

AN EPIDOTAL SYLLABUS OF THE MURAL  
AT CLEAR LAKE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

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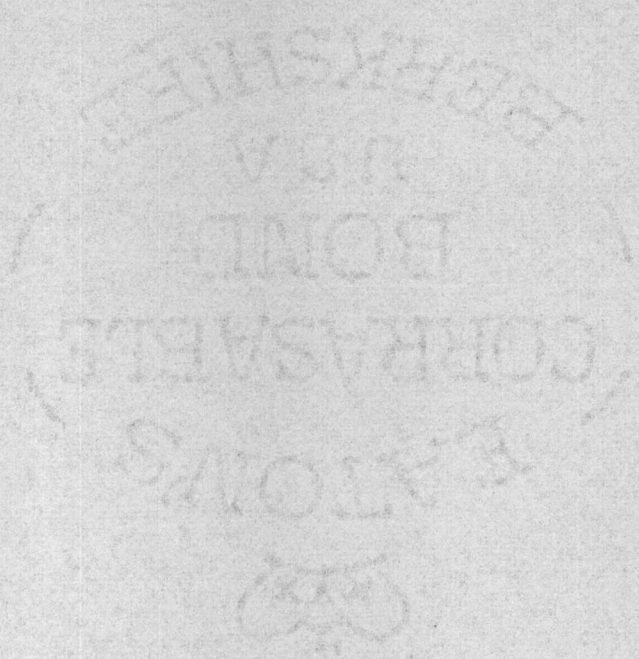
A TERMINAL PROJECT

Presented to the School of Architecture and Allied Arts  
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon  
in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts

JANUARY 1957

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APPROVED:



(Adviser for the Project)

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## I. FOUR INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPHS

I take my motivation for the M.F.A. degree to be the Opportunity it provides rather than the M. or the F.A.: the Opportunity to pursue my personal Growing by continuing the original studies and development of the particular Programming begun about six years ago in collaboration with my professor and adviser Mr. Jack Wilkinson. In taking the consequences of such Programming, there is a natural and necessary manifestation or Expression of itself by the individual persons in some meaningful and communicating Form: "I merely apply the System"---Georges Seurat.

I find myself situated in the uniquely Temporal Culture of the 20th Century with an aptitude for the two particularly temporal media---the instantaneous Visual and the simultaneous Mnemonic; which convention calls Painting and Writing. My Wholehearted Involvement in this situation does not in any way preclude preliminary or periodic Expression thru both these media in terms of their maximum Differentiation as the means for determining basic Potentials and Appropriatenesses of Expression: but the natural disposition to Synthesis tends in the longrun to produce a new Expression which is much more Comprehensive in intent and interest, including as it does, not only both visual and literary insights, but also tactile and kinetic factors to compose a whole world complete in its context where nothing is left out.

The Problem then, demands Environment: the framed plane of Easelpainting and the hinged page of Book provide the Differentiated Worldscapes---but what about the Comprehensive Synthesis. Aid to decision comes with consideration of that additional aspect of Comprehensiveness involving extending the range of Communication-levels, which in turn adds the special Problems of Presentation to those of Expression: this consideration of Presentation, which is mainly a matter of Scale including the particular audience (in this case the whole range from child to adult), pretty directly suggests the two possible sorts of "Staging"---Movie or Mural.

It might have been a Movie just as well, since Motionpictures are the modern projected form of the Ancient Illuminated Scrolls: as it is, this Mural might be a sort of Contemporary Wall Compendium, with charts and maps, sensations and illusions, documentation and history, idea and design in the way of the Ancient Cavepaintings. The Clear Lake Elementary School, grades one thru six (Bethel District, North Barger Drive) provides the particular Cave demanding a multi-leveled Visual Wonderland for all its Alices to Find their own Hunting in: many of the elements used have been gathering as separate items over the last two and three years and are already on hand before I begin the project, but some are developed from my immediate experience during several weeks attendance and participation in all aspects of the school activity, and still others, as well as the ultimate integration of all, must come directly out of the particular architectural, visual (-design-to-date) and temporal situation.



