Lake Eola Park Toilet Facilities: A Paradox of Safety and Security Through Exposure

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INTRODUCTION

Located in the center of downtown Orlando, Florida, Lake Eola Park has had all the problems associated with an urban park. For years the park had been the center of illicit activities, most of which had occurred in the existing toilet facilities. These facilities were part of the city's beautification projects which included the renovation of the 50-acre Lake Eola Park into a showpiece for the city with a changed image: from a habitat for vagrants, drug dealers and prostitutes to a vibrant urban park filled with cultural activities and pedestrian traffic. The paradoxical technique utilized to design the toilet facilities was *safety and security through exposure*. The dialectic of the public toilet facility within the urban public park juxtaposes the most private space against the most public space within American culture. This paper is a discussion of the Lake Eola Park Toilet Facilities with respect to public versus private within the historical contexts of bathing/elimination and urban space/community in order to reveal how an act of modesty might more comfortably occur with a minimum of exposure.

THE PRIVATE ACT

During the Roman Empire public toilet facilities were truly public and were places for social intercourse. They appeared in Roman cities as early as the second century B.C. when a water delivery system with an ample, continuous flow was developed. They were often incorporated into bath buildings, or *thermae*, because there was an ample source of water

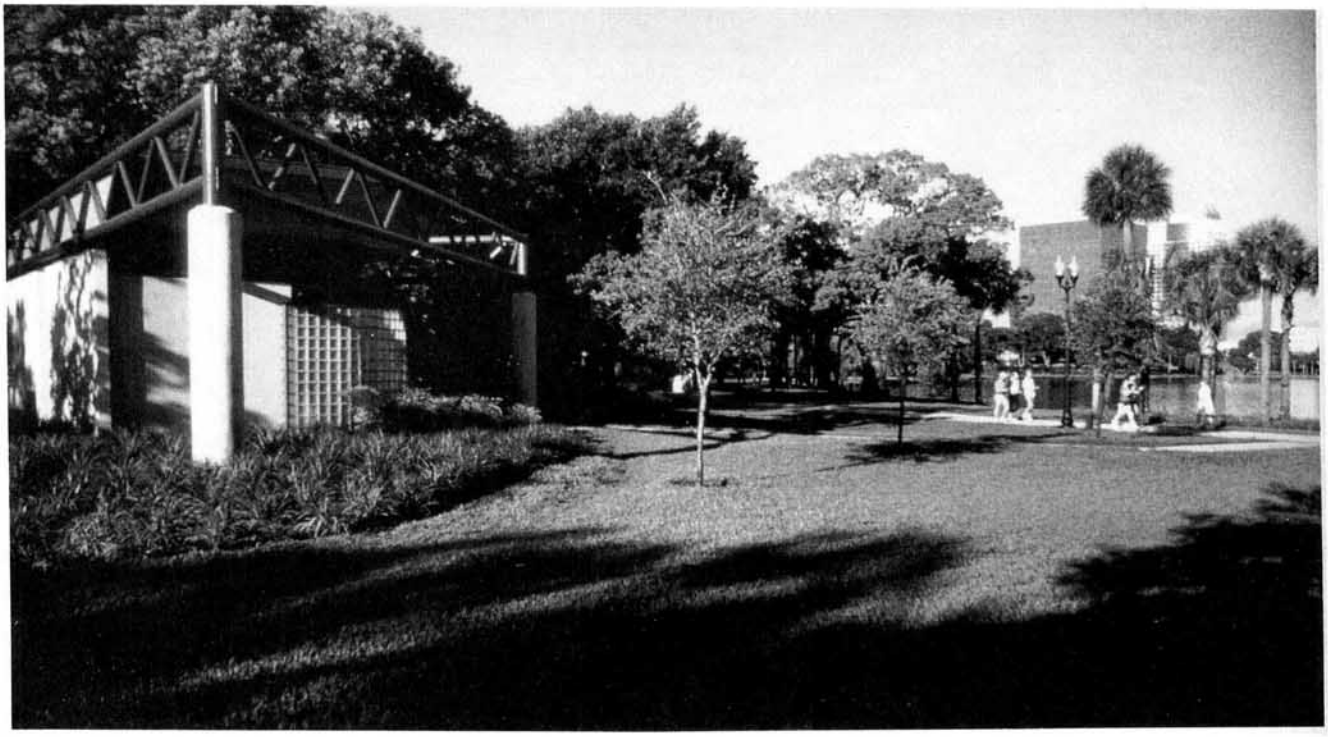


Fig. 1. Lake Eola Park Toilet Facilities looking toward the west and downtown.

