Melvin Charney
and the Temple of Jerusalem

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From a historical standpoint, the Temple of Jerusalem may be conceived in one of two ways: as an actual structure that existed in time and space, or as an ideological construct that has lasted through history. While the latter is only partially discernible through visual and textual "traces" of the past, it is arguably the more weighted and historically revealing form. Reconstructions of the temple from the 16th century onward provide a wealth of information in this regard. Not only do they represent the staying power of the temple idea, they offer insight into its meaning at various times and places in history. While reconstructions of the temple may appear to have little currency in contemporary society, Canadian artist Melvin Charney has begun to prove otherwise in some of his more recent work. How Charney came upon the temple theme and how he developed it in his work are explored in this paper.

In order to appreciate the full complexity and symbolic value of Melvin Charney's vision of the Temple of Jerusalem, it is important to understand the artist's fascination with built form as historical record. While there already exists a substantial amount of literature on Melvin Charney and his work, relatively little research has been done on the subject of the Temple of Jerusalem and the significance it holds for the artist. Accordingly, this paper offers only a brief overview of Charney's œuvre, focusing instead on works by the artist that have had a direct impact on shaping his vision of the temple, and on works in which the Temple of Jerusalem is figured, notably "Visions of the Temple (after Matthias Hafenreffer's 'Reconstruction of the Temple of Jerusalem,' Tubingen, Germany, 1631)" of 1986 and "Parable No. 26 ... RE: Visions of the Temple" of 1995-96.

Melvin Charney was born in 1935 in Montreal. Although his Jewish ancestry is not a featured part of his biography in published sources, it is informative given the context of this paper. In addition to studies at the school of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Charney received a Bachelor's degree in architecture from McGill University in 1958 and a Master's degree in architecture from Yale University in 1959. While Charney is not a professional architect, in the conventional sense of someone who designs permanent structures or buildings

on commission, he has, over the past four decades, written and lectured extensively on the subject in Canada and abroad.

Charney's work is perhaps best positioned somewhere between the boundaries of art and architecture. Often referred to as an "artist/architect," Charney has described himself as "an artist who is preoccupied with a range of issues, many of which are related to architecture."[1] Whichever label is attached to him, Charney is internationally renowned. As a result of his unique blend of idioms, Charney has won several public art commissions[2] and has received numerous distinctions, including selection as Canada's representative at the 42nd Venice Biennale in 1986 and the 5th Venice Architecture Biennale in 1991. A further measure of Charney's success is that in 1991 the Canadian Centre for Architecture launched a retrospective exhibition of his work.

Charney's approach is decidedly post-modern. Historical references, layered meaning, and pastiche abound in his work. Since 1970, Charney has been compiling photographs, newspaper clippings, and wire-service messages as potential source material — a virtual stockpile of "content." Being well read, Charney also frequently draws on textual sources (particularly those related to architectural theory) as inspiration — and, to some degree, rationalization — for his work. Process is usually made apparent to the viewers as preliminary (and in some cases, follow-up) sketches and/or plans are exhibited alongside completed (although at times seemingly unfinished) works. In this respect, it is worth questioning the actual transparency of such a practice, when sketches are being produced with the intention of having them exhibited.

A key to Charney's work is the understanding that buildings assume meaning. In an essay entitled "On Architecture: A Statement about Statements," Charney wrote:

Buildings exist, given the need of physical shelter by people. They are obviously created to satisfy a biological contingency. Equally obvious is that the creation of buildings also involves cultural transformations of material conditions; after all, how do people articulate their needs if not through structures and conventions whereby the very notion of need is conceived as built form. Buildings also produce something
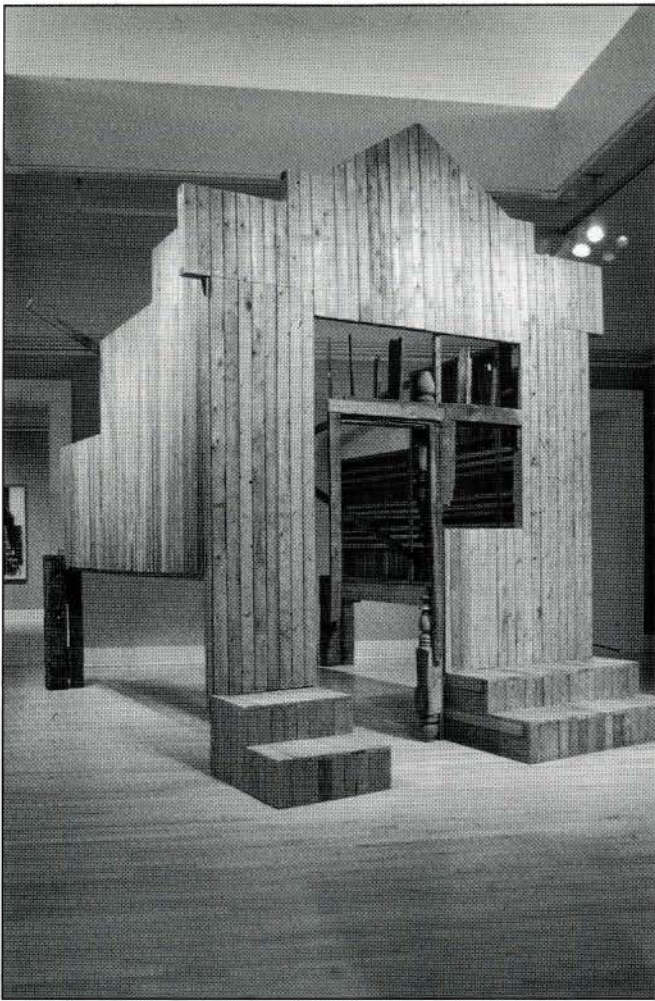
Figure 1. Melvin Charney, "Le trésor de Trois-Rivières," 1975; wood construction, 3.9 x 2.9 x 4. 1 m. (M. Charney [Coll. National Gallery of Canada])

new that was not there before. As such, the manifestation of a building cannot but idealize and make heroic, to some degree, material conditions contingent upon its realization. A spirit of renewal and of affirmation is built into our surroundings, for better or for worse. In other words, buildings are made to express their existence in the normal course of human activities. Every building constitutes a statement. Every building is a monument of sorts. Architecture focuses on the specific condition of buildings to exist as expressive devices; that is on the creation of monuments.[3]

Between 1973 and 1975, Charney completed a series of works entitled "Une histoire de l'architecture ...." Initially, the project was conceived as a documentary work. It began with Charney collecting visual "evidence" of buildings in Québec from the industrial era. This included photographs, newspaper clippings, and postcards showing views of towns and structures in various states of ruin or decay, as well as actual building fragments.[4] Charney was struck by one image in particular, that of a worker's house located near a pulp mill in Trois-Rivières. For Charney, the formal qualities of the house recalled

those of a classical temple, in spite of its small scale and meagre surroundings, signs of what the artist saw to be "the marginal existence of its builders and inhabitants."[5] Aware that such houses were slated for demolition as part of an urban renewal project, Charney, determined to "get to know" the house, travelled to Trois-Rivières. In his own words, Charney then "photographed its surroundings, documented its history, and tried to reproduce it in a set of drawings ... [but finding] the drawings ... to be abstract and removed from immediate experience, [concluded] that the only way to know the 'thing' itself would involve nothing less than building it."[6]

