

# Book Review

April 2015

## **Cities**

Lawrence Halprin 1916 – 2009

The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, [1963], Revised Edition, 4<sup>th</sup> printing 1978.

## Highlights

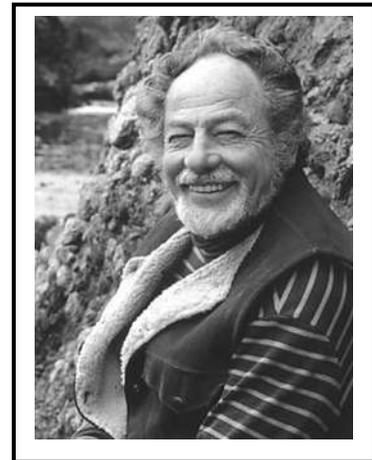
**Cities** is one of those books from the 1960s when idealism in city planning was blooming, design was a valuable commodity, environmentalism was new and cities were just beginning their comeback. People like Halprin led the way with lofty ideals and ideas, strong skills and a classical foundation in history, design and the expression of thought. *Cities* is a book containing all these things; plus photos and sketches galore to illustrate Halprin's point of view. A "must read" for urban designers and others so inclined.

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His work at Ghirardelli Square, Nicollet Avenue and the Portland parks Represent his thoughtful and sensitive approach to the public realm.

All are remarkable achievements that set the tone for the urban resurgence that America has been experiencing ever since.

Halprin, a landscape architect, is well known for his sketches. *Cities* has, it seems, more photos and sketches than text. A tribute to his way of communicating ideas is the many graphic examples in his work. The



current vogue of computer graphics supplemented with water color sketches makes a statement, but loses the spontaneity of the quick sketch, even the quick sketches that take hours to prepare...a diminishing art in the urban design profession.

## Implications for the American City

Halprin does "not touch on many of the basic aspects of city planning which are fundamental to the functioning of cities and whose decisions are precursors to aesthetics." He believed that planners and designers were coming together on the idea that once the fundamental systems of the city were provided, "their function is to guide change; not to develop static form or fixed criteria, but evolving form. The search in our time is for valid processes..." "In search of a valid process, I have tried to avoid any implications of compositional principles, any rule book of urban aesthetics." [p9]

Halprin's contribution to society is his unflagging optimism in the future of the city. His strong belief in the power of beauty and the idea that cities "demand participation." Movement, action, liveliness and motion are the elements to be captured in public spaces, streets and every aspect of urban life. Physical design can achieve socialization goals.

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Despite his rejection of checklists, the table of contents from *Cities* provides an insight into the processes he searched for:

- Urban Spaces
- Gardens Between Walls
- Furnishing the Street
- The Floor of the City
- The Third Dimension
- Water in the Square
- Trees for All Seasons
- The View from the Roof
- Choreography

Movement is the element that gives cities life. Water, trees, birds, kites, cars, bikes and every dynamic aspect of the natural environment and human nature are captured in his urban spaces. “Finally, the city comes alive through movement and its rhythmic structure.” The chapter on Choreography opens with: “Participation and activity are essential factors of a city. One can be a passive spectator in the enjoyment of the arts, but the essential characteristic of the city as an art form is that it demands participation.” [p193]

### YouTube

Uploaded on Feb 18, 2009

Hear Lawrence Halprin talk about his extensive career in landscape architecture, his design philosophies, and his most notable projects. Learn more [www.tclf.org](http://www.tclf.org)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-zPI8XgPyM>

### A Published Review and Discussion Paper



## Cities: Revised Edition

by [Lawrence Halprin](#)

“In ‘Cities’, Lawrence Halprin examines the basic elements of the cityscape: the open spaces that give a city its character and the spaces within which its life takes place (streets, plazas, parks, the private living spaces and small gardens); street furniture (kiosks, benches, light); the city floor (asphalt, brick, concrete); water; trees; roofviews; and what Halprin calls the “choreography” of the city. This edition includes a section on Halprin's fountains.”

<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/575032.Cities>

### A Discussion Paper

#### **The Fate of Lawrence Halprin’s Public Spaces: Three Case Studies**

Alison B. Hirsch, University of Pennsylvania,  
Graduate Program in Historic Preservation

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Theses (Historic Preservation)

University of Pennsylvania Year 2005

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Historic Preservation 2005.

Advisor: John Dixon Hunt

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons@Penn. <http://repository>.

## Excerpt:

“Lawrence Halprin is an environmental designer that understands the value of a rich urban experience. Yet because he was most active in the 1960s and 1970s, a period too recent to have yet inspired widespread public appreciation and one often associated with the evils of urban renewal, many of his designs are currently threatened. The following chapters focus on three Halprin sites: Heritage Park in Fort Worth, which is threatened by neglect and new development, Skyline Park in Denver, which has already been demolished and redesigned, and Seattle Freeway Park, which is deteriorating and threatened by a partial redesign that would diminish the value of its experience. These three designs successfully fulfill Halprin’s lifelong interest in the experiential quality of landscape. Today, however, city officials justify the sacrifice of each of these spaces, because of their generally introverted nature, which contrasts the current emphasis on open access urbanism.”

## Related Readings:

- ***A Clearing in the Distance, Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the Nineteenth Century***, Rybczynski, Witold, Scribner, 1999.
- ***Bowling Alone***, Robert D. Putnam, Simon & Schuster, 2000.
- ***Design of Cities: Revised Edition***, Edmund N. Bacon, The Penguin Group, NY, 1976.
- ***The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces***, [William H. Whyte](#) (Author, 1917 - 1999), Project for Public Spaces, New York, 1980.
- ***The Resilient City. How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster***, Vale, Lawrence J. and Thomas J. Campanella, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- ***Triumph of the City, How our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier and Happier***, Glaeser, Edward, The Penguin Press [USA], London, 2011.

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