run-off. Roman public toilet rooms were usually rectangular with benches for sitting along three sides, and generally could accommodate over twenty citizens at a time. Oftentimes they were lavishly decorated to encourage the citizen to spend time there. The thermae in the 4th century city of Timgad in North Africa had toilet facilities with twenty-five stone seats, each separated by a carved-marble dolphin-shaped armrest. Thermae were usually located near the forum in the city center which was a gathering point for governmental activity; therefore, these public toilets were frequented by senators and other politically-minded citizens who found it to be an ideal place for networking. By Roman standards this was not considered immodest, for they frequently and openly discussed bodily functions. To the average Roman citizen a visit to a toilet was as natural as a visit to the dining hall, and equally conducive to conversation.[1] However, these public facilities were only for the governing male elite, neither women nor slaves could go there; even a father could not go there with his son.[2]

In "The Mechanization of the Bath," Siegfried Giedion looks at the evolution of the bath and the bathroom as an oscillation between considering the bath as an act of ablution or the bath as a means of total regeneration of the body. When the bath was regarded as a means of purification or cleansing, bathing became a private matter; whereas the regeneration bath encouraged social intercourse and often became a focus of community life such as the thermae of the Roman Empire.[3] Sanitation and elimination generally mirrored attitudes toward bathing.[4]

The Romans exalted the human body. Bathing was a multi-stage affair involving entry into a warm room, being rubbed with oil, being rinsed, scraped, and reanointed with oil, and entering a cold bath. Bathing was a communal or public affair and served a variety of social and relaxation functions centered around rejuvenation of the body. The public toilet facilities of the Roman Empire were flushed with water run-off from the thermae. After the decline of the Roman Empire and for a thousand years thereafter during the Dark and Middle Ages, Europe went unwashed; gone were the aqueducts with continuously running water. Elimination became private.

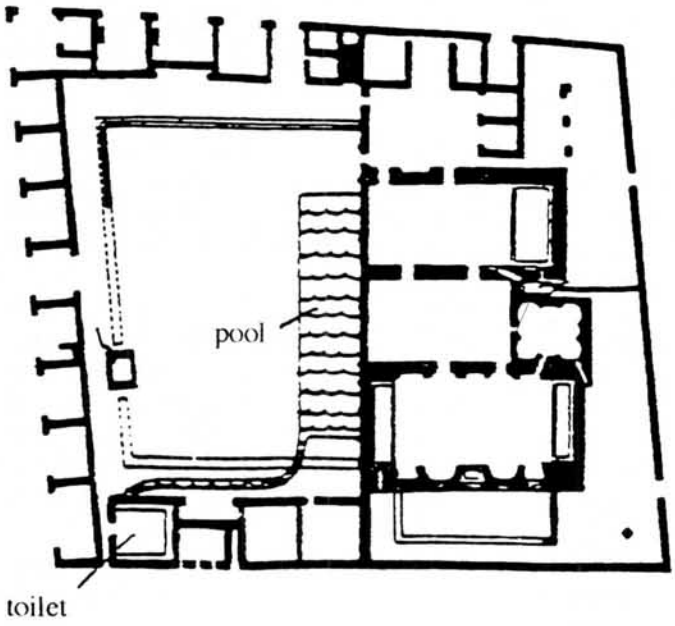
During the Middle Ages the monasteries and abbeys became the guardians of culture and sanitation. For example, a medieval monastery, the London Charterhouse, had a complete system of water supply in 1430 and also had a "large and decent place" called the "Privies" which were not unlike our modern-day public toilet facilities. They had wooden toilet seats and wooden partitions "so they could not see one another when they were in that place."[5] In urban areas elimination occurred privately into chamber pots which were often emptied out of windows into the street below to collect in noxious pits.