What resulted was Charney's first construction (or "re"-construction), "Le trésor de Trois-Rivières" of 1975 (**figure 1**), now at the National Gallery of Canada.[7] According to Charney, "The act of physically assembling the building ritualized it. The figure of a house and of a temple merged with that of a tomb. What emerged was a totem: an effigy which put into practice the substance of the thing itself."[8] By recreating the building and by placing it within a museum environment, Charney invested it with new meaning. No longer an insignificant worker's house, easily discarded in the name of progress and redevelopment, the structure is now likened to a Greek treasury,[9] giving symbolic importance to vernacular architecture in Québec at the turn of the 20th century. The work also has various religious signifiers: Trois-Rivières denotes a trinity; the wooden cross in the doorway refers to Church doctrine and the belief that the meek shall inherit the earth;[10] and the four posts upon which the structure is supported bring to mind architectural treatises, such as the 18th-century treatise by Abbé Marc-Antoine Laugier on the form of the first primitive hut (or, in a biblical context, Adam's house in Paradise).[11]

The work for which Melvin Charney is best known is "Les maisons de la rue Sherbrooke" of 1976 (**figure 2**). As part of the official preparation for the Montreal Olympic games, Charney was asked to organize a group of artists who would

Figure 2. Melvin Charney, "Les maisons de la rue Sherbrooke," 1975; wood, steel, and concrete construction, 15 x 16.5 x 14.5 m. (M. Charney)
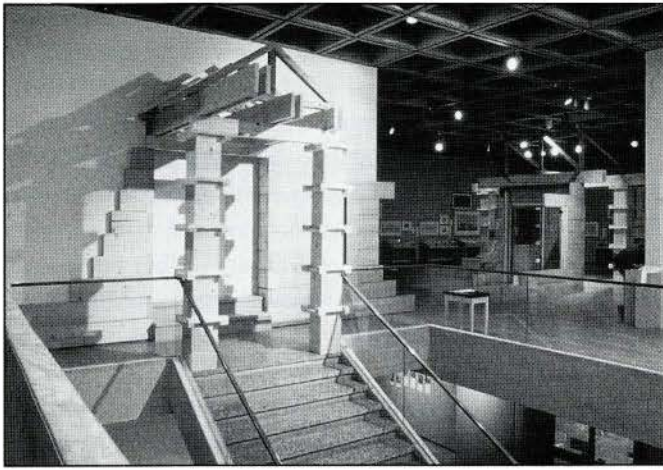
Figure 3. Melvin Charney, "Pliny on My Mind, No. 1," 1983; wood construction, 4 x 4.3 x 7.3 m. (M. Charney [Coll. Phyllis Lambert, Montreal])

create temporary works to be installed along the main festival route. "Corridart," a massive project with a prohibitively low budget, was to stretch along eight kilometres of a downtown city street. For his own work, Charney selected an abandoned site at one of the main intersections of Sherbrooke Street, where houses had been razed more than ten years earlier to make way for an unrealized government-sponsored urban renewal project: an alternate location had been chosen for the project, leaving a "hole" on Sherbrooke Street where houses had once been. Using scaffolding, reclaimed lumber, and rough plywood, Charney constructed a full-scale façade, mirroring the two greystone buildings that stood on the opposite corner of the street.[12]

Once complete, the work appeared unfinished — both as a "ruin" and as "a building in the midst of construction."[13] Its effect was similar to that of a stage set, completing the look of a city square and reflecting similar classically balanced and symmetrical "squares" at the Piazza del Popolo in Rome and the Place de la Concorde in Paris.[14] In one of the most famous acts of artistic censorship in Canada, mayor Jean Drapeau ordered the destruction of the work days before the opening of the Olympic games on the grounds that it was ugly. In what Charney has described as "a spectacular night-time blitzkrieg, reminiscent of Germany in the 1930s,"[15] the work was dismantled by municipal authorities working under floodlights. Photographs of the site before and after the destruction of the installation were featured in national and international media, and have since been exhibited along with Charney's drawings and mixed media works that document the project.

Ever since Corridart, site-specific installations have been an important part of Charney's œuvre. Temporary wooden constructions that either bisect or reconfigure existing buildings or environments have been erected at several locations in Canada and abroad, and have resulted in greater exposure and recognition for the artist.[16] Under the sponsorship of the

Canadian Centre for Architecture, Charney was commissioned to create a construction for the 1983 exhibition "The Villas of Pliny and Classical Architecture in Montreal" at the city's Musée des Beaux-Arts. Intended to "set the theme" for the exhibition, "Pliny on My Mind" (figure 3) was a two-part installation that recalled many of the elements of the artist's first construction. But, as a description of the work by guest curator Pierre du Prey showed, Charney's interest in evoking multiple historical and architectural references simultaneously had evolved considerably since "Le trésor de Trois-Rivières":

Crowning the top of a flight of stairs, the pedimented, temple-like section suggested several things at once: a Quebec shack, the polemical primitive hut propounded by Abbé Laugier, the wooden form work of modern construction techniques, and the Freemason's triangle, evocative of the temple at Jerusalem. All these overlapping levels of meaning, which singly and collectively fascinate the creative imagination of Charney, make this construction one of his strongest artistic statements to date.[17]
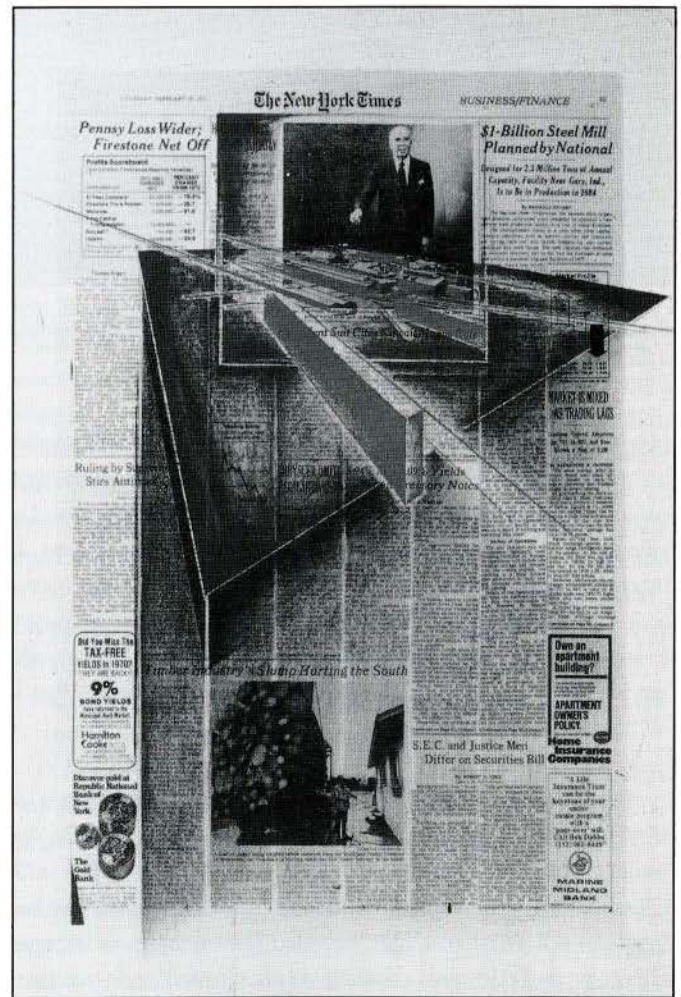

Figure 4. Melvin Charney, "Front Page Construction, No. 4," 1978-79; oil pastel and wax crayon on a gelatin silver print, 68 x 45 cm. (M. Charney [Coll. Musée du Québec])

Although "Pliny on My Mind" contains a reference — Charney's first — to the Temple of Jerusalem, evocations of the temple are more explicit and fully developed as "figurative devices" in Charney's works on paper, a less celebrated but equally important medium in the artist's work.

