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Although I lack the financial resources to fund a hundred parks across America, I, like Richard Bloch, am a cancer survivor. I am a member (Lymphoma, Class of 1999) of a large and growing club that Bloch has undertaken to represent in his ambitious and laudable campaign to use parks to make the struggles of cancer patients both visible and less daunting to members of the public who may also be stricken by the disease. As a result, I approached the cancer survivors park in Minneapolis as both cancer survivor and landscape architect, with both a sense of ownership and a critical eye, with hope that the park would embody some aspect of my experiences—and apprehension that it wouldn't.

The Minneapolis cancer survivors park is one of a few open spaces on Nicollet Mall and is located at the base of



an icon of late modernism, the 1973 Federal Reserve Building designed by Gunnar Birkerts. The siting of a cancer survivor memorial here is either fitting or ironic, given that the building, now known as Marquette Plaza, was recently gutted to abate an extensive asbestos problem. The park is a rectangular, terraced site inscribed with a parabolic path. In plan, the path mirrors the building's inverted catenary arches that are visible in elevation behind its blue glass curtain wall. Unfortunately, the bold gesture of the path is obscured by a water feature, layers of lush ornamental plantings, and the additional paths, signage, and sculpture prescribed by the Bloch program. The park and the building just don't seem to fit together: The park's diminutive, personal scale and conception seem trivial in the face of the big, bold architectural idea. The Bloch elements are the wrong kit of parts for this site, which requires something less cluttered and more brazen to compete with the building.

But I wonder: Is this the right kit of parts for any site? The requisite sculpture is a set of three-quarter-scale bronze figures, which on this site seems puny in the face of the massive and architecturally dynamic building. Though the

Bloch Foundation web site ([www.blochcancer.org](http://www.blochcancer.org)) says the sculpture "needs no explanation," in my opinion, it's trite. The bronze plaques explaining cancer and its

treatment line the park's walkways like so many lollipop bus stops along the streets of Candyland. Though some of the signs contain good advice about treatment ("Get an independent qualified second opinion," "Seek and accept support"), their number—21—seems excessive.

The signs are also overly prescriptive, urging a Dale Carnegie attitude about treatment outcome. One tells me to "Read and practice suggestions in the book *Fighting Cancer* available free from 1-800-433-0464"; another says "Make up your mind that when your cancer is gone, you are through with it." Sorry, but I think about my cancer almost every day; it's a potent, if not pleasant, reminder not to sweat the small stuff.

Maybe I would be less troubled by this landscape-architecture-cum-public-service-announcement if the signs were situated in an educational garden in a hospital courtyard. But it seems to me that the design of public landscapes calls for a more inspirational and less instructional approach.

As I mull all this over, I keep coming back to the fact that these parks are condemned to be mediocre landscapes because the park requirements negate a basic principle of landscape architecture: that a park be site specific. The restrictive requirements of the Bloch program at best reduce and at worst eliminate the possibility

of site-generated design. They also, it seems to me, inculcate a singular message about how to approach cancer, denying the idea of an individualized response to the disease. Despite their positive, upbeat sentiments, the dictated program and message of the park ultimately make these landscapes propaganda.

This constricted vision of a cancer survivors park makes me sad, because the idea itself has so much potential. And while I give Richard Bloch great credit for conceiving and promoting the idea, I also mourn for what these places might have been. These parks might have been *art*. Gut-wrenching, beautiful, human art. The Bloch Foundation could have funded a series of parks with an open program, through which one local artist in each community expressed his or her experience of cancer survivorship in response to a particular site. Such a program would honor the galaxy of ways real people confront, triumph, and sometimes fail in their struggle with cancer. These stories, not Mr. Bloch's didactic, cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all message, embody the ideas that should be expressed in a cancer survivors park.