



State Route 480 (SR 480) was a state highway in San Francisco, California, United States, consisting of the elevated double-decker Embarcadero Freeway (opened in 1959 and demolished in 1991).

Daniel Solomon: An Appreciation

Why Architects in Practice should Teach

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Abstract: Bennett identifies in Solomon's work a paradigm for deep understanding of urban situations which can produce sympathetic, constructive interventions in existing cities, and paradigms for new ones. Solomon is seen as a paradigm of values for professionals teaching in universities.

Love versus Hope is the latest accomplishment of an architect who has designed remarkable urban housing during a long career in which he has also been on the faculty of the University of California, Berkeley and a significant contributor to the Congress for the New Urbanism, helping to cause significant re-thinking of American settlement patterns. The story is very personal for me, since, as an architect of housing and a teacher of about his age, Solomon's accomplishments constitute a very high standard for our work as architects and teachers.

As a clueless architecture student at another university, I spent a summer in San Francisco at about the time Solomon was starting at Berkeley. The city was magic, then and now, but Solomon as a native who developed an appreciation of San Francisco which was deep and personal and which he vividly explains.

He describes the pre-occupation with 'Thinghood' in the architectural education (and the architecture) of the time – buildings seen to be isolated – designed without study or understanding of the 'continuous' environment of which they were to be a part. The consequences of this thinking gave us the cities of the late 20th century with their spatial vacuity and isolated buildings studied only in their own terms, not their connections to their contexts. He shows his own masters thesis – a group of outrageously tall towers on the sacred San Francisco waterfront. My own masters' thesis at the time, a hulking suggestion for a city hall for Fremont, California, a newly incorporated

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city on the East Bay, received an honorable mention in a competition in 1966. The design that won was built and has been demolished since the competition. Unfortunately, this object-centered thought remains strong in today's architecture. Solomon's counter-conception of the 'continuous' city is a major theme of the book – and of the reformed curricula of some architecture schools including my own.

As a young professional, he was animated by the local struggles I saw as a brief visitor – the damage caused by the Embarcadero Freeway, and all the other 'Hope'-ful efforts of the '60's and '70s to remake American cities using 'urban renewal' and the construction of highways. His engagement with community groups, developers, slightly subversive planners and the forces behind ruinous 'rupturous' acts against his city are full of the insights, disappointments and successes which brought him national attention early as an architect. His story is a 'Love' affair with his native city which can be a model for all of us.

His deepening affection for his city and its residents is told engagingly through his experiences in remaking Public Housing 'projects', illustratively the Hunters View reconstruction effort. This World War 2 labor settlement had devolved into a behavioral sink which housing officials, most of the residents and even preservationists agreed required replacement. Solomon's stories of some of the residents shows an engagement far closer than mere consulting. The resulting plan is still in progress, but shows his architectural successes at building streets with buildings, planning with connections, useful spaces and housing quite different, and more humane than the military types of the original development.

His early years at Berkeley included association with Catherine Bauer Wurster, one of the chief advocates for the importation of European models for mass housing. She brought the Zeilenbau model from Frankfurt: midrise parallel identical blocks separated for solar exposure, objects on an undifferentiated landscape – prototypes for places like Hunters View. This reminder of Bauer Wurster's role, associations and impact remind us of the seductive influences of European examples on American housing design in the pre- and post-war years and their effect on architectural education, especially Berkeley, Illinois and Harvard.

Solomon's ideal urban type is the perimeter block which makes, or maintains streets, and provides courtyards for semi-public or private use – the opposite of the slab and tower in the landscape. His chapters on Paris and Rome show an enthusiast's knowledge of the modern histories of these two cities in a compendious but personal set of reflections on those cities and their interaction with Modernism.

His chapter on 'The Chinese Puzzle' shows his ingenuity at applying fundamental cultural sensibilities to a culture not his own to help solve one of the worst manifestations of Modern urbanism – the Chinese mass cities of isolating towers in a totally 'Ruptured' urban fabric. Amazingly, he has been successful in building a counter-prototype using the indigenous courtyard house as a component of an urban alternative to the current alienating standard.

At one point, Solomon refers to himself as a contextualist, the name given to a brief period of American architectural reflection in the '70's and '80's when the 'Rupture' of our cities become so apparent that stylistic pastiches were proposed to (purportedly) mend the fabrics. Solomon's architecture is not merely postmodern contextualism. Granted, when called upon he can produce ornamented buildings appropriate to parts of San Francisco (Biedeman Place Townhouses) but in other situations, his forms are abstract and closer to Italian rationalism (House for two Musicians, Hunters View). He speaks several languages fluently – an aspiration to be shared by all of us working in today's environment.

Universities today are somewhere between ambivalent and hostile to professional education. The term 'professional' has been applied in my university to non-tenure track faculty in acceptance of the idea that research and scholarship are nobler than professional activity in the status ranks. We appoint 'professors of the practice' but not 'professors of research' or 'scholarship'. Solomon's work and thought as recorded in 'Love versus 'Hope' is all three, and brings credit to U.C. Berkeley for Solomon's inclusion on its faculty. He sets an example for thoughtful, active and activist work which can motivate us all to think, work and even write as parts of our professional work – work which should have full citizenship in universities as paradigms for the young. And in Solomon's case, prototypes for a newer, restorative urban future.