## II. TWO PROSPECTUS DOCUMENTS

Most of an article I was asked to write for their school paper, specifically as publicrelations for the children, their parents, their teachers and an annual four-district "teachers' workshop":

### T H E M U R A L at ClearLake Gradeschool -- April 2, 1956

I am going to make a mural in the center hallway of your school... I looked at many schools in and around Eugene, and I liked yours the best: for its location, for its building and wall-space, and not least by any means for its principal and teachers.

I've done two murals before---one in 1952 in the Commuter's Lunchroom in the Student Union at the University (with John Otto), and the other in Korea when I was there in 1954. But this new one is going to be quite different from my other murals. In the others I mostly sort of played visual games with the space by using illusions, like making walls and corners look like they come forward or go back when they actually don't at all, and so on. It is a lot of fun I think, but those walls really needed something like that because at the time I made the mural, there was only one door and no windows in that room (although they've cut in more now) and it was like an Egyptian tomb, and so the walls just naturally came out designed and painted something like the beautiful Egyptian tomb wallpaintings with something of a story to tell, but in contemporary terms of course. Your

school hallway walls are already interestingly spaced: plain varnished-grained plywood cut into and lit by bright skylights and doors and windows and hallways. I chose your school in the first place because of the already interesting space, so I could do this different sort of game I have in mind.

I think perhaps this mural will be more like the magnificent Cavepaintings of early man, rather than like the Egyptian wall-paintings. Of course there won't be any bison-hunting scenes or symbols and so on. But I do hope it can be a similarly decorous wall textbook of sorts. So you see, in this mural I want to play visual games with Ideas (in time) more than with the space. As I say, it will be in contemporary terms, rather than bison, but I hope the handling can be similarly pictographic and ideographic. I hope I can juggle the symbols of our senses with a simple wholeness, vitality and fidelity similar to that which primitive men and children always have in common. I hope to participate in a reciprocal environment, and develop an extension of it, and leave an expression of it on the walls. (One of my teachers on my Terminal Project Committee facetiously asked if I meant it would be didactic, and I answered to the effect that regardless of intentions, almost anything has a lesson to teach eventually, especially if it has an ounce of meaning initially).

In other words, I want to use Images to tickle an Idea rather than Pictures to tell a Story. And if you still can't guess what it's going to be like from what I say here, then I hope at least I've already begun to make you curious about it.

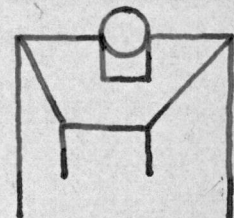
Excerpt from a letter to R. Buckminster Fuller requesting permission to use one of his Dymaxion World Map Projections:

31 May 1956

Dear Bucky,

...I am doing a mural in a public primary-grades school in Eugene for my M.F.A. terminal project. I am using as my method and subjectmatter what I call the "Ideograph" in the most inclusive sense of the word (after Ez. Pound). The attempt is to get at nutshell forms which are complete at one shot---which present a complete (or comprehensive) plurality of pertinent conditions (or views) all at the same time or in a single image. I hope my mural can be a sort of grand wall-textbook in the contemporary sense of Egyptian tombpaintings and primitive cavepaintings---but mine of course will be largely non-pictorial; a sort of Hall of Ideographic Chartings. And I would very much like to paint a large blow-up of your Dymaxion World Map Projection in the version printed in trans/formation #1... Since yours would be the only element used that is not my own invention, I would be sure to plainly mark it as patented by R. B. Fuller. This, as with most of your prototypes, is what I mean by Ideograph: come to think of it, I suppose all Archetypes are Ideographic, like the simultaneously multi-viewed Cubist tables and tumblers:

tops  
sides  
bottom



### III. A SYNOPTIC VIEW

Being a Résumé of some additional questions, replies, remarks, and endorsements made during the course of my Oral Presentation in fullview of the Mural (not quite complete at that date), 13 August 1956---In attendance: my Terminal Project Committee composed of Dr. Chandler Beall and Professors A.M. Vincent and Jack Wilkinson, chairman, as well as guests Mr. Chas. Endicott one of the architects of the building, Mr. Tom Powers superintendent of the school district, Mr. Glen Hankins principal of ClearLake School, my parents, and four friends:

