

Decay Stage—5 Mitsu Park in America Village

アメリカ村の御津公園

Q. road

The results of preservation efforts in historical communities effected while their roads are being upgraded can often be interesting. Suhomachi Street in Osaka's Chuo Ward, which became famous as America Village, a place where young people gathered, is a good example of this. Looking west down Suhomachi Street, one can see a police station, in front of which the street veers. Beside this jog in the road is a triangular-shaped community and a triangular-shaped park. After going past this area, the street continues straight and to the west. This is the only place in this part of the city where the road pattern is irregular, creating a landscape with a different rhythm. Why does this one road have a bend? The reason lies in the fact that Suhomachi Street once terminated at the river. The bend in the road was necessary when the city wanted to link it to Kita-Horie Street and cross a bridge at right angles to the river. Kita-Horie is located to the north of Suhomachi Street.

A triangular shaped space remains after a street is altered in such a manner. In America Village, this was how Mitsu Park came into existence. Residents in America Village call this park its belly button — its center point. Indeed, this park is a symbol of the vitality of commerce in the community. Before America Village was created, the whole area was a distribution and warehouse center for big companies in Shinsaibashi. Consequently, there were few people in the area. When a surfing boom started, however, well-off young people from Semba born during the baby boom, brought the surfing culture from the west coast of the U.S. and opened stores. Their unconventional marketing strategies were successful for a generation seeking something different. Soon products with the America Village brand name became established.

Flourishing times for these businesses, however, lasted only about four years. After the boom, sales in the shops of America Village rapidly decreased. As a result, a group of young people in the community began searching for ways to respond to this downturn. An association of young entrepreneurs, consisting primarily of those involved in the production and sale of clothing and who operated out of single room premises, became the key force in this revitalization movement. Their efforts were augmented by other innovative young people whose interests were in music, theater, and design. The focal point of the association's efforts was the neighborhood around Mitsu Park. In May 1983, during the spring holiday season, the association

volunteered its labor and held a festival.

Interestingly, government authorities responded quickly to this movement for revitalization. Mitsu Park was actually designated as road. When the extension was made to Suhomachi Street and the triangular zone was created, it was named Street Park and became a place where children played. Although slides and sandboxes were in place at that time, it was still considered by the city to be a street. Due to the voluntary efforts of association members, the city finally granted park status to the site. In August 1983, plans for the system of city parks were decided upon and in March of 1984, the city opened the site as a town square.