For Charney, the process of "re"constructing always involves drawings, plans, and other two-dimensional forms, including photographs and collage. In some cases, the process culminates in a three-dimensional form; in others, it stops short of anything built; in others still, the process is contained in one drawing, or a series of drawings. An example of this latter kind of reconstruction is Charney's series of "Front Page Constructions" from 1978-79. In "Front Page Construction, No. 4" (**figure 4**), the artist used oil pastel and wax crayon to draw on an enlarged photograph of a page from the business section of *The New York Times*, on which an image is shown of a man in a suit pointing at a scale model of an industrial complex. In red and blue — characteristic colours for Charney — the architectural forms of the scale model have been extended beyond the boundaries of the original image. The extreme two-point perspective and sharp geometric forms evoke the formal vocabulary of Suprematism and De Stijl. In reference to this work, Charney wrote:

Constructivist figures and De Stijl planes drop out of the front pages of daily newspapers. Even the business pages are not immune.... These modern figures have long ceased to signify a "project for," or even an interpretation of, some new transformational vision. They are part of history, an idiom that infuses our perception. Any attempt to reinstate their original impulse is destined to remain contradictory, since the desire to represent the "new" can only remain unrequited, a project unfinished; the emptiness of signs cannot be reconciled in the work without functionalizing a series of signs that transforms it into a representation of itself.[18]

The ideas that nothing is "new" in the Modernist sense of progress and "pure form," and that everything is inevitably invested with ideological and cultural assumptions (be they historical, universal, or local), are key concepts for Charney and a driving force behind the "loaded" meaning of his works. As a result, the artist seeks lost or underlying forms that he believes to be discernible through fragments or elemental structures of our built environment. It is thus through a kind of collective memory (albeit on an unconscious level) that these elemental forms are continually reproduced in time and space. So, just as the worker's house in Trois-Rivières was revealed as a metaphorical Greek temple, other structures can be shown to possess similar "traces" of a distant or not-so-distant past.

After visiting West Germany in 1980, Charney was asked to submit a proposal for a construction to be built in Kassel in association with an exhibition called "Documenta-Urbana."
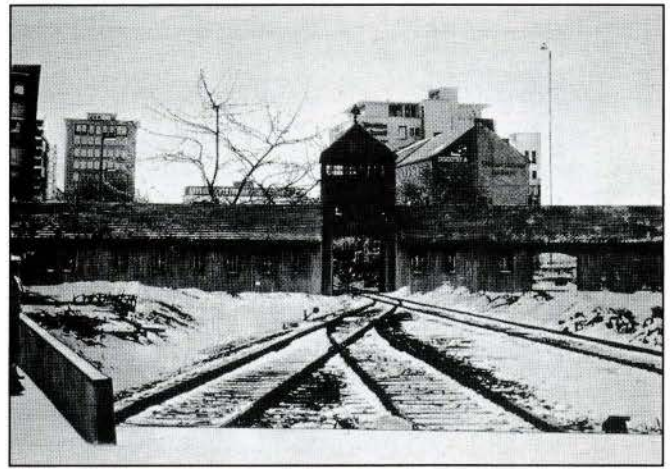

Figure 5. Melvin Charney, "Better if they think they are going to a farm ...," 1982; photomontage, 43.3 x 53.2 cm. (M. Charney [Coll. Canadian Centre for Architecture])

The site of an important railway centre during the Second World War, Kassel had been largely destroyed due to heavy bombing and was, as a result, reconstructed during the 1950s and 1960s. The proposed construction was to be located on a street midway between the railway station and the museum where the exhibition would be held.[19] Consisting of a series of multi-levelled façades through which people would pass, the construction was intended to refer to Kassel's recent history. On a second site, in the Bahnhofplatz, Charney used a newly constructed railway station as the basis for another proposal. According to the artist, he became interested in "Nazi ideology as found in the late 19th century Pan-Germanic recall of the 'volk' to the soil, and the subsequent use by S.S. architects of an idealized farm facade to camouflage the railway entrance to Auschwitz-Birkenau."[20] In 1982, Charney proposed a reconstruction of the idealized façade, entitled "Better if they think they are going to a farm ..." (**figure 5**). The piece was never built, and Charney's drawings were taken off exhibit.

Charney submitted a third proposal for an installation at a new site, one flanked by walk-up flats on one side and office buildings on the other. Several public transportation rails ran between, dividing the site. Charney proposed another construction of an idealized farm façade. It too was refused. Finally, in 1983, Charney was able to produce a version of the work in Stuttgart, although it was arguably much less powerful than the original vision. The installation consisted of painted canvas that was suspended from an arcade on the front of a museum building. While the effect may have been different for those who viewed the work in person, photographs of the installation show that it was largely obscured by the architecture of the museum.[21] The various attempts at reconstructing this provocative form, however, constituted the first of Charney's German Series. It also generated a new area of inquiry for the artist, one that would eventually lead to the Temple of Jerusalem.

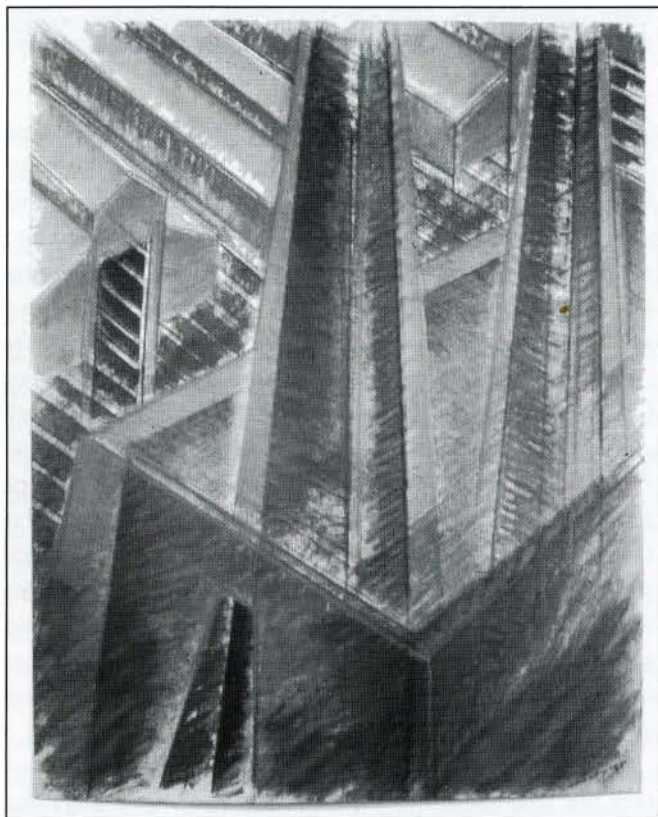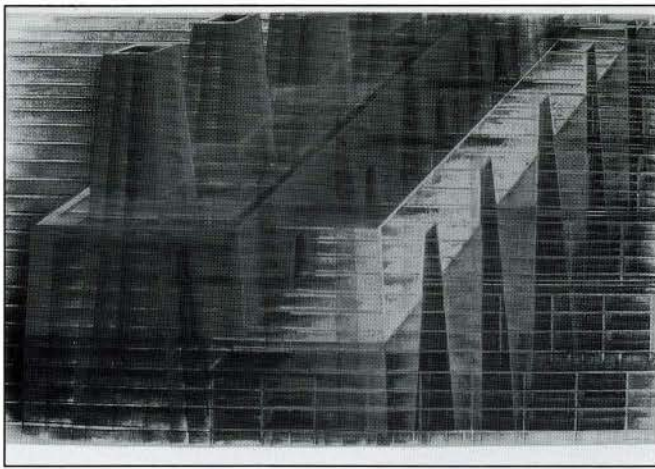In his second German Series, created between 1981 and