The medieval castle utilized the *garderobe*[6] for elimination. The garderobe relied on gravity to carry the human soil within the castle wall to a garderobe pit below which may or may not have been washed by a diverted stream running through the moat; or, the garderobe may simply have been in a corbelled-out projecting turret to give clearance directly to the moat below. The garderobe was usually located in a small room of its own. An exception were the garderobes at Southwell Palace (1200-1300 A.D.) which radiated around a central shaft, facing outward onto a circular passage so that neighbors were sociably within hearing distance but decently out of sight. Compare the private outward-facing garderobes at Southwell Palace with the more public inward-facing toilets of the Roman thermae.

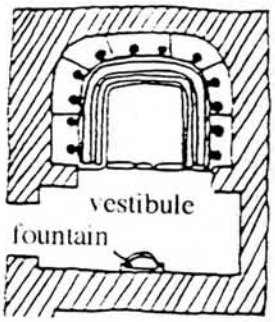
The unhygienic conditions of the Middle Ages most probably contributed to the Black Death which ravaged Europe and climaxed around 1350 A.D. After the Black Death people bathed to cleanse themselves. The medieval bath was a communal affair. Water, particularly hot water, was scarce. Families generally bathed together in a portable tub in order to conserve the water which had to be hand-carried. The bath was also utilized for ablution purposes, particularly in the inauguration of knights; for bathing was seen as a symbol of purity. Following this ceremony, the knights were presented with beds, bed covers, or a cover for the bath. The ceremony of presenting a cover for the bath was one of modesty and one of the first suggestions that bathing might be a private affair.[7] Elimination was private and still without running water. As late as 1596, for most people the injunction to retire 'a bow's shot' away was all the sanitary precaution they heeded. Jonathan Swift, in 1745, recommended the garden of the country house as the place for anyone to 'go pluck a rose.'[8]

The purpose of bathing began to shift from an act of cleansing to bathing for regeneration purposes during the sixteenth century. Patrons would gather in domestic surroundings to take 'the cure' in a medicinal bath in promiscuity along with other patrons. Cleanliness was no longer an issue during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the commoner and royalty alike often went unwashed. However nakedness became a sin. At this time the Islamic or Turkish bath was reintroduced to Europe as a foreign luxury for the wealthy for regenerative purposes, and yet one bathed alone in specially-designed cubicles. Elimination, however, was public for Louis XIV and Louis XV. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in France kings, princes and even generals treated the *chaise percée* (Royal Stool) as a throne at which audiences could be granted. The royal stool was even fabricated in versions whereby two persons could sit simultaneously. This stool contained a chamber pot which required emptying by a chambermaid or a valet.[9]

Historically, then, when bathing was considered as regeneration, elimination became public; when bathing was considered as ablution, elimination became private. In the middle and late 1800's bathing again became associated with cleansing and the cure of diseases, and subsequently because of the epidemics and plagues that had swept Europe during the preceding years, toilet facilities were also geared toward health and hygiene. Indoor plumbing, however, did not become commonplace in America until after World War I



Central Baths with latrine, Pompeii (after H. Eschebach)



Public toilets, Thugga, North Africa (after M. Grassnick)

Garderobes at Southwell Palace

Fig. 2. The public toilet within the thermae and as compared to the medieval garderobe.

which is when the toilet ceased to be a luxury. According to Giedion, during this century the American bath became fully mechanized into the "bath-cell" (5' x 8' bathroom with toilet, lavatory and tub) appended to the bedroom. As a result, the American bath became tied to an act of simple ablution for cleansing the body and health maintenance. The word "toilette" originally meant the cloth in which artisans gather their tools (fourteenth century); then the cloth on which brush and comb are laid out (sixteenth century); then their use but also the spread of clothes and the act of putting them on (seventeenth century).[10] Today the word encompasses grooming, dressing and eliminating, all of which in America ideally take place privately within the master bedroom suite.

