we attempt to remake these landscapes, we must fully understand what we are trying to bring back. Michel de Certeau suggests that “renovation does not, ultimately, know what it is bringing back—or what it is destroying—when it restores the references and fragments of elusive memories. For these ghosts that haunt urban works, renovation can only provide a laying out of already marked stones, like words for it.”<sup>14</sup> Once removed, the stones cannot be put back together in the same way. Their re-assembly gives way to the construction of new histories. The story evolves and changes. In Macon, the stones have been re-assembled to tell a story that is different than that remembered by black inhabitants.

Yearly, Americans flock to great European cities in multitudes to bathe in glorious histories and past memories that are literally written in the cities’ stone and mortar. Returning home our environments seem sterile, void of the same richness. We yearn for the same qualitative experiences and connection to the past. What we cannot articulate or see in the environment is the simple fact that past histories have been subtracted out of our everyday landscape. Le Corbusier’s mantra of “when the cathedrals were white” continues to haunt American renovation. The American modern landscape is characterized by the disregard for the old, whereas in mature cities and cultures of the world the past is valued even in the face of modernization. The stones are carefully subtracted and put back in place literally one by one. In time they change and give way to new memories as each stone is understood for its past and present contributions. In Rome, the twentieth century exists within the stones of emperors and popes. And within the walls of Raphael Moneo’s Roman Artifact Museum in Merida, Spain, the visitor is immersed in a visual cacophony of Roman centurions marching along the roadway discovered beneath the city. As you view art works under the roof of a modern structure, past episodes come alive through juxtaposition and program. The past haunts the built environment and remains familiar to all visitors and inhabitants.

These thoughts suggest that maybe a more thoughtful and fruitful endeavor is to wed old, diverse, and disparate artifacts with newly constructed landscapes and built constructions. American society today more than ever requires a bond between cultures and a willingness to share memories. The most important and telling landscapes, those which are used everyday, are the landscapes least discussed or studied, yet they

<sup>14</sup> de Certeau, 143.

are the sites that generate the strongest memories, the strongest associations with place and time. If these stones, the rebuilding blocks of collective memory, are removed, how do we reclaim them and reassemble them?

A bricolage approach, as illuminated in American vernacular building traditions and improvisational characteristics exhibited in African-American cultural arts,<sup>15</sup> can be a useful design strategy to extend the lineage of memory and time into the present landscape. Other black American cultural art forms reveal the process of improvisation as seen in the work of Bearden, Parker, and Ailey. They suggest ways to reverse normative trends and validate the existence of the other in our public landscapes.<sup>16</sup> This process does not seek to diminish or eradicate the existence of European cultural influences on the public landscape, but instead attempts to validate acculturation by utilizing the norm as a point of reference to begin an extemporaneous design exchange, introducing familiar spaces and objects based on other cultural experiences, social patterns, and practices. These strategies necessitate inclusion of the past through an additive design process, counter to normative site demolition and subtraction strategies.

Landscapes can incite episodic memories in the physical. Even though it is a subjective endeavor, this can present a proscenium for understanding setting, time, and place of spatially articulated social relations and landscapes, forcing us to recollect our past within the setting of the present. To fuse objects and space with the past a cultural backdrop must be in place to serve as a structure for juxtaposition. This does not mean that we simply mix together the old and new, but carefully commingle past and present through formal gestures and narrative. De Certeau writes of these two as a condition for a new urban aesthetic. They are chains of operations, like a spoken language. Improvisation facilitates personal expression and freedom within the structure of specific site and building design. De Certeau sees “two distinct modes, one tactical and the other linguistic.”<sup>17</sup> He further explains that “gestures and narratives manipulate objects, displace them, and modify both their distributions and their uses.”<sup>18</sup> Story can be distinguished from form, incorporating the physical landscape from the past and present through real landscape and built constructions, allowing narratives to reach back, extending the past to the present and future. In this way, we can clearly see where to place the fallen and misplaced stones.

<sup>15</sup> John Michael Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978).

Robert Ferris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> de Certeau 1998, 141.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 141.



The project for the re-making of Poplar Street in Macon, Georgia, utilizes the yard and the street as historical archives to bridge the gap between the past and present. The yard is a simple gesture that refocuses the street into small identifiable spaces where people come together to socialize or for other leisure activities. Current uses such as parking and transit continue. They are juxtaposed with new building structures that sit atop previous building sites, water features that emanate from previous sources, spaces, and places where music can be played, and landscape elements and plantings can create space. The new objects and spaces take on new meanings through human use and change in context.