Figure 6. Melvin Charney, "Fragments of the Forgotten City, No. 12," 1985; conte and pastel on wove paper, 65 x 102 cm. (M. Charney [Coll. Bank of Montreal])

Figure 7. Melvin Charney, "Fragments of the Forgotten City, No. 14," 1985; conte and pastel on wove paper 35 x 28 cm. (M. Charney [Concordia University])

1985, Charney began an exploration into the architecture of Auschwitz-Birkenau, creating and recreating the forms in red, blue, and black conte and pastel. What he saw in the camp structures, and what he felt to be the significance of repeating the forms again and again, is best captured in the artist's own words:

Within Auschwitz-Birkenau lay "the worst of all camps." Arrival ramps, a circle of watch towers, barrack compounds, body rack upon body rack inside the barracks, gas chambers, crematoria ovens, and

chimneys are parts of a machine that has to be reconstituted again and again in order to grasp its signification.

The scars of the camps are still fresh and difficult to assimilate. I drew and redrew the lines of barracks and body racks, the crematoria and chimneys to make visible the sight of the camps as a force of memory hidden behind the surface of appearances.[22]

Two later works in the series, "Fragments of the Forgotten City, No. 12" (figure 6) and "Fragments of the Forgotten City, No. 14" (figure 7), both of 1985, represent the crematorium — the central structure in a nightmarish compound — in simplified form. While similar compositions are identified by Charney as temple scenes in the following year, it is doubtful that the artist recognized an association between Auschwitz and the Temple of Jerusalem until he read (or re-read) Helen Rosenau's book, Vision of the Temple. This most likely occurred in 1985, sometime after the completion of the "Fragments of the Forgotten City" works.[23] Up to this point, the only other reference to historical architecture made in the context of Auschwitz in Charney's work was to Pliny's Villa, in an early drawing from the third German Series entitled "Pliny's Other Villa" of 1983-84 (figure 8). It was also in 1985 that Charney created a series of plans and drawings for "A Lethbridge Construction," a project that was heavily influenced by John Wood's plan of the "Temple of Jerusalem as Built by Zerubbabel," from his book The Origin of Building.

In the exhibition catalogue that was published by the Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Charney compared the street layout of Lethbridge with Wood's temple plan, suggesting the following connection:

In The Origin of Building published in 1741, John Wood presented a reconstruction of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, following sources in the Old Testament. The plan of the Temple consists of a square divided by a square grid, within which there are further square subdivisions of the grid. Less than a half century after this publication, the American Congress of 1785 set up a continental grid based on a pattern of six-square-mile plots. At the same time, in Upper Canada, Lord Dorchester promulgated regulations for the creation of ten-square-mile inland townships with one-square-mile town plots.[24]

In other words, Charney identified (however unconsciously) the layout of the Temple of Jerusalem as a source for town planning in the 18th century and, by extension, the present-day layout of many towns and cities, especially in North America.

Melvin Charney believes that there are four basic metaphors or "tropes" in architecture. They are the Villas of Pliny, the Temple of Jerusalem, Adam's house in Paradise, and Noah's Ark.[25] All of these oft-imagined structures have, at different times, entered into the artist's vocabulary to form a kind of architectural Order upon which all other forms are said to be
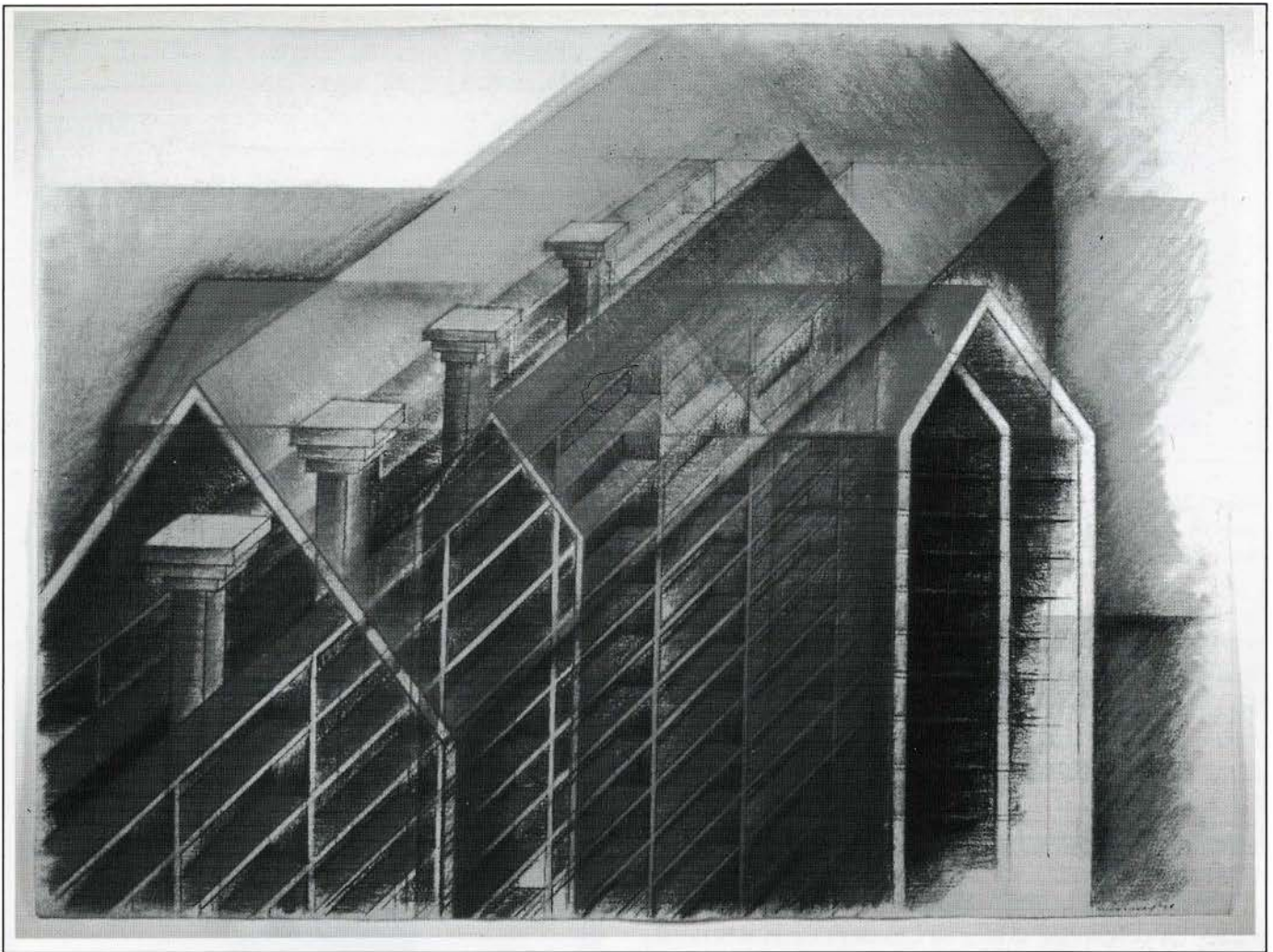
Figure 8. Melvin Charney, "Pliny's Other Villa," 1983-84; conte and pastel on wove paper, 56.5 x 76 cm. (M. Charney [Coll. Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canada])

derived.[26] Based on Charney's own writings, it seems likely this theory first came to light and was developed in his work on Auschwitz. In a commentary on the German Series, Charney wrote:

