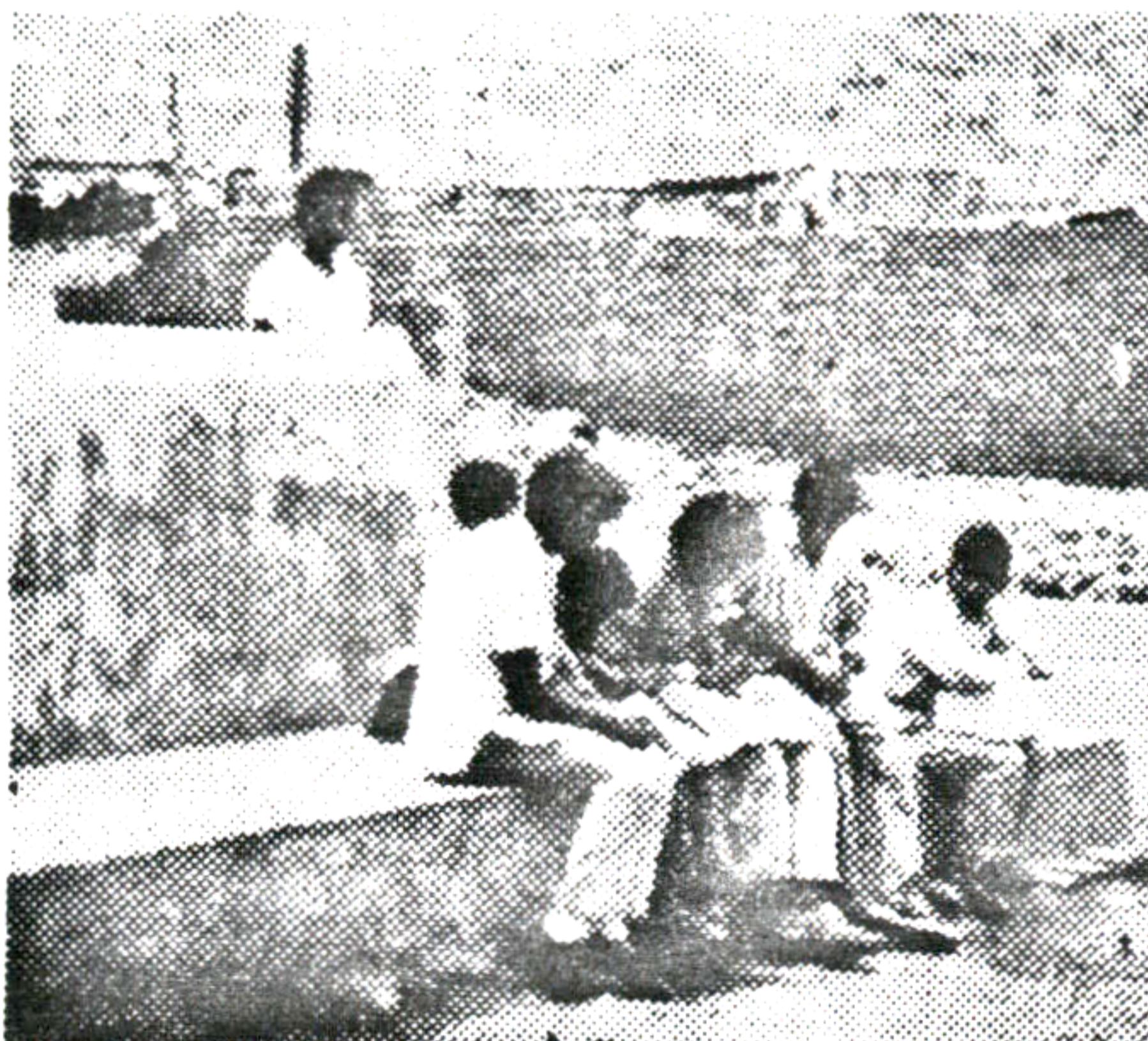


*Neighborhood open spaces are lifeless—they rarely have the characteristics which make them places to be in.*

In existing modern housing projects, people rarely feel comfortable lingering outside their houses. There are few places where it is "all right to be". Yet at the same time, it is clear that almost everyone wants, at some time or another, to linger in some public space. Our observations show that the men seek corner beer shops, where they spend hours talking and drinking; teenagers, especially boys, choose special corners too, where they hang around, waiting for their friends. Old people like a special spot to go to, where they can expect to find others; small children