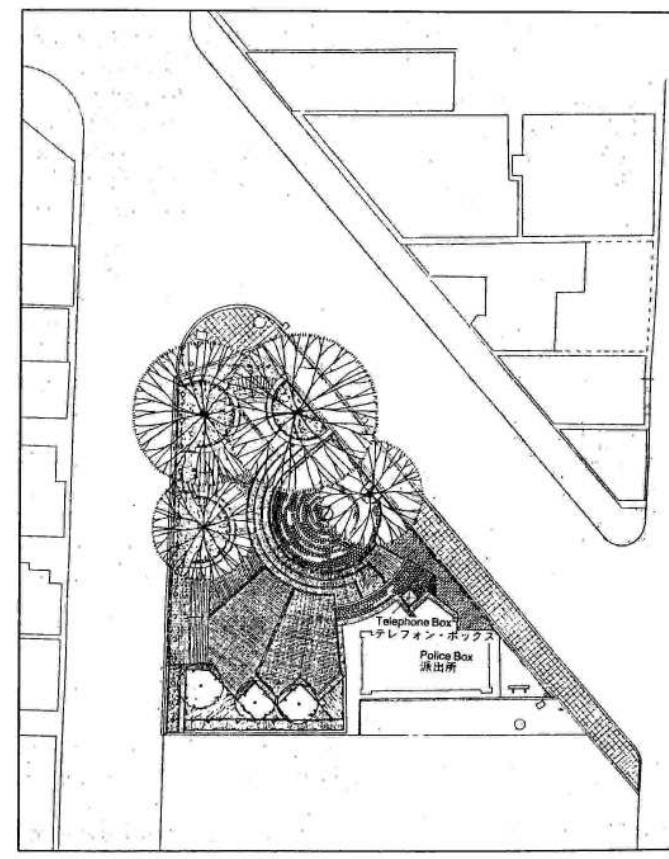
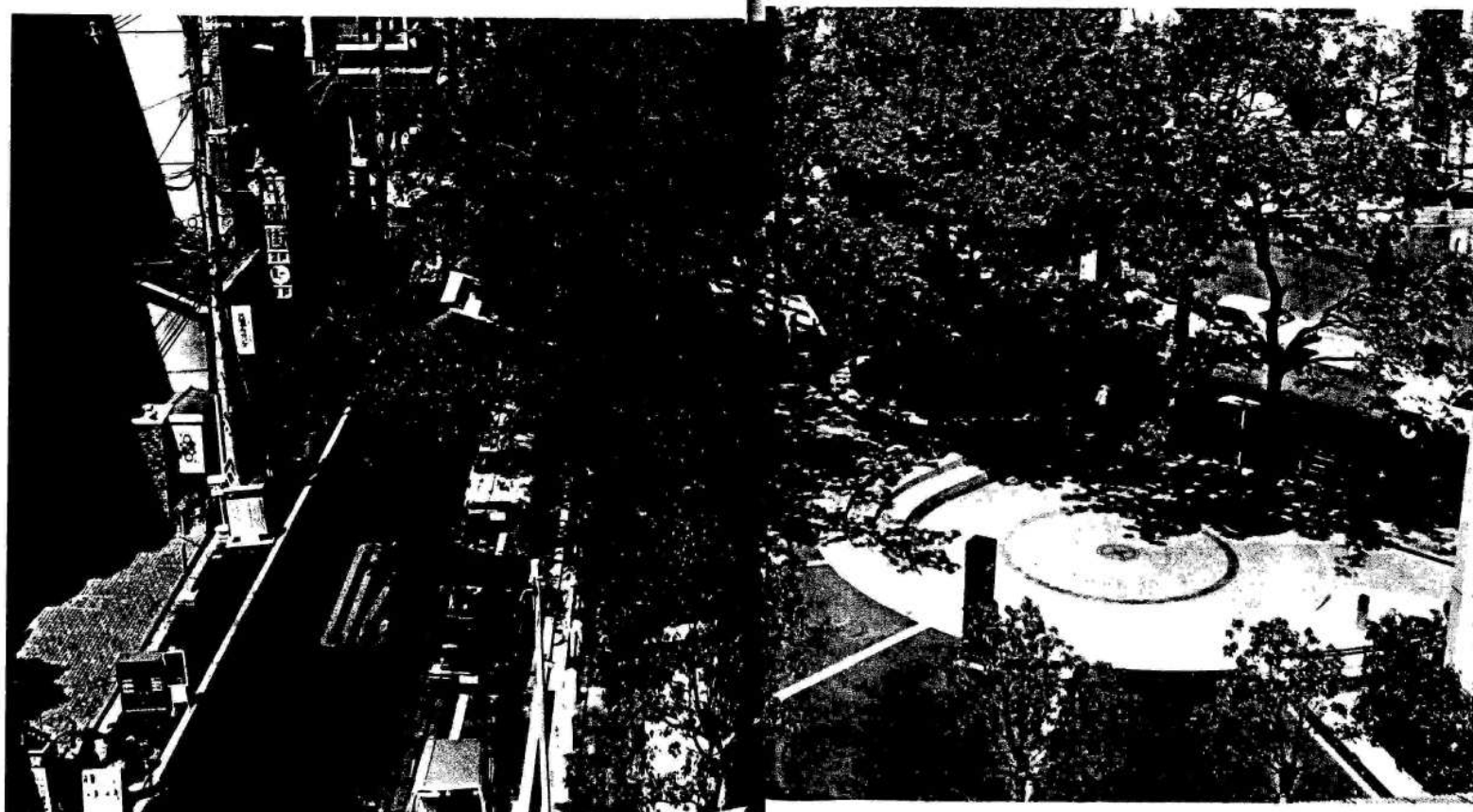
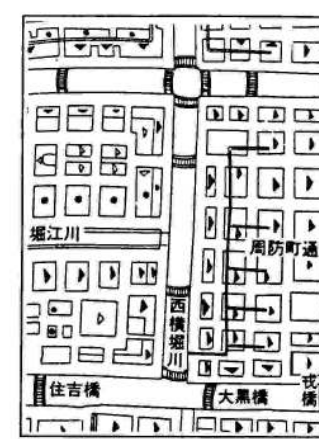
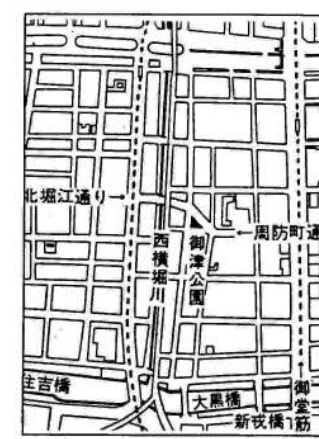
There are no play things in the park. There is a raised section to the square making it similar to an outdoor theater, benches that a small audience can sit on, four large elms that have been at the site for a long time, small, newly planted camphor trees, below eye-level lighting, and electrical plug-ins, an unusual feature for a park. The layout of the park suggests that it is a space designed for events. From a budgetary point of view, the city of Osaka considered the site as part of its urban greenbelt space. The city's real intention, however, was the creation of a town square and regulations of the city's park system have been applied. From the beginning, plans stipulated that the entire park was to be surfaced, which is not in keeping with conventional images of a park.