The compelling presence of the extermination camps infiltrates my work. Every building I look at or image I conceive reveals ovens, chimneys barracks, and body racks.
Be it a railway station outside Paris or on the Canadian prairie, the thread of steel rail appears to be less of a link between parts of a country than a direct line to oblivion punctured by the stations of the condemned.
In Pliny's villas, the ideal Roman country villa, a camplike city appears within the citylike structure of the estate. Parts of the camp come to signify the place of those who are exiled from life — Pliny's other villa inhabited by the slaves who suffered the metaphor of idyllic country life. In a town in Alberta, Canada, where neo-Nazis congregate and teach revisionist history in a high school, a crematorium oven appears in a candy store; a chimney and body racks inhabit an abandoned church in a nearby abandoned town. In Quebec, the

bunk houses of a mine camp become a barrack compound, the mine shaft a chimney.[27]

It was within this context that Charney first recognized "traces" of the Temple of Jerusalem. And it was within this context that he first created "Visions of the Temple," a subtitle for his fourth German Series.

"The Other City ... Visions of the Temple, No. 1" of 1986 (figure 9) picks up on the simplified temple-form used in the two earlier works of the second German Series. Here, the form is identified in the title: it is a vision of the temple. The high degree of stylization in the work is undoubtedly the product of Charney's repetition of forms. In effect, Charney has created a kind of vocabulary of simplified forms, allowing him to experiment with different patterns and combinations of structural elements to the discovery of different ends. In this work, cylindrical, screw-like forms have been introduced below the crematorium, leading up through the building to the chimney stacks. More evocations than actual structural elements, they seem to suggest a cyclical force rooted somewhere below the
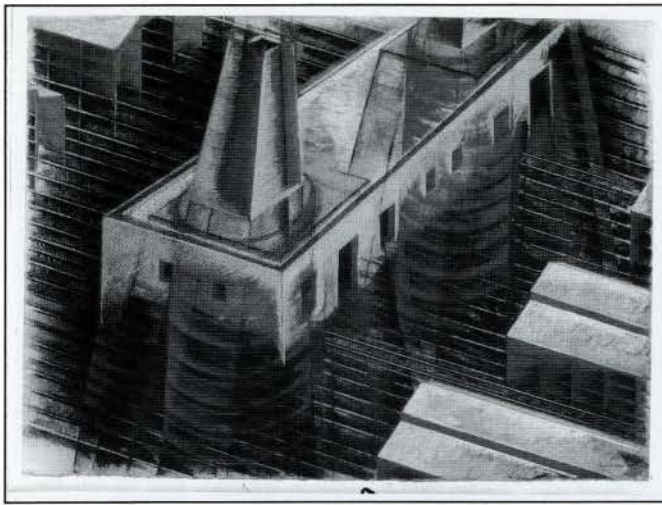
Figure 9. Melvin Charney, "The Other City ... Visions of the Temple, No. 1," 1986; pastel on wove paper, 92.2 x 125.7 cm. (M. Charney [Coll. Canadian Centre for Architecture])

Shamans conjure from the soil past offenses, and demand present confessions. Yet their conjurations, their journeys to the world below are treacherous, and affect their lives in a permanent way. A genuine shaman is therefore a "wounded healer." Shamans are frequently ill, poisoned by the residue of their journeys to the dark and threatening worlds below and scarred by a primeval memory of withdrawal. Yet the shaman's wounds are his stigmata, signs of disgrace that mark him as a person who risked all, ineffaceable scars that mark him as a person who suffered all.[32]

In this context, van Pelt identifies works such as "The Other City ... Visions of the Temple, No. 4" (**figure 10**) as Charney's stigmata — red being the colour of blood — and claims that the works are "about the relationship of the architect's mind and the shamanic body."[33] While an interpretation of the German Series as a form of stigmata is well-founded, the more appropriate analogy would be that the wounds are not Charney's, but human kind's in general.

The main problem with van Pelt's essay lies in the degree to which the author uses Charney's work as a vessel or a platform

temple-form, originating in the past. Diagonal lines create a kind of groundwork that fills the composition, while intersecting lines suggest bunks in the barracks and railway tracks leading toward the central building. Perhaps most disturbing, however, is the extension of the lines of the crematorium structure below the surface of the apparent ground. Analogous to an iceberg, what is shown here is only the tip of a much larger configuration.

Except for brief commentaries provided in exhibition catalogues, the only critical writing on Charney's German Series is an essay by Robert Jan van Pelt entitled "Into the Suffering City," which appeared in 1991 as part of the Canadian Centre for Architecture catalogue published in association with Charney's retrospective exhibition. Given van Pelt's knowledge of both the Temple of Jerusalem and the architectural history of Auschwitz, he may have represented the best choice to provide an in-depth analysis of the confluence of the two themes in Charney's work.[28] But his essay is extremely problematic: what van Pelt sees as "evident" in Charney's work is not reflected in the artist's own statements about the German Series, nor is it easily identifiable in the works themselves. As a result, the stimulus behind van Pelt's essay warrants further consideration.[29]

"Into the Suffering City" is not a simple historical or art-historical analysis of Charney's German Series. While the essay shows an obvious familiarity with Charney's work and several of the theoretical sources upon which the artist has formed ideas, it is based on the premise that Melvin Charney is a modern-day shaman, and that his work — in its ability to upset "our priestly notion of the relationship between significance and representation"[30] — should be understood "as a whole from a shamanic perspective."[31] According to van Pelt:
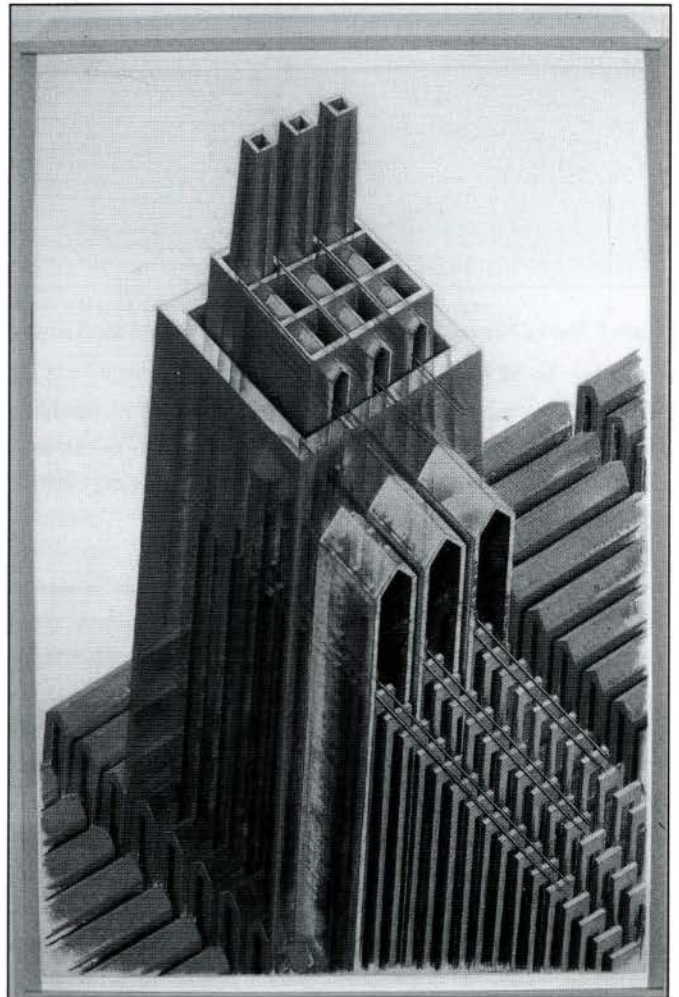