Culturally, the American attitude toward elimination is one of solitude, antisepsis and modesty. Bathroom activities are usually done alone behind closed doors. Americans attribute good physical health to bathing and washing; to be clean is a virtue in and of itself. Thus, toilet functions are often linked to hygiene. The American bathroom reflects the virtues of health and hygiene in its design and use such that it is now an austere, clean, sanitary, efficient, simple place where cleanliness and health maintenance are evident in every facet of its design. Americans use all manner of deodorants and perfumes to hide body odors and the bathroom itself is kept clean with sterilizing agents. Thus, the American views anything associated with natural bodily processes and odors negatively. So much so, that the American rarely uses terminology which actually describes the room. American attitudes regarding toilet functions are so modest that the names for the place are masked: powder room, restroom, john, etc. The acts of elimination are disguised as numbers one and two, people try to prevent others from hearing noises made during elimination and are ashamed of the odors they create in the process.[11] These cultural qualities of solitude, antisepsis, and modesty all reinforce the private nature of the American attitude toward the toilet.

THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

The location of the Lake Eola Park Toilet Facilities in the heart of downtown Orlando, Florida places them in a contradictory position. American cultural values would ask that these facilities be private, antiseptic and discreet. And yet the very nature of the American urban public park asks that it be accessible to all citizens for their use and enjoyment, which would make privacy, hygienic conditions and modest behavior difficult to maintain. Prior to the park's transformation, these conditions would have been even more difficult to achieve. According to the park's landscape architect Annette Chaffon-Perry of the firm Herbert-Halback, Inc., "Since most normal people didn't want to hang out there, the park became a haven for drug dealers, prostitutes, and vagrants. . . People were literally living there, under the bushes, in the corners and in the restrooms."[12]

Ideally, the urban public space fosters an exchange of communication and culture between all citizens. This was not always the case. The Roman forum located in the city center was simultaneously a gathering point, functioning municipal center, and a symbol of municipal pride. How-

ever, the forum was restricted to the male elite; women and slaves were forbidden to be there. The Greek agora, often idealized as a public open space, was restricted as well to the male citizen. Women and slaves were consigned to the realm of the household. In 5th-century Athens, women were not permitted to enter many areas of the city and a special police force restricted their movements. The only daily occasion when well-bred women could leave their homes unchaperoned was to fetch water.[13]

In medieval times in both Paris and London the square was a central place of multiple use, of meeting and observing; where everyone knew each other. After the great fires of London in 1666 and Paris in the 1680's, these cities began to reorganize around the square. However, in Paris the square became a monument to itself with activities primarily of passage and transport with little pedestrian activity. On the other hand, in London the square became a museum of nature for shrubs and trees; street vendors, acrobats, and flower sellers were not allowed to be there nor was there a place to walk. Around the 18th century in Europe new networks of sociability developed with the building of massive urban parks with pedestrian promenades. The pedestrian promenade allowed for a fleeting suspension of social distinction; however, contact between the classes consisted of royalty driving by in their carriages and waving at their subjects. This engendered the notion of the stranger and of silence in public: taking a walk with the ability to pass anything or anybody by.[14]

The 50-year-old Lake Eola Park was redesigned around the notion of the ideal urban public space: a place where all citizens could meet, gather and communicate. The design began with a ten-foot wide pedestrian promenade which circles the lake. This wide walkway allows several people to pass each other comfortably, encourages eye contact and discourages the avoidance behavior the average American exhibits when in close proximity to a stranger.[15] This is a distance which allows for familiarity in American culture and for an exchange of communication among strangers.

The pedestrian promenade meanders maintaining distances which allow for easy observation and is juxtaposed