Since this Mural as a permanent installation in a Public School is an unprecedented event in this area (and to our knowledge in this and most other States), I think it only proper that I say a few thankyou's before I say anything else: I want to thank the Architects, Wilmsen and Endicott for encouraging such a project in their building, and my thanks also to Mr. Tom Powers, Superintendent of the Bethel District, and Mr. Glen Hankins, Principal of this school for their generous cooperation, and to the two custodians or janitors of the school for helping out in so many little practical ways this summer, and a more general thankyou to the faculty and friends at the University who always provide those advantages which compose what is perhaps too broadly called the "background", and a silent and very special thankyou to Mr. Jack Wilkinson who negotiated the initial arrangements and who has been most patient in his hopeful wait for the fulfillment of this project, and to whom this Mural is dedicated in appreciation of gifts for which he can never be adequately thanked.

Why a mural rather than easelpaintings?

Well for one thing, Performance, Presentation (of idea) is mainly a matter of scale. So I enjoy big enough to see plainly, and besides, a mural provides a guaranteed exhibition. Actually, the larger scale demands a clearer articulation. And mural function always has to do with the particulars of the architecture since it has a place. The hanging or exhibition problems are built-in: the more universal meaning aspects become automatically synthesized with the architectural particulars and can give it all a larger level of meaning when used appropriately ---eg. this beam-arm up here really is holding up the wall in effect---but a wall of sky?---supporting or reaching? or the other hand over there really does open that door---that door to the healthroom---and whose hands are they anyway.

Why did you paint the mural here rather than anywhere else in the building?

Because the center hallway provides the natural convergences of the front main entrance of the school entering directly onto the large main wall and the corridors of both other wings of the school terminate at the other two walls due to their shift in axes at the center vestibule here, where all other major traffic convergences also occur, including the teachers' room, the school and principal's offices, the healthroom, the cafeteria, the gymnasium, and the library: plus the fact that the entire main wall and the larger of the other two walls are both ideally lit by specially raised skylights.

Does it work: have you succeeded in your intentions regarding communicating?

Of course school hasn't been in session here this summer while I've been working on it, but I have had a remarkable crosssection of visitors and there's no question in my mind that it does.

The responsive age-range has even exceeded my own expectations: a friend visits with her 11-month old baby who, barely able to walk, is set down in the center of the hallway and immediately totter-shuffles over to the big wall and puts his hand in the brightcolored handflowers--and a week later the principal here and his wife visiting with their little girl about the same age, have the same experience... then one Saturday evening when the adult squaredance group is using the gymnasium, a sixth grade girl from another school who is here with her parents explains to her mother with firm certainty the wall I'm just finishing at that time:

---"See that's the hopscotch along the bottom and there's the monkeybars or junglejim we climb on and next are the swings and the top one is the merrygoround like the one we have at our school..."

---I ask her from the ladder "Are you sure?---then how come I'm painting numbers allaround inside?"

---"Well it's a clock too..."

---"Now how can it be both?"

---"Well they both go round," says the confidently grinning daughter of the quizzically smiling mother.