Figure 10. Melvin Charney, "The Other City ... Visions of the Temple, No. 4," 1987; pastel on wove paper, 152.6 x 102 cm. (M. Charney [private collection])
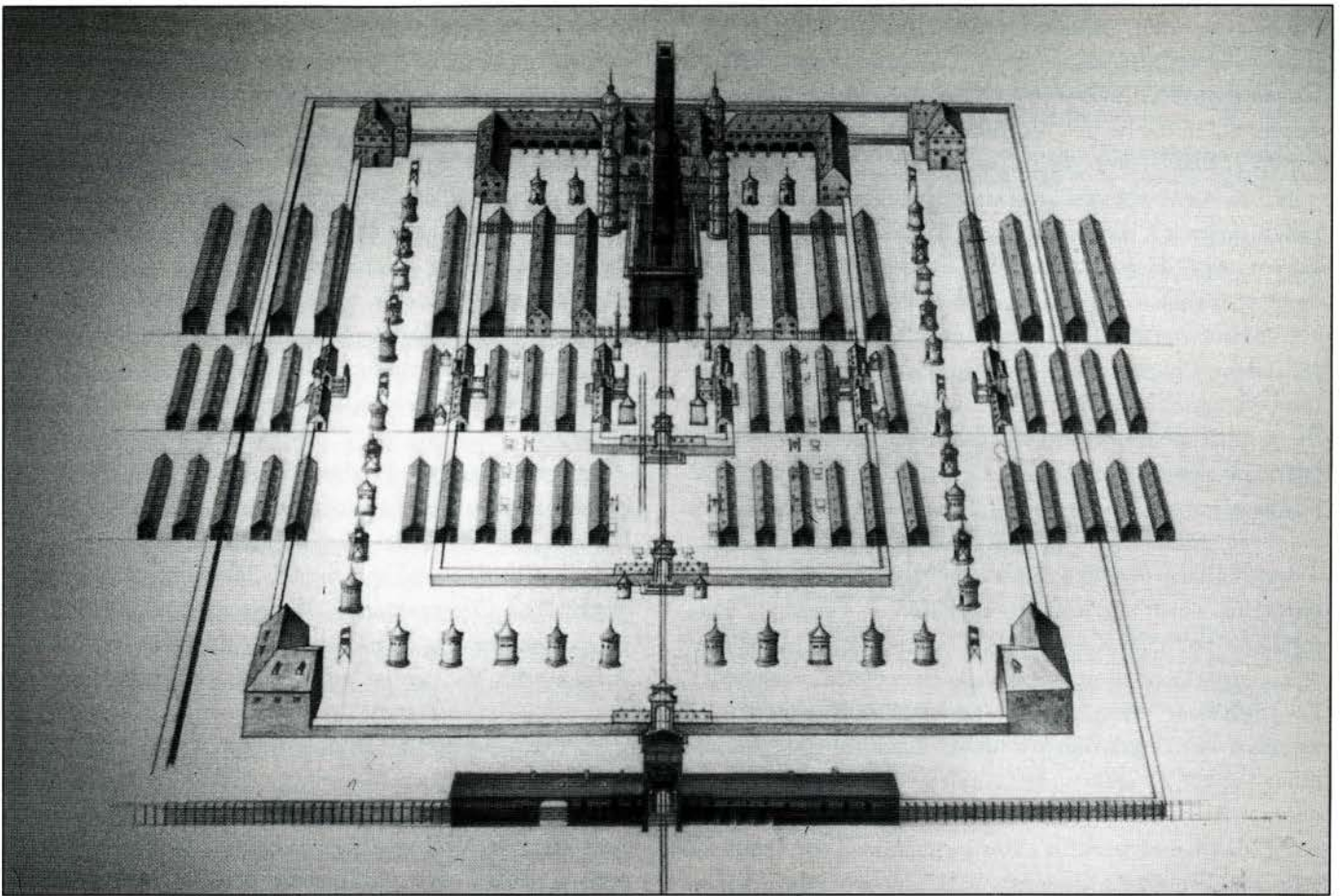
Figure 11. Melvin Charney, "Visions of the Temple (after Matthias Hafenreffer's 'Reconstruction of the Temple of Jerusalem,' Tubingen, Germany, 1631)," 1986; pastel on wove paper, 100.8 x 154 cm. (M. Charney [Coll. National Gallery of Canada])

from which to launch his own ideas. Through van Pelt's writing, Charney's vision of the temple takes on new dimensions: that is, Freemasonry comes to the fore, and images of the Temple of Jerusalem become invested with apocalyptic theories and Marxist ideology. Moreover, the fact that "Into the Suffering City" corresponds so closely with van Pelt's own experience, and that it incorporates the full range of the author's research interests, throws into question exactly who the essay reveals more about: Melvin Charney or Robert Jan van Pelt.

"Visions of the Temple (after Matthias Hafenreffer's 'Reconstruction of the Temple of Jerusalem,' Tubingen, Germany, 1631)" of 1986 (figure 11) is really the culmination of the fourth German Series, even though it is not the final work. Charney has said: "What began in my work with an attempt to grasp the pervasive image of the death camps, culminated in a revelation. The outline of an extermination camp appeared in a reconstruction of Ezekiel's Temple of Jerusalem...."[34] The reconstruction was "Precincts of the Temple" by Lutheran theologian Matthias Hafenreffer, from his 17th-century publication *Templum Ezechielis*, as it appears in Helen Rosenau's book, *Vision of the Temple*.[35] With few changes, Charney reproduced Hafenreffer's etching in blue pastel.[36] Using red

pastel, he superimposed the architectural layout of what had now become for him the archetypal death camp.

The work is highly disturbing in a number of ways. The mere juxtaposition of what Charney has described as two "cities" brings into sharp focus something which has, for most people, remained invisible. The repetition of the barracks in Charney's composition is echoed by Hafenreffer's pavilions, some of which are reconfigured as watchtowers. The temple itself, with its multi-levelled tower, shares the basic shape of Charney's crematorium with chimney stack. In an interesting twist, the stacked forms on either side of Hafenreffer's entrance to the temple, resembling piers encased in concrete formwork, recall references made by Charney to Adam's house in Paradise in two of his earlier constructions, "Le trésor de Trois-Rivières" and "Pliny on My Mind, No. 1" and "No. 2."