NARRATIVE IV

Time

2002

Setting

Downtown:

Poplar Street

Characters

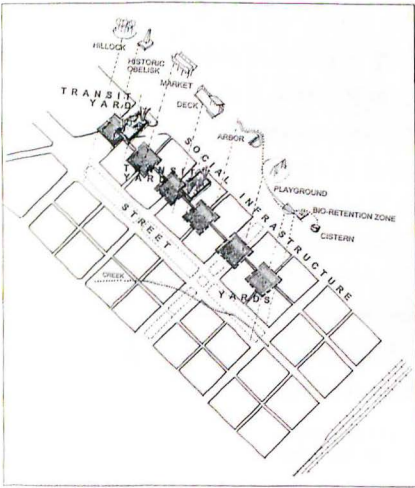
Citizens of Macon

Hood Design

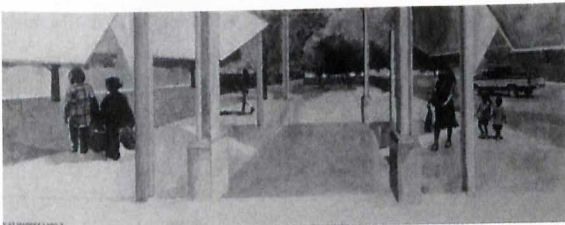
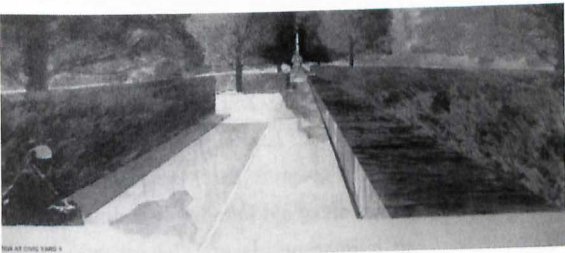
City of Macon

Bibb County Road

Improvement Program



Hybrid street diagram



View of Yard #1 and Yard #2

**YARD AND STREET AS GESTURE** Located in the heart of the city of Macon, Poplar Street is a wide boulevard featuring public yards where automobiles, people, water, light, trees, and flowers create a cacophony of activity and sound. Storefronts of buildings are full of merchandise as tourists flock to buy souvenirs and southern edible delights. The building uses are mixed, featuring housing, retail, restaurants, and civic functions. The new transit system has buses and trolleys for locals and tourists.

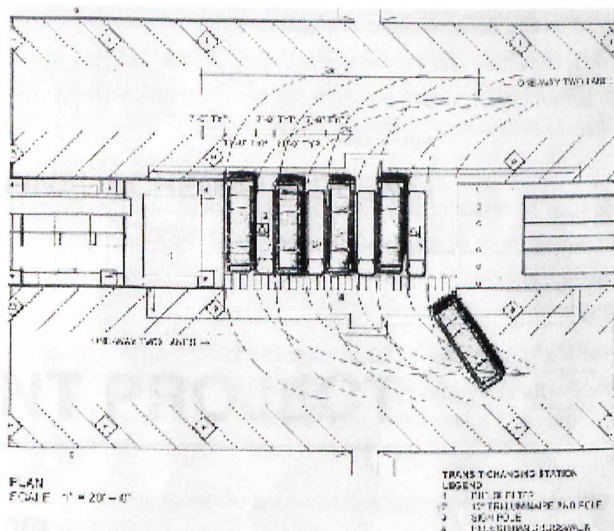
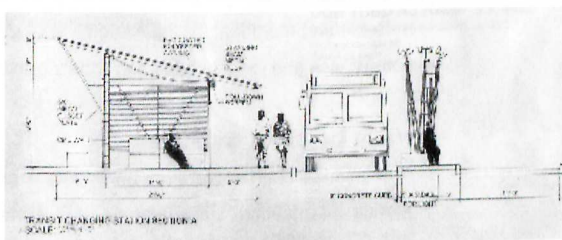
The yards are synonymous with the street. As you walk up and down the sidewalk you notice spatially that activities and movement are taking place in the street itself.

On this day the yard has a market with a group of pickup trucks backed in selling apples. Another has a trellis structure with beautiful vines draping its center and big oak trees along the edges. Kids are running through the space chasing the butterflies that from a distance seem like blossoms in air. A local band is set up in another yard playing the blues on the porch structure. The latter is full of people reclining in yard chairs. The hot sun is reflecting off of the fountains that shoot water horizontally across the ground.

At the top of the hill, the obelisk dominates the yard where the water overflows into a big trough. The shadow and reflection make the yard seem full. At the bottom of the hill children are playing on the swing and racing sticks in the fountains that channel along for a block before disappearing into the ground.

There are a few strange and unfamiliar objects in the yards that hold your attention. The lights are big and animated like the windmills in George Ervin's yard; they are giant tripods. In several yards the ground appears to have been cut; big chunks of yellow rock are visible in wire cages on the ground. Along the cut's broadside the ground seems like a layer cake. You can see dirt, stone, brick, and asphalt as if someone sliced it in half with a knife. The fountains seem to be seeping the water out of the ground. They are like shallow wells that you do not need to pump. In certain places there seems to be some sort of old foundation walls. One is really big but the bus stop shelter sits on top of it in some places. The others fade out under the porch where the musicians are and along the sandbox where the kids are playing. They cannot be old foundations . . . they shine too much and are made of stone.

Looking up and down the street you see black and white alike, eating, playing, parking, walking, talking, and just hanging out in the yards.



(clockwise from top) Poplar Street looking towards City Hall; the transit changing station—elevation and plan.