Some of the best comments have come as unguarded personal interpretations which show individual insights into the various configurations, and have greatly enriched its total meaning for me: friends point things out in terms which have not occurred to me in quite the same way: such as the bottomside view of the basketball coming thru the basket painted over the doors to the gym is seen by some instead as a wreathlike emblem, and another friend delights us both with her discovery of "the turtle in the garden is holding up the world---and he's a world of his own", and still another spontaneous friend tries a peculiar pronunciation of the numbers-spelled-with-numbers which I'm painting-in at the time---"Owen Toothry, Seven to Thrio, Thuhtwelve 3-E, Effor Oh Five-er", and then she goes right on to say she's found the six eyes and one nose in the i eye hieroglyph.

My committee chairman asks the Superintendent and Architect their candid opinions of the project, to which the Superintendent replies "I think I can honestly say this is the first mural I feel I can understand---no not just at the 11-month age level but to the measure of my own effort", and the Architect agrees with the observation that the Painting as Surface---a mentalistically articulated surface---now gives new meaning to all these other proximate surfaces of brick, brown and weathered roughwood, glass, and plain and painted plywood.

I repeat these experiences here because I consider them valid extensions of my intentions, rather than readings-in: and as the time of this presentation is running well into the second hour and a conclusion is desired, I finally admit "I'm an Alchemist; and this is the Laboratory and these are the Charts for the Initiates."



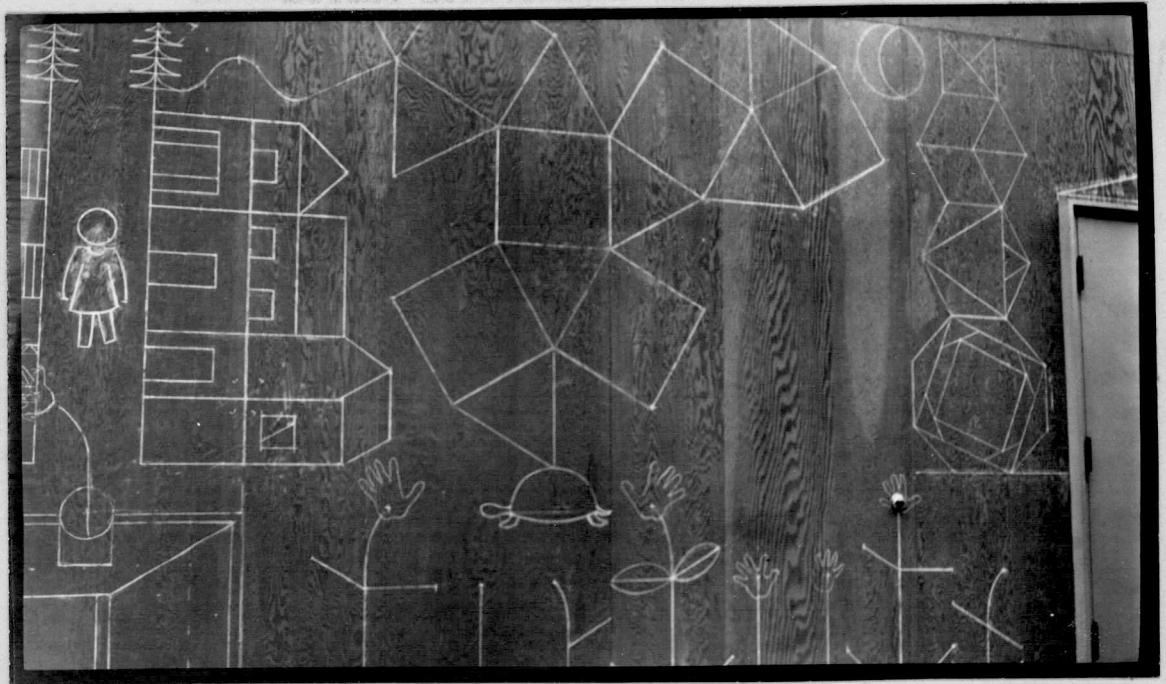


Plate 1.

