Architectural psychology and the new Burton

By David Sears

If nothing else, the old Burton House was sturdy.

To be sure, the plaster flaked, the pipes jutted incommodiously (where it existed) aged ungracefully and when wet smelt delightfully of old beer, the furniture stubbornly resisted anything resembling interior decoration, and the Servend machines consistently denied their services, seemingly with a frequency correlated to the degree of desperation of the wadne. No one disputed the fact that Burton was ugly, decrepit, institutional, and often depressing in its own right.

Still, there was very little you couldn't do in Burton. You could conduct massive waterfights up and down the halls and in the stairwells, with a veritable armory of manias (two to ten feet lengths of plastic lab tubing gorged with water, which imparted their elastic energy to said water in a stream of stunning force. These and myriad other offensive inventions flowered during the latter days of Burton), and JudComm would usually give you at least an hour before issuing the first warning. You could commit all manner of mischief in the halls (from tennis balls to frisbees), and break only a few light bulbs in an evening, probably without even cleaning them up. You could carefully flush literally miles of computer tape down the toilet, a few yards at a time, in an effort to reach the Charles (later to discover that most of it conglomerated at the first bend in the pipe, eventually flooding the first floor to a depth of several inches).

There was something equalizing, and democratic, in the squat, simple structure of Burton. All the floors were the same - five stories didn't give you much of a view, and most of the windows faced the opposite wall, anyway - and the rooms were consistently wretched. In other words, everyone was in the same boat. This fact was little comfort; it didn't even come to light until the eve of the move to his perambulations.

The recreational areas have an ultra modern decor, with arched ceilings and off-beat lighting. The stairwells are bulk like Peruvian mountains, and the library is a tour-de-force, complete with built-in modern art.

"I hear there's going to be girls right in the same building next year," says the security guard, "Pretty convenient, huh?"

I nod, and try to remember how to find my way out.

There were some who maintained that the reason the old Burton House was tolerated at all was synecdoche - the fact that the experience was an allegory of MIT. Not that there was anything resemble school spirit, but rather, that thing that bound was survival, and perhaps a subdued pride therein. For some, life in Burton appealed to a certain latent hippie instinct; for others, it might have been the comfort that this was as low as they ever would get. Now, perhaps, a new dimension of all that allegory has been added, that follows a pattern of institutional evolution: along with wealth and independence comes departmentalization and isolation.

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of the common rooms for each subsection, it's a sticky business, but if you can hit it right eventually, it might pay off for well-adjusted students. It will certainly eliminate the hephazard nature of the old Burton, where you rangled up and down the halls as far as you felt like in choosing your friends.

They've installed garbage disposals and rubbish chutes. We won't even have to take out the garbage.

As we descend to the lower levels, the floors become increasingly dark and dingy - they have been working from the top down, and the carpeting and various other construction materials are out on the floor. The ground floor, however, is close to completion, and it is obvious that here is where the architect got his kicks. The recreational areas have an ultra modern decor, with arched ceilings and off-beat lighting. The stairwells are bulk like Peruvian mountains, and the library is a tour-de-force, complete with built-in modern art.