

with many others who eventually fill the empty chairs and tables. Feeding pigeons in the Stadtpark brings daily attention and meaning to an otherwise solitary life. Every morning without fail, a lone figure brings her bag of corn to feed the birds, an act that feeds her spirit in return. The more often she does this, the more often the birds are fed and the more often her spirit is nourished.

Ritual is an imaginative re-creation of the rhythms we feel in a place. Children, who celebrate winter by sledding in the snow, may later rejoice in spring by drawing chalk flowers on the sidewalk.

RITUAL ELEMENTS

Parts of buildings can assume ritual meaning. Descending a stair can take us symbolically as well as actually from a private and secret world to a public and shared one. In a house, coming down the stairs can mean joining the family. In a city it means joining countless others. Ascending the stairs completes a cycle by turning the ritual around.

Doors as much as stairs can assume ritual meaning. A door in Suquamish, Washington, is an extreme example. A most minimal act, it stands by itself, no wall around it. By defining an entrance to a nonexistent enclosure, the door symbolizes arrival at a family's domain.

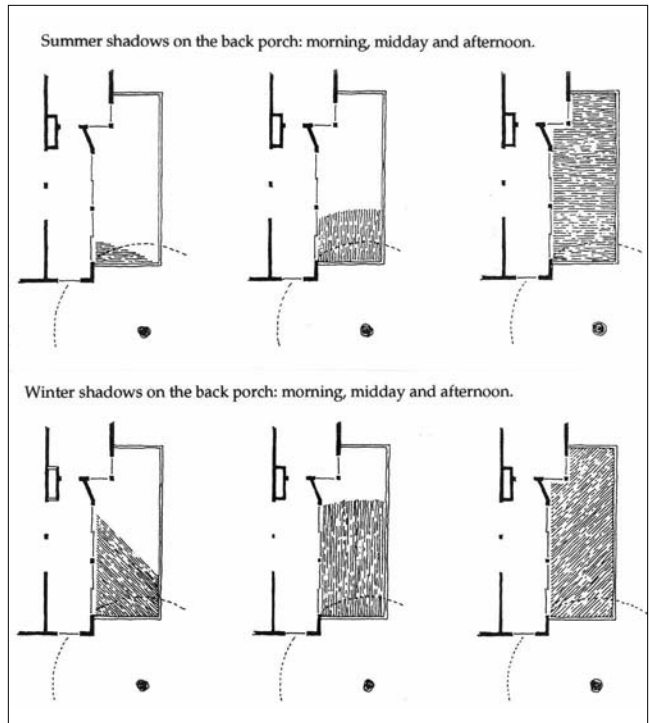
A BACK-PORCH RITUAL

While some rituals seem purely symbolic, others have quite practical sheltering benefits. In Los Angeles, my family sits down every day to eat. But instead of sitting in the same place, at the same table, we move around. The way this happens has been gently guided by rhythmic changes of sunlight and shadow on our back porch.³

Almost every day we eat at least one of our meals at the table on the back porch. The meals that we do not carry out to the porch we



Stairways and Doors: Wandler Hotel, Vienna; Ritual door, Suquamish, Washington.



eat in the dining room, separated from the porch by glass doors. In and out, throughout a day, we carry food and utensils through the doors.

Two independent sunlight cycles provide multiple combinations of places to sit. In winter we are likely to eat breakfast and dinner in the dining room. But for lunch we have the choice of sitting on the sunny part of the porch. In summer we are more likely to eat breakfast behind adjustable sunscreens in the dining room. But for lunch and dinner, we have the choice of sitting on the shady part of the back porch.

A neighbor's tree spreads over the south end of our porch. To catch the warm winter sun, we move our porch table northward. To sit in the cool summer shadow, we move the table southward.

Back Porch: (Left) East-facing with overhanging tree at the south end; (Right) Plan diagrams of shadows cast in the morning, midday, and afternoon during summer (upper) and winter (lower).