#### IV. SIX DESCRIPTIVE PHOTOGRAPHS

Photographs can in no way substitute for the actual mural-situation: they are here as nothing more than mere diagrammatic aids or suggestions (black&white photographs-for-the-record of a colorful and spatial mural must necessarily be grossly inadequate at best): three walls of approximate total area, 440 sq. ft:

Plate 1:

WORK IN PROGRESS (eastwall):

preliminary chalk guidelines transferred by very careful measurement from original griddrawing.

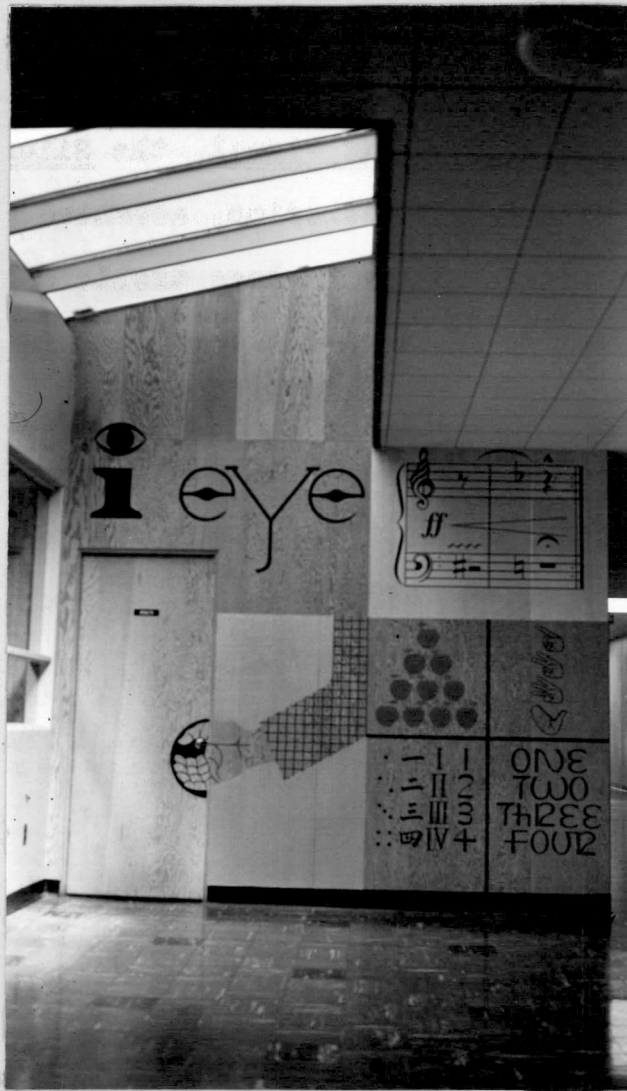
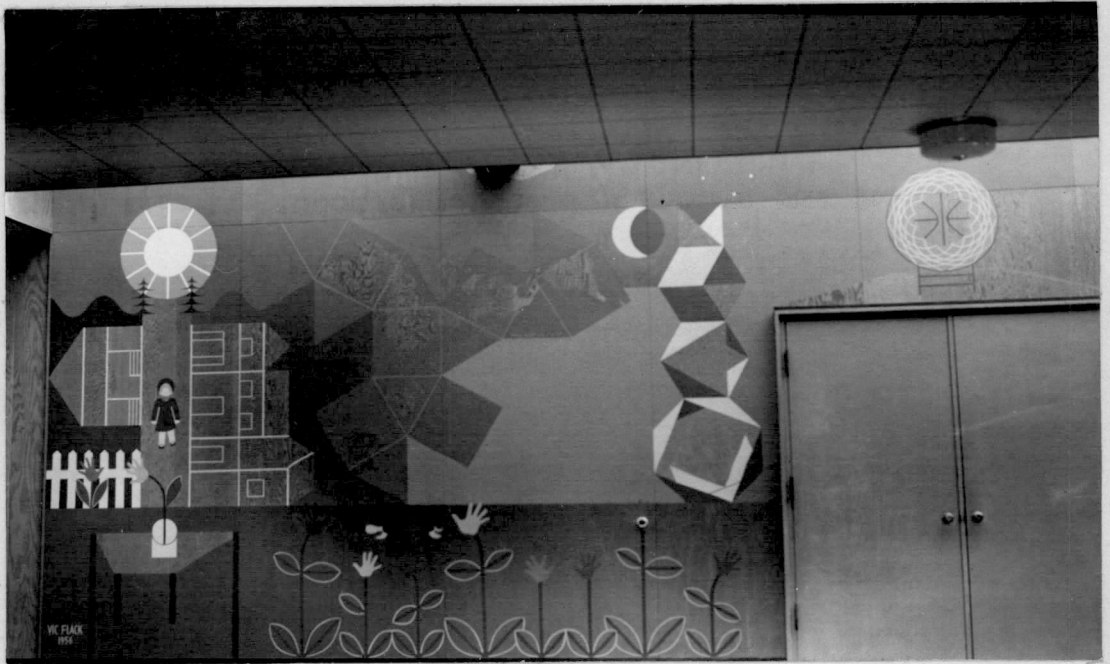


