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## Places

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## In Formation

Information constructs change. “In formation” may not be etymologically equivalent, but it yields an image of action, an orientation towards making use of what we know. A geological formation, for instance, is a grouping that can be named, a heaving of the earth that we can imagine.

On the football field formations set the general course of the action. They establish much of what is likely to happen, since the position of various players on the field conditions what they can do. But even the uninitiated can quickly see that from any formation numbers of plays are possible; they may be conditioned, but they are not determined. And even the slightest further observation reveals the importance of talent—the energy, skill and will required to translate opportunity into accomplishment.

The destiny of places, too, is played out through the interaction of talents within established formations. The groupings of people who form alliances, the physical patterns that are familiar to a place and the game plans that prevailing economists imagine all contribute to the evolution of our surroundings. Knowledge, placed in formation, structures how citizens consider their cities and open spaces. What they presume to be possible and how they imagine their lives gives substance to the aspi-

rations of a community. Individuals who muster the will to create new visions or, even better, to seize undiscovered opportunities within the existing fabric of the place, become the agents of distinction or of dissolution. In this issue we observe the interplay of talents in the creation of a civic court, and consider a role for information in the retention of regional character.

We have also expanded "Speaking of Places" into a Debate. The Yosemite Valley has long occupied a hallowed place in our national geography, lodged there by heroic figures like John Muir, Frederick Law Olmsted and Theodore Roosevelt and embedded in the mind's eye by innumerable paintings, etchings and photographs, many of them profoundly moving. As Walter

Creese has observed in his epic work *The Crowning of the American Landscape*, Yosemite Valley is only a third larger than New York's Central Park, yet "its remoteness, fixity, solidity and evident derivation from colossal forces, when contrasted with the silver light of waterfalls, the gray stones, and a peculiarly soft blue haze in the void, provided more than enough wonder for all. Its quality as an integrated space made it unique. Yosemite stood apart, but grew into a scenic lodestar without parallel because so many artists and intellectuals wanted to enter into dialogue over it."

That dialogue continues in new formations today as the future of Yosemite as a great sanctuary appears threatened by the trappings of voracious tourism.

—Donlyn Lyndon

Ted Orland,  
*One-and-a-Half-Domes*,  
© 1975.