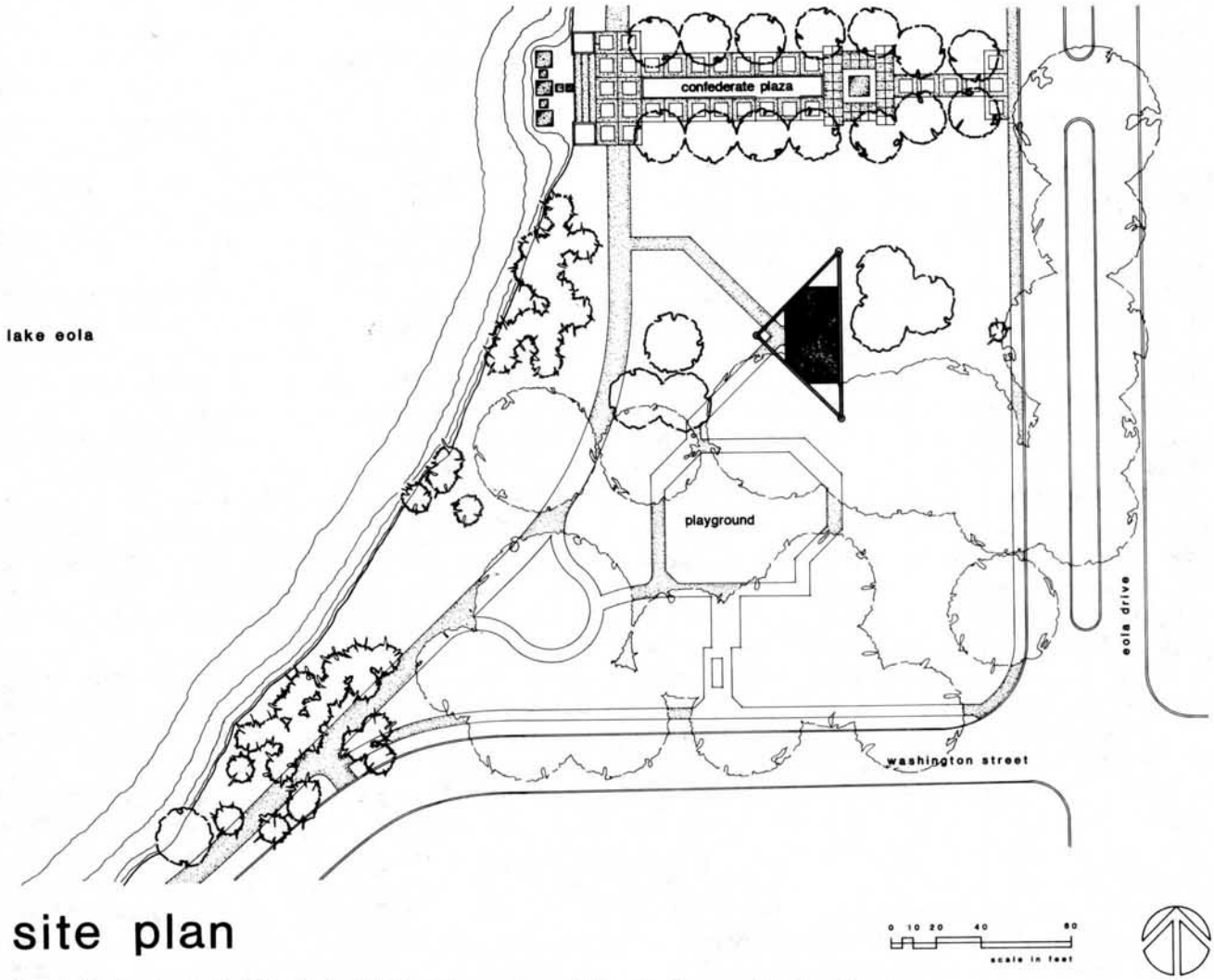


Fig. 3. East end of Lake Eola Park with Confederate Plaza, children's playground and public toilets.

with several symmetrical plaza areas. The park is so well-lit at night that it almost seems like it is daylight which contributes to a general feeling of safety and security. The design also includes several activity centers which encourage social interaction: the Chinese Pavilion donated by the Chinese government, fish pond, children's playground, Japanese garden, amphitheatre, and concession stand for both food and the rental of swan boats. The combination of pedestrian promenade, plazas and activity centers has created such a vibrant urban center that recent analyses have shown that people come to the park as a destination point from as far as 25 miles away.

SAFETY AND SECURITY THROUGH EXPOSURE

The redesign of the park by Herbert-Halback and toilet facilities by the author while with Architects Design Group began in 1986. Since then the National Crime Prevention Institute has published Timothy D. Crowe's book, *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* (CPTED), in 1991. CPTED is a means of incorporating crime prevention into the design process by reducing the propensity of the physical environment to support criminal behavior. There are three basic strategies to CPTED: natural access control, natural surveillance and territorial reinforcement.[16]

Natural access control uses physical and spatial elements to permit entry to legitimate users and deny access to intruders. By denying or restricting access, a greater perception of risk is created thereby inhibiting criminal activity. In Lake Eola Park, public access spaces are clearly delineated by connecting the plazas and pedestrian promenade at key points along the periphery of the park with the street. The remaining areas are grassed and discourage access.