Plate 2.

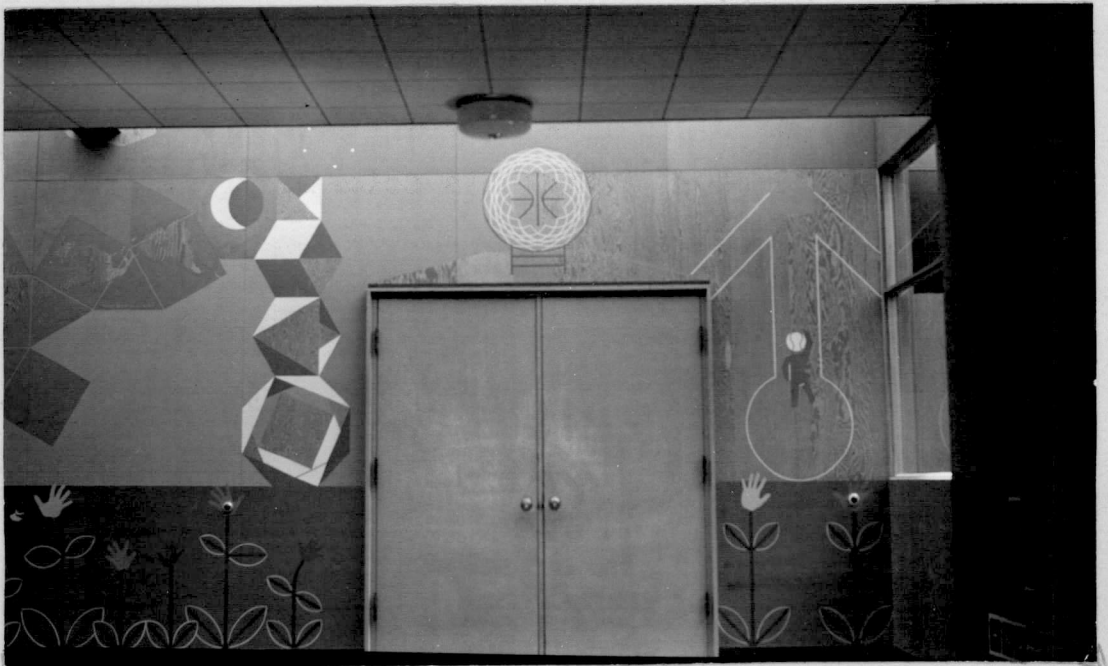
Plate 2:

PERCEPTUAL EXPRESSIONS (completed northwall):

including the Verbal Visual, the Silent Music with a staff of double fortissimo, accented, trilled, held and crescendoed rests whose treble clef is a seashell and bass clef is an ear, the Arm Opening the Door to Health-room, and the Little History of Numbers with the ten bright red apples being counted by the fingers which become marks of strikingly similar Mayan, Oriental, Roman and Arabic numerals, the latter of which ultimately spell themselves in english by visual arrangement of their alphabetic resemblance as a final feedback to Visual Verbal.