The outermost perimeter of Hafenreffer's precinct was left untouched for the most part by Charney, except for the front, where he transformed the wall into railway tracks used to transport prisoners to the camp. A comment by the S.S., which was repeated in one of Charney's statements on his German Series, holds particular significance in relation to this work: "Here you enter by the door and exit by the chimney."[37]

mapping out one's "real" journey into the camp. Still perceptible through Charney's idealized farm façade in red is Hafenreffer's temple gate. The similarities between the two structures are surprising, certainly, but become somewhat eerie when one considers that Charney first developed his version of the entrance to Auschwitz two to three years before he began using Helen Rosenau's book as a source. In other words, Charney did not simply impose his vision of Auschwitz onto Hafenreffer's temple design, but saw elements of his vision reflected there.

Of Hafenreffer's interpretation of Ezekiel's Temple of Jerusalem, Charney wrote: "This appropriation of the Temple usurped, again, a Jewish symbol of regeneration; and, again, the Jews were banished from Jerusalem. Three hundred years later, this purged model of the Celestial City can be seen to prefigure an earth-bound city of death."[38] The notion that Auschwitz was actually prefigured in reconstructions of the Temple of Jerusalem like the one by Hafenreffer is extremely disturbing. But it also leads, by extension, to something more insidious: the historical foreshadowing of Hitler. In the context of temple reconstructions, Hitler becomes a metaphorical King Solomon.[39] Here, the definition of allegory takes on new meaning, "the description of a subject under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggestive resemblance."[40] Charney's display of structural resemblance in "Visions of the Temple (after Matthias Hafenreffer's 'Reconstruction of the Temple of Jerusalem,' Tubingen, Germany, 1631)" broaches the question of what is actually being represented in Temple reconstructions.

Although "Visions of the Temple (after Matthias Hafenreffer's 'Reconstruction of the Temple of Jerusalem,' Tubingen, Germany, 1631)" is the only title attributed to the work in published sources, the drawing was originally called "The Other Temple (after Matthias Hafenreffer's 'Reconstruction of the Temple of Jerusalem,' Tubingen, Germany, 1631)."[41] While no reason has ever been provided for the name change, it may reflect Charney's desire to have the piece identified with the other works in the fourth German Series that share "Visions of the Temple" as part of their title. Despite the drawing's formal differences from the other works in the series, it followed from Charney's recognition that elemental structures of Auschwitz could be found in various forms in today's environment; hence, the significance of the barracks continuing beyond the temple precinct and the railway tracks extending past the end of the wall and fading out in a suggestive manner. In fact, the piece is not an image of "The Other Temple," a structure closed off in time and space. Rather, it is symbolic of a construct emblazoned in what Charney would call "our collective memory." As the red lines that lead out of the picture suggest, the "Visions of the Temple" are those of the viewer.

In 1989, Charney began the Parables Series that continues today. This series, according to the artist:

pushes at what one sees in relation to what one might see beyond the surface of an image. A "crisis of representation" — if such exists — is situated within the modalities of representation, as signified by the hybrid use of diverse media: a spectre of twentieth-century iconography is made to appear from behind on the photographic surfaces. Recent images, such as those of seeming non-events in non-places are broached. The worldwide dissemination of very ordinary events — showing the effects of an international blockade in the back streets of a Vietnamese or Haitian town, for instance — seems to expose another "crisis": the limitless efflorescence of technology that is not only alive and well in advanced countries but is also travelling in a rickshaw or in a broken-down schoolbus in some backwater.[42]

Like the rest of the Parables, "Parable No. 26 ... RE: Visions of the Temple" of 1995-96 is an enlarged photograph on which Charney has drawn and painted geometric and architectural designs with oil pastel and acrylic. Reminiscent of Charney's "Front Page Constructions," "Parable No. 26" is based on a page taken from the World section of the Montreal Gazette of August 1995. The central image is described by the caption:

Protests on West Bank — Israeli settlers on the West Bank push a mobile home into place on a hilltop outside Kedumim during the fourth day of protests over the planned expansion of Palestinian self-government in Israel's occupied territories. After soldiers started dragging settlers away, the protesters declared a three-day truce yesterday. The settlers and soldiers have been fighting running battles for control of the hilltops.[43]

As Charney points out, however, neither the newspaper image nor the political situation behind it is the subject of the work.[44] Over this image in red, blue, and beige, the artist has rendered a temple scene.

In a letter to a colleague, Charney wrote that the wire-service image of religious zealots illegally constructing a settlement near Jerusalem "brings forth the restitution of the first Temple as 'pure' form in an end-of-the-century reading of Supremacist iconographic devices."[45] In other words, what Charney saw in the event was a parable; an instant settlement at a religious site reads as a reconstruction of the Temple of Jerusalem.[46] Several notions are at play here, not least of which is the Temple idea. But two other ideas deserve mention: first, mass-media images determine the way in which the world is perceived; second, a "site" can assume meaning.[47]

For Charney, the practice of reconstructing the temple through history is not so much a tradition as it is a habit, or a "habitus."[48] It is a structure in Western thought that entails an almost grammatical way of formulating space; a tacit knowledge that is now, at the end of the 20th century, being abstracted. According to the artist, the 500-year history of reconstructions of the temple should be understood as a way of formulating a holy spot.[49] What Charney recognized in the photograph of

the Israeli settlers and the mobile home was the drive to create the ideal. And in Western thought, the ideal is the temple.[50]

In "Parable No. 26 ... RE: Visions of the Temple," Charney has created an archetypal temple reconstruction by superimposing the architectural "elements" of a temple structure over the image of the instant settlement. The composition is divided into two parts by a sliding De Stijl plane: on the top is the temple, and below is a temple city. The sources for the temple are immediately recognizable: its colour and abstract form echo the artist's German Series, while its façade-like structure recalls his construction for Corridart. The source for the temple city is not as readily apparent. It is Bernard Lamy's design for Solomon's Temple as it appears in Rosenau's book.[51] A comparison of the two works, however, reveals that Charney has borrowed the *idea* of Lamy's city, moreso than its actual style or design. For Charney, this type of architecture evokes the kind of mass (or perhaps prefabricated) housing that can be found in a variety of places, including the Middle East.[52] By reducing each house to its most basic geometric elements, Charney has produced an archetypal form for a minor Order of architecture.[53]

The use of abstraction in "Parable No. 26 ... RE: Visions of the Temple" is an attempt on Charney's part to represent the temple and the temple city in "pure" form. He has even drawn on a modernist vocabulary in order to do so. But unlike the modernists who saw "pure" form as non-representational, Charney sees the opposite. In his work, "pure" form is not only representational but metaphoric, a language through which the artist's ideas can be expressed and widely disseminated. In "Parable No. 26... RE: Visions of the Temple," Charney has used this language to make visible the temple-form in modern-day society. While this necessarily involves a social and political dimension, it is something upon which the artist will rarely comment, leaving it to the viewer to see.[54] By refusing to elucidate how his own political views inform his work, Charney has merely reinforced the transcendental quality of "Parable No. 26 ..." and ensured its staying power.

For Melvin Charney, the Temple of Jerusalem is many things: a metaphor, a source, an idea, the ideal. It is a part of history and a part of memory, a form that is ever-present in time and continually reproduced in space. Reconstructions are only one of its many lasting effects. Can Melvin Charney's work be compared to that of Juan Battista Villalpando or Bernard Lamy? Although Melvin Charney may not be trying to formulate a holy spot through his reconstructions of the temple, works like "Vision of the Temple" and "Parable No. 26 ..." can and should be viewed in the context of such traditions. After all, even though Melvin Charney's vision of the temple appears to be unique and new, according to his own theories it has been there all along.