The fact that the park is in a commercial district and is also considered to be a model area for landscaping, has helped make this park interesting. Its most important asset, however, has been the volunteer work of the young shop owners in America Village who have been the driving force behind the holding of events in the park. At first, whenever this association held events, they had to put up with the protests of longtime residents of the area (especially the three local town assemblies in the area around Mitsu Hachiman Shrine). But thanks to these events, commercial activity in the area was revitalized, causing land prices to rise. Longtime residents soon came to expect events to be held.

When a member of the association who had put a great deal of effort into the revitalization of the community was asked about using the park, he said, "As the park is small, even small events look rather impressive. This park is just the right size for the frequent holding of low-budget events. And as the park is very open, it does not attract homeless people." Incidentally, the park covers an area of just 500m².

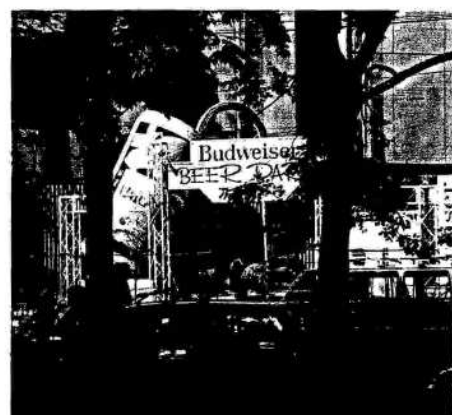
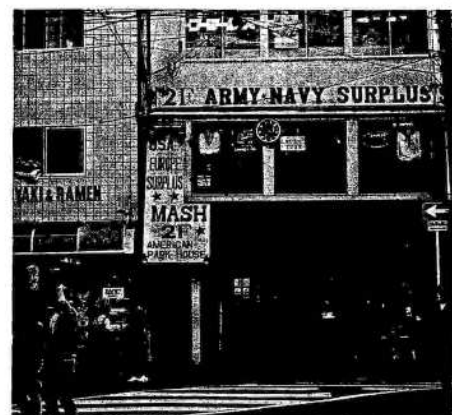
1. Suhomachi and environs in contemporary times
2. Suhomachi and environs in the Edo Period
3. The circular stage in Mitsu Park is paved with granite with bricks around it.
4. Plan of Mitsu Park.

1. 現代の周防町周辺
2. 江戸時代の周防町周辺
3. 御津公園、円形の舞台部分は、みかげ石舗装で周囲がレンガ(大阪市提供)
4. 御津公園平面図(大阪市提供)



1. The triangular city park which acts as an outdoor stage.
2. It seems to draw young people from all around.
3. There is a true international atmosphere here with a prominent use of English.
4. A Garage Sale held near to the park.
5. The stores facing the park create a distinctive streetscape.
6. The full extent of America Village.
7. The nearby Mitsu Hachiman Shrine.