Plates 3 and 4.



Plates 3 and 4:

MAPS OF THE WORLDS (completed eastwall):

including the child's neighborworld of sunnybright spring and summer day and afternoon, and the last of the Cubistworld tables, R.B. Fuller's Dymaxion Worldprojection and the green garden turtleworld and brightcolored handflowers whose low horizon-line is eyelevel for first and second graders, and the moonlit fall and winter night-stacked boxes of Fuller's Energetic Geometry, above which a starmap of the dippers at the current time of this Mars-year are hanging in the deepblue sky interrupted by the huge beam-arm hand (not visible in photo), and at the right and over door to gym is the sport- and gameworld of baseballheaded boy in the diamond where There's No Plate Like Home---all done in generally very bright color which is based on a new extension of Goethe's Colorprinciple which becomes an integral of the entire underlying Program.

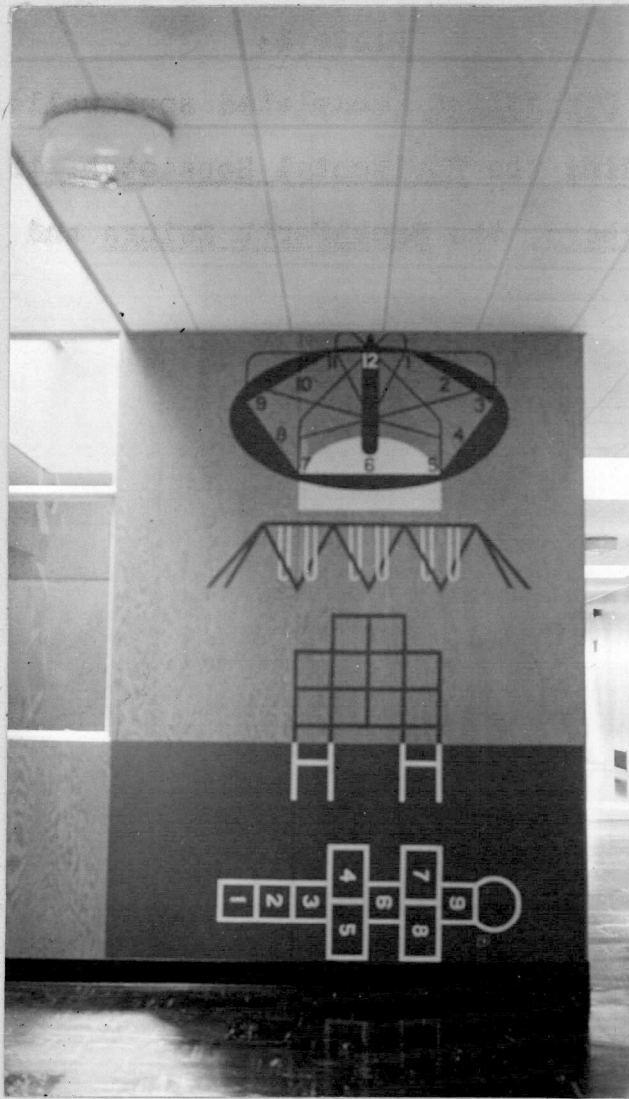


Plate 5.

Plate 5:

PERCEPTUAL DIMENSIONS (completed southwall):

including the Horizontal Hopscotch, the Vertical Monkeybars, the Back&forth Swings and the Temporal Merrygoround.





Plate 6.

Plate 6:

TURVYTABLE TEATIME.

EXTRA  
COPYABLE  
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