Endnotes

1 Melvin Charney, interview with Phyllis Lambert, 12 March 1991, in Melvin Charney, *Parables and Other Allegories: The Work of Melvin Charney, 1975-1990* (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1991), 25.

2 In 1990 Charney completed two of his most famous commissioned pieces to date: The Canadian Centre for Architecture Garden in Montreal and The Canadian Tribute to Human Rights in Ottawa.

3 Melvin Charney, "On Architecture: A Statement about Statements," in *Building with Words* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1981), 30.

4 Melvin Charney, *Melvin Charney, œuvres, 1970-1979*, exhibition catalogue (Montreal: Musée d'art contemporain, 1979), 29.

5 *Ibid.*, 33.

6 *Ibid.*

7 The work is made of wood and measures 4 x 3 x 4 metres.

8 Charney, *œuvres*, 33.

9 Specifically, it resembles the Treasury of the Athenians at Delphi. See Charney, *Parables and Other Allegories*, 58.

10 In notes by Diana Nemiroff, curatorial file 28784, 12 February 1985, p. 2, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

11 See, for example, Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972); on Laugier, see Wolfgang Herrmann, *Laugier and Eighteenth Century French Theory* (London: A. Zwemmer, 1962).

12 Melvin Charney, "Melvin Charney: Other Monuments, Four Works, 1970-1976," *Vanguard* 6, no. 2 (March 1977): 8 (reprint of Melvin Charney, *Melvin Charney: Other Monuments, 1970-1976*, exhibition catalogue [Boston: Harvard University, 1977]).

13 *Ibid.*

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*

16 Charney and fellow artist Krzysztof Wodiczko represented Canada at the 1986 Venice Biennale with "A Construction in Venice." Other constructions have been erected at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, the Agnes Etherington Art Centre in Kingston, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, and an abandoned site on King Street East in Toronto, to name only a few locations. For a comprehensive list of Charney's constructions, see *Parables and Other Allegories*.

17 Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey, *The Villas of Pliny: From Antiquity to Posterity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 218.

18 Charney, *Parables and Other Allegories*, 86.

19 Extrapolated from a description of Charney's work in Louise Dompierre, *Melvin Charney, 1981-1983* (Kingston, Ont.: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1983), 35.

20 Melvin Charney, as cited in *ibid.*

21 See, for example, reproductions of the work in Charney, *Parables and Other Allegories*, 132-33.

22 *Ibid.*, 141.

23 Although Charney freely admits to having used Helen Rosenau's book *Vision of the Temple: The Image of the Temple of Jerusalem in Judaism and Christianity* as a source for several of his works, the artist claims that he had considered possible connections with the Temple of Jerusalem before reading the book. Melvin Charney, telephone interview with the author, 20 October 1997. During this interview, Charney could not or would not specify when he first came upon the source; he has since claimed that he read the book in 1979. According to Charney in a note to the author, 29 January 1999, the association occurred to him between 1982 and 1983, but "remained vague" until 1986.

24 Taken from the revised version of *A Lethbridge Construction* (Lethbridge, Alta.: Southern Alberta Art Gallery, 1986), as it appears in Charney, *Parables and Other Allegories*, 155.

25 Melvin Charney, telephone interview with the author, 20 October 1997. Similar ideas have been expressed by William McClung, *The Architecture of Paradise: Survivals of Eden and Jerusalem* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), and Rykwert, *On Adam's House*.

26 Charney's theory parallels one expressed by Juan Battista Villalpando in his treatise on Ezekiel's vision of the Temple of Jerusalem, in which the Solomonic column is believed to be the one perfect Order from which all others have been derived.

27 Charney, *Parables and Other Allegories*, 145.

28 In addition to completing his doctoral dissertation on temple reconstructions, Robert Jan van Pelt recently co-authored a book on the plans and architecture of Auschwitz. See Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996).

29 The conclusions expressed here were informed by a lecture given by Robert Jan van Pelt to a graduate seminar (ARTH-805) at Queen's University, Kingston, during which van Pelt revealed, among other things, his experience with and deep-seated interest in Freemasonry.

30 Robert Jan van Pelt, "Into the Suffering City," in Charney, *Parables and Other Allegories*, 38.

31 *Ibid.*, 36.

32 *Ibid.*, 42-43.

33 *Ibid.*, 43.

34 Monica Bohm-Duchen, ed., *After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in Contemporary Art*, exhibition catalogue (Sunderland, Eng.: Northern Centre for Contemporary Art, 1996), 149.

35 Helen Rosenau, *Vision of the Temple: The Image of the Temple of Jerusalem in Judaism and Christianity* (London: Oresko Books, 1979), 106.

36 Charney removed the people as well as some minor detailing from Hafenreffer's design.

37 Charney, *Parables and Other Allegories*, 162.

38 Charney, as cited in Bohm-Duchen, ed., 149.

39 Several political leaders have been aligned with King Solomon throughout history, either by their own volition or through forms of tribute by others. In temple reconstructions the reigning monarch was often accorded such status, as was the case with Phillip II of Spain and James I of England.

40 The *Oxford English Dictionary*, as cited in Charlotte Townsend-Gault, *A Construction in Venice and Other Works by Melvin Charney*, exhibition catalogue (New York: 49th Parallel Gallery, Centre for Contemporary Canadian Art, 1987), unpag.

41 The curatorial file on the work at the National Gallery of Canada contains several letters between the curator and Melvin Charney about the title and its spelling. The only explanation given for the name change is that after exhibiting the work in Venice in 1986 under the title "The Other Temple," the artist decided that he preferred "Visions of the Temple." Curatorial file 29554, National Gallery of Canada.

42 Melvin Charney, "Displaced Origins," in *Melvin Charney: Un Dictionnaire, Parable Series, In Flight Series*, exhibition catalogue (Toronto: The Power Plant — Contemporary Art Gallery, 1995), 2.

43 *Montreal Gazette*, 4 August 1994, B10.

44 Melvin Charney, telephone interview with the author, 11 November 1997.

45 Melvin Charney, letter to Pierre du Prey, 18 April 1997.

46 Melvin Charney, telephone interview with the author, 11 November 1997.

47 *Ibid.*

48 A self-contained process described by Pierre Bourdieu as "un système de dispositions durables et transposables qui, intégrant toutes les expériences passées, fonctionne à chaque moment comme une matrice de perceptions, d'appréciations et d'actions ...." Pierre Bourdieu, *Ésquisse d'une théorie de la pratique : précédé de trois études d'ethnologie Kabyle* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1972), 178-79, cited in Melvin Charney, "Of Temple and Sheds," *Architecture / Québec*, October 1983, 15.

49 The forgoing is a synthesis of statements made by the artist in a telephone interview with the author, 20 October 1997.

50 *Ibid.*

51 Rosenau, 124. See also Bernard Lamy, *Apparatus Biblicus* (Lyons, 1696).

52 According to Charney, this "kind" of architecture was typical in Paris in the 1740s, when the city underwent reconstruction. Melvin Charney, telephone interview with the author, 11 November 1997.

53 *Ibid.*

54 While Charney acknowledges that there is a social and political dimension to "Parable No. 26 ... RE: Visions of the Temple," he refuses to offer any additional explanation about how his own political views inform his work. *Ibid.*