1. 屋外劇場にもなる三角形をした街園（大阪市提供）
2. どこからともなく若者が集まってくる
3. 英語が目立ち、国籍不明の場所であるようだ
4. 近くで行なわれるガレージセール
5. 公園に面する店舗は特異な街並みをつくる
6. 面的にひろがるアメリカ村
7. 近くの御津八幡神社



歴史的な街区構造を受け入れながら道路整備を進めたものには、おもしろい痕跡が残っている。

大阪の中央区にある周防町通りもこの種の興味深い痕跡を残す。現在は、若者が集まるアメリカ村で有名な場所だ。

この周防町通りを西へ突き進むと正面に派出所が見え、その前で、道が斜めに折れ曲がる。この斜めに走る道路のところに、三角形をした公園と三角形の街区がある。ここを通り過ぎると、道は再び真西へ向かう。このあたり一帯が整然とした矩形の街区割りをもつなかで、公園のあたりだけが特異なリズムを放つのである。

格子状の街なみになぜ斜めの道がつくられたのか、それは、川で行き止まりになっていた周防町通りを、対岸の北堀江通りへ直結するためであった。しかし、この北堀江通りが周防町通りより少し北側に位置していたため、そこへつなぐには周防町通りをつけ替えねばならなかった。もちろん川に直交して橋を架けるためである。

周防町通りのように、部分的に道をつけ替えると、その後に三角形の余り地ができる。そうして生まれたのがアメリカ村の御津公園であり、通称、三角公園と呼ばれている広場である。

この三角公園をアメリカ村の住人は「ムラのヘソ」と呼ぶ。この公園が地区の商業活性化のシンボルだからだ。アメリカ村ができる以前の、このあたり一帯は、心斎橋に店を構える大店の配送センターや倉庫街で人通りも少なかった。ところがサーファーブームが起ると、団塊の世代にあたる「船場のアホボン」がアメリカ西海岸のサーファー文化を仕入れてきて、店を開きはじめた。老舗の感覚を超えた若者達のマーケティング戦略は成功し、またたくうちにアメリカ村という地区ブランドができあがった。

しかし、そうした繁栄は4年しか続かず、ブームが過ぎるとアメリカ村の売り上げも激減した。この時立ち上がったのがアメリカ村ユニオンの若き面々である。マンションメーカー（マンションの一室で衣料品を製作販売する業者）の若手オーナー達を中心に、音楽や演劇やデザインに興味をもつアーバンイノベーター達が地区の活性化に動いた。この時彼らが目をつけた場所が御津公園である。昭和58年5月の連休に公園を利用して、手弁当でイベントを開催したのである。

こうした動きに行政当局もすばやく対応した点が興味深い。御津公

園は長い間道路用地であり、周防町通りをねじ曲げたとき、その後に三角地帯ができてしまい、そこを街園と称して、ずっと児童公園的な利用をしていた。当時はすべり台や砂場もあったが、制度上は公園でなく御津街園と呼ばれていた。手弁当のイベントが後ろ盾となり、市は御津街園を広場公園につくり替える決定を行い、同年の8月に都市公園の計画決定、翌年の3月にはやばやと広場公園として共用を開始した。

この公園には遊具が一切ない。野外劇場を思わせる小規模なレベル差と観客席に利用できるベンチ、もともとあったニレなどの大木4本、新たに植えられたクスの小木3本、それに日線より低い照明灯、公園には珍しい電気設備がある。その姿はイベント広場だ。大阪市は設置事業の予算計上では都市緑地として扱ったが、その内容は広場公園制度を準用したタウンスクエア（都市広場）づくりであった。当初から、既成の公園イメージを超えた全面舗装の広場が計画されたのである。

商業地区という特性やモデル景観形成地区といった位置づけもユニークな公園実現に幸いした。しかしなんといっても、アメリカ村の若きオーナー達が手弁当のイベントを開催しつづけたことが原動力であったといつてよい。最初はそこでイベントを開くたびに旧住民（御津八幡神社を中心に広がる3つの地元町内会）から白い目でみられたそうだが、イベントのおかげで商業活性化がすすむと土地価格も高騰し、そうなると御津公園でのイベントが旧住民から期待されるようになった。

こうした町おこしを進めてきたユニオンのメンバーに公園の使い勝手を聞くと、「規模が小さいから簡単なイベントでもかなりサマになりますよ。金をかけずに何回もやるにはうってつけの広さです。それに開放的だから浮浪者も寄りつかないしね」という。ちなみに公園の広さは500㎡である。

1. There are many children who make use of the park.
2. Wall painting caught on quickly here.
3. Tom's House is typical of the night scene along Suhomachi Street, which is so American in flavor.

1. 近くの子供達も結構いる
2. 早くからウォールペインティングがみられた場所でもある
3. アメリカ的な周防町通り。トムズ・ハウスの夜景（大阪市観光パンフレットより）