Natural surveillance is a principle that enhances observation opportunities. By strengthening visual ties to public spaces and to each other, the public is allowed to be the "eyes on the street" and is encouraged to watch out for each other. Natural surveillance is achieved in the park by keeping vegetation clear from between two feet to five feet above the ground. Prior to the park's renovation there was a problem with people sleeping amongst the vegetation. Dense vegetation also allows the potential criminal a place to hide in order to surprise the next victim. The center of the park is an immense lake which naturally limits the depth of the park between the lake and the surrounding streets and naturally facilitates observation through the park.

Territorial reinforcement allows people to develop a sense of proprietorship over spaces. By defining spaces through physical design elements which provide visual cues as to the nature of the space, whether public or private, an individual is empowered to defend a territory. Territorial reinforcement comes naturally through the use of natural access control and natural surveillance. The pedestrian activity which has been observed during all hours of the day in Lake Eola Park is evidence that this park is one which the citizens have claimed as their own.

The CPTED strategies of natural access control and natural surveillance run counter to the American cultural notion of the toilet facility. Natural access and natural surveillance speak of the "public." The first recorded uses of the word public in English, circa 1470, identify it with the common good in society. Around seventy years later it began to mean open to general observation; by the end of the seventeenth century, public meant open to the scrutiny of anyone.[17] In this sense, the Lake Eola Park Toilet Facilities *are* truly public. There are two in the park: one facility is at the west end located next to the concession stand and near the amphitheatre, and the other facility is at the east end by Confederate Plaza and the children's playground. Toilet facilities are traditionally isolated by location as a cultural sensitivity. Isolated locations encourage illegal and illicit activity. Both of these locations encourage public use of the toilet facilities because they are busy activity centers which are most often occupied. The increased use of any public facility increases the perception of safety for the normal user.

Natural access is achieved because there are no entrance doors to the facility. This is one of the salient points in a CPTED design. The traditional vestibule entry system for public toilet facilities presents unsafe cues to normal users and safe cues to abnormal users. A vestibule consisting of a double-door entry system produces a warning sound and a transitional time that is an advantage to the abnormal user. This floor plan was developed using site lines from the outside to the inside which were calculated to prevent visibility into any discreet functions. The entry area is gracious, and without doors the toilet facility is convenient to enter and perceived to be safe.

The Lake Eola Park Toilets were envisioned as open-air facilities with walls of varying heights which are free of the floating roof structure. The walls are free of the roof and free of each other in order to capture prevailing breezes and redirect them through for natural ventilation. The walls have a protective paint finish which prevents graffiti from adhering and allows for easy cleaning and disinfecting. Its maintenance-free design and ability to be easily hosed clean reflects the American cultural expectations of hygiene, cleanliness and health maintenance. However, these toilets run counter to the American attitude toward elimination as a private matter because every sound made within becomes public.

It is through the scale of the wall heights that the user feels safe and secure. The entrance wall which shelters the toilet partitions is as low as the top of the toilet partition. Although the user is not exposed, the outside world is not far away. These low wall heights set up the psychological feeling of discomfort due to the threat of potential observation with the positive effect of discouraging lingering in the facilities which limits the possible occurrence of illicit activities.