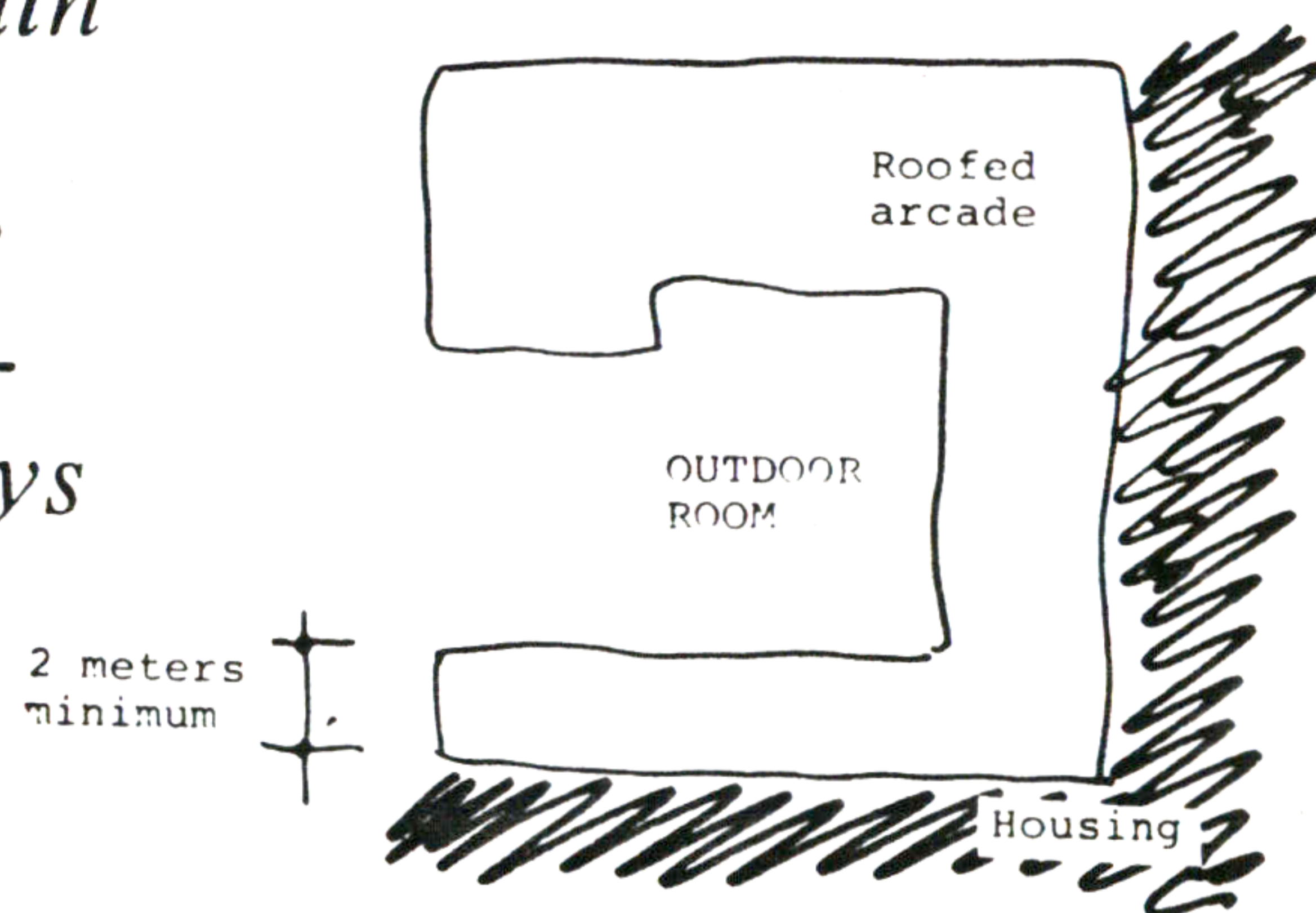
need sand lots, mud, plants, and water to play with in the open; young mothers who go to watch their children, often use the children's play as an opportunity to meet and talk with other mothers.

Because of the diverse and casual nature of these activities, they require a space which has a subtle balance of being defined and yet not too defined, so that any activity which is natural to the neighborhood at any given time, can develop freely, and yet has something to start from.