The facility is enclosed by a translucent glass block wall. The inside and the outside of the facility is dissolved to the least point of differentiation: the ultimate in visibility without complete exposure. At night the toilet facility is like

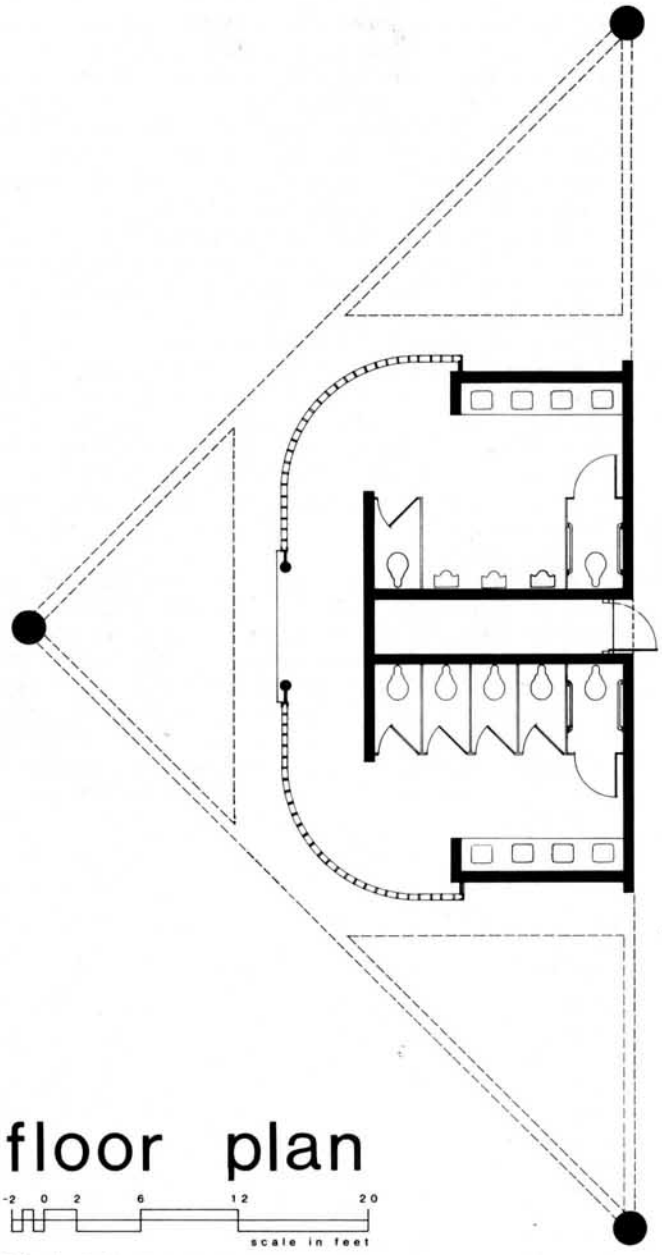


Fig. 4. Lake Eola Park Toilet Facilities.

a beacon in the park. Natural observation is achieved both during the day and during the night, because although details cannot be distinguished, the movement of figures is easily detected. This design gives the normal user the ability to determine who is in the restroom easily and creates a greater perception of risk in the abnormal user.

CONCLUSION

Safety and security in a public space is critical for space use, particularly for the elderly and women. Many women do not use parks and plazas because of the fear of rape or other forms of physical violence. The frequency of sexual attacks and verbal sexual approaches indicates how much women's sexuality makes them fair game to men in public spaces. Women in public cannot claim as much right to privacy as men can. This type of harassment is because men associate a private concern (sex, intimate activities) with women's presence in public spaces. Unfortunately, women themselves make a similar association. Men's recurring violence toward women encourages bathroom segregation because it makes it easier for potential assailants to be spotted as "out of place." Providing women with latched cubicles provides a further bit of security in a world made less secure by men.[18]

An ability to feel a sense of control over a space, to be able to see in, to escape easily, or to gain assistance in times of crisis are examples of how a place can be made to feel more secure. The ability to control access to places and defend against intrusion are characteristics of territorial behavior. This behavioral mechanism operates in the service of privacy to help regulate access to the self. Privacy is a permeable boundary under the control of a person and is a dynamic process of regulation of openness/closedness to others. An area that cannot be defended against intruders is not considered to be a private territory. Public territories are temporary territories which are available to all citizens as long as certain codes of conduct are observed. Control is generally restricted to time of occupancy in places such as toilet stalls and is limited to that area around a person that is temporarily recognized as being under that person's control such as the area in front of someone washing their hands in a public lavatory.[19]

The Lake Eola Park Toilet Facilities foster a delicate balance of territorial reinforcement in the citizen. The toilet facility in American culture is considered to be a private space, however when placed in a public park they become a temporary public territory. These facilities reinforce territoriality in the citizen because their design empowers the citizen to feel safe and secure through exposure. They are simultaneously comfortable and hostile. They are comfortable to the normal user because of visibility, however that same visibility creates an hostile environment for the abnormal user. The potential criminal does not feel comfortable because of the perception of risk and the vagrant is discouraged from taking up occupancy. However, if these facilities were too hostile, then the normal person would be afraid to use them. The Lake Eola Park Toilet Facilities hang in the balance: *safety and security through exposure.*

NOTES

[1] Diane Favro, "The Roman Latrine: Urban Technology and Socialization," in *On Architecture, the City, and Technology*, ed. Marc Angelil (Stoneham: 1991), 41-43.

[2] Lawrence Wright, *Clean and Decent: The Fascinating History of the Bathroom & the Water Closet* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 17.

[3] Siegfried Giedion, "The Mechanization of the Bath," in *Mechanization Takes Command* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1969), 711.

[4] For a complete discussion and history of the toilet, bath and bathing see the following works: A.J. Lamb, "Sanitation: An Historical Survey," *The Architects' Journal* Volume LXXXV

(March 4, 1937): 385-403; Roy Palmer, *The Water Closet: A New History* (Newton Abbott: David Charles, 1973); Lawrence Wright, *Clean and Decent,* and Siegfried Giedion, "The Mechanization of the Bath," in *Mechanization Takes Command,* 628-712.

[5] A.J. Lamb, "Sanitation," 386.

[6] The term *garderobe* means wardrobe in present-day English, hence a garderobe flushed with water would become a water closet.

[7] A.J. Lamb. "Sanitation," 397-8. The last time this type of ceremony was performed was at the Coronation of Charles II, in 1661.

[8] Roy Palmer. *The Water Closet*, 19-21.

[9] Lawrence Wright. *Clean and Decent*, 100-2. Thus, the origination of our present-day reference to the toilet as a throne.

[10] Ivan Illich, *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness* (Dallas: 1985), 66.

[11] For a thorough discussion of American cultural attitudes toward bathroom functions see: Irwin Altman and Martin M. Chemers, "The American Home," in *Culture and Environment* (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1980), 207-213.

[12] Charles Linn. "Lake Eola's Evening Eyeful," *Architectural Lighting* 3/11 (November 1989): 38.

[13] Karen A. Franck and Lynn Paxson, "Women and Urban Public Space," *Public Spaces and Places*, ed. Irwin Altman and Ervin H. Zube (New York: Plenum Press, 1989), 124.

[14] Richard Sennet, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 53-86.

[15] For discussions on public behavior see the following works: Timothy D. Crowe, *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design: Applications of Architectural Design and Space Management* Concepts (Stoneham, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1991); Richard Sennet, *The Fall of Public Man*; Robert Sommers, *Personal Space* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969); and Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969).

[16] Timothy D. Crowe, *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design.* For an abbreviated explanation see the Herbert-Halback circular "The 'Safe Neighborhood' Approach to Community Planning."

[17] Richard Sennet, *The Fall of Public Man*, 16.

[18] For discussions of women in public see the following works: Mark Francis, "Control as a Dimension of Public-Space Quality," *Public Spaces and Places*, ed. Irwin Altman and Ervin H. Zube (New York: Plenum Press, 1989), 147-172; Karen A. Franck and Lynn Paxson, "Women and Urban Public Space," *Public Spaces and Places*, 121-146; and Harvey Molotch, "The Rest Room and Equal Opportunity" *Sociological Forum* Volume 3/1 (Winter 1988).

[19] For discussions on territory and privacy see the following works: Irwin Altman and Martin Chemers, *Culture and Environment,* Irwin Altman, "Toward a Transactional Perspective," in *Environment and Behavior Studies*, ed. Altman and Christensen (New York: Plenum Press, 1990), 225-242; Sidney N. Brower, "Territory in Urban Settings," in *Human Behavior and Environment,* ed. Altman, Rapoport and Wolwill (New York: Plenum Press, 1980), 179-193; Robert Sommers, *Personal Space*; and Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension.*