(Continued over)

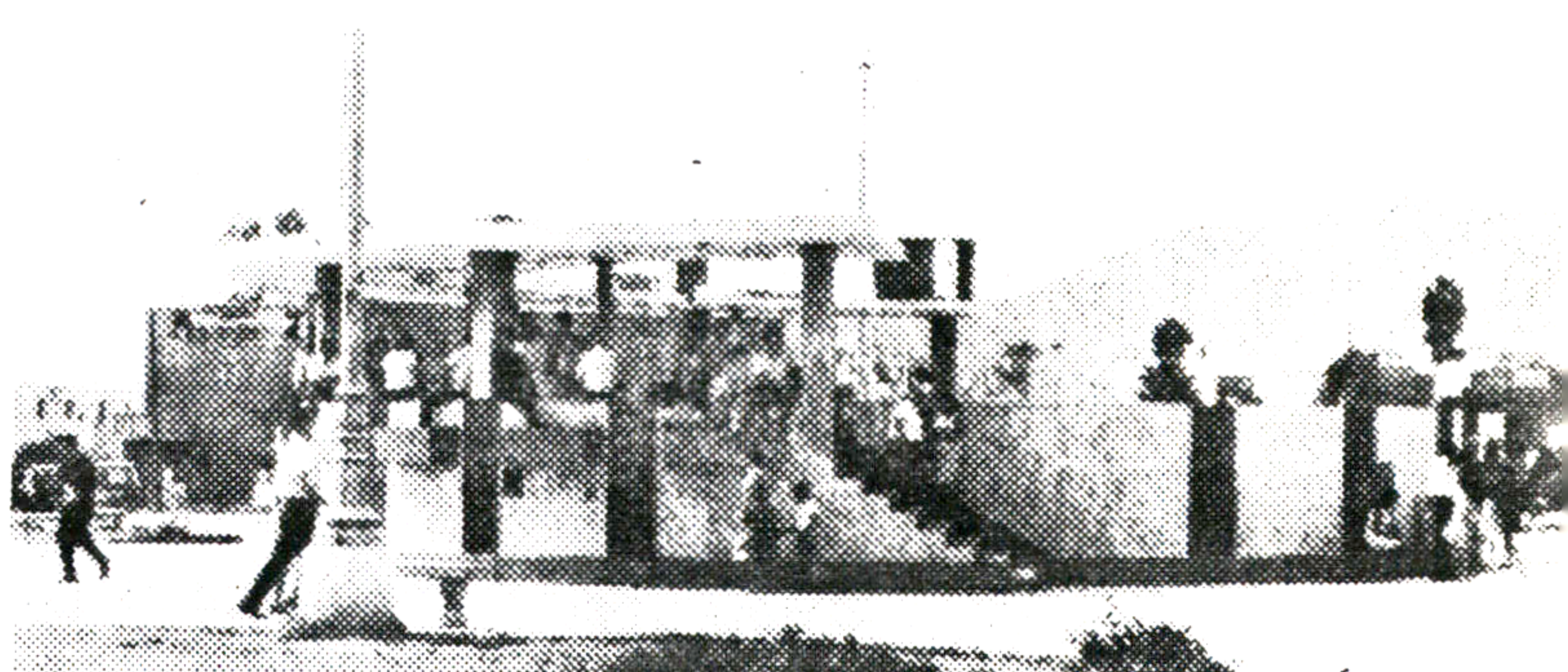
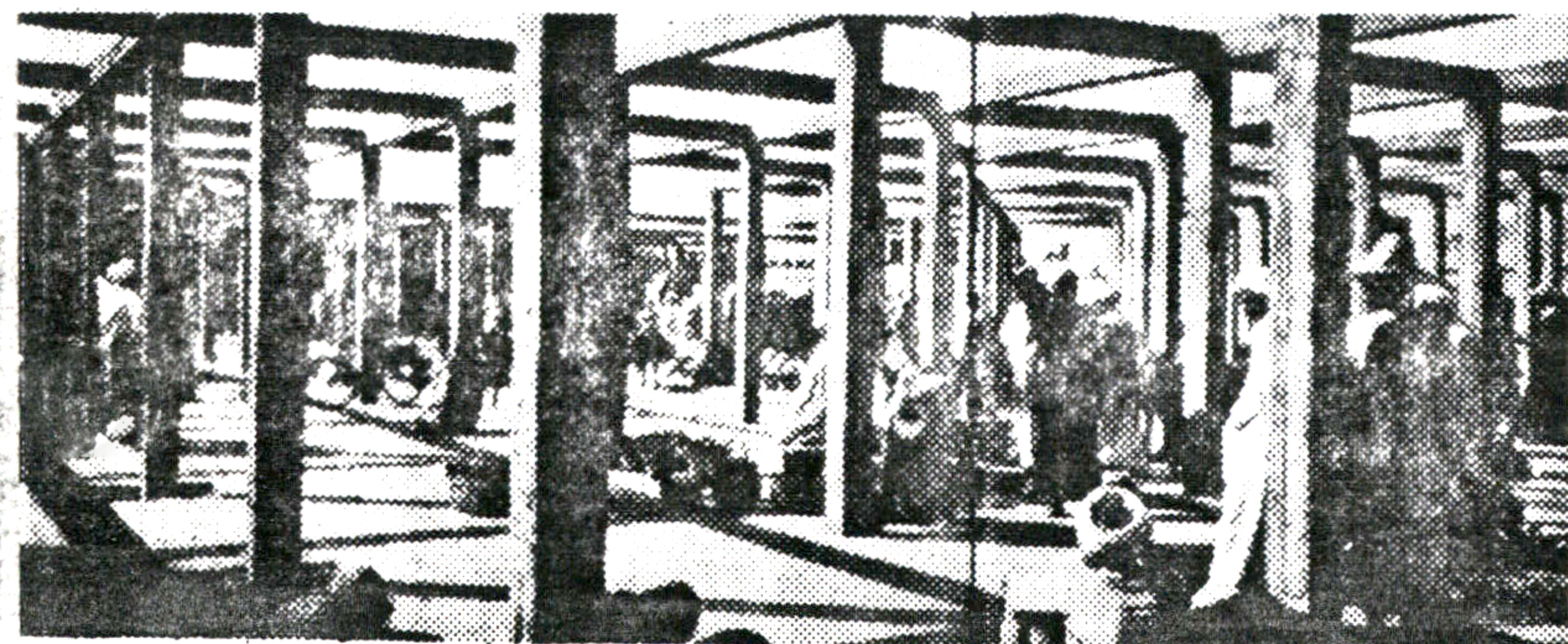
## *Public Outdoor Room*

*Therefore: In every neighborhood, within view of every house, build at least one "multipurpose outdoor room" with the following characteristics: It is surrounded by a continuous roofed arcade, always at least two meters deep, and, where possible, built up against the walls of existing buildings.*



*Leave the outdoor rooms unfinished, with the understanding that they will be finished by people who live near them, to fill whatever needs seem to be most pressing. They may contain sand, or water faucets, or play equipment, for small children.*

*They may contain steps, and seats, where teenagers can meet. Someone may build a small bar or coffee shop in a house that opens into the arcade, making the arcade a place to eat and drink. There may be games for old people, like chess and checkers.*



# Public Outdoor Room

---

## Problem (continued)

Public spaces in most modern housing projects suffer from the lack of this subtle balance; it is very difficult to achieve. When indoor community rooms are provided, they are rarely used. People don't want to plunge in to a situation which they don't know; and the degree of involvement created in such an enclosed space, is too intimate to allow a casual passing interest to build up gradually to full involvement. On the other hand, vacant land or the casual open space is not enclosed enough. It takes years for anything to happen on open or vacant land; it provides too little shelter, and too little "reason to be there".

What is needed is a framework which is just enough defined so that people naturally stop there, and tend to stop there; and so that curiosity naturally takes people there, and allows them to stay. Then, once community groups begin to gravitate towards this framework, there is a good chance that they will themselves create an environment which is appropriate to their activities. Some possible examples of such future developments are given in the solution statement.

We conjecture that a small open space, between 10 and 20 meters in diameter, and surrounded on all sides by an open roofed arcade, may just about provide the necessary balance of "openness" and "closedness". The arcade should be at least 2 meters deep, for the reasons given in *Two Meter Balcony*.

Even if this conjecture turns out to be correct in theory, it will undoubtedly be very hard to implement. Only detailed experiments, in communities, will show up the finer

points that are needed to make this pattern work in practice.

---

By: Christopher Alexander, Sanford Hirshen, Sara Ishikawa, Christie Coffin, Shlomo Angel.

August 1969 revised May 1970

*This pattern is tentative. If you have any evidence to support or refute its current formulation, please send it to the Center for Environmental Structure, P.O. Box 5156, Berkeley, California 94705; we will add your comments to the next edition.*