DWELLING, HOUSES AND HOME: RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENTS AND THE FORMATION OF PLACE

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THE UNDERSIGNED FACULTY COMMITTEE APPROVES

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SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

Spring 1999

DEDICATION

To My Father and My Mother

Harry Clinton Mahan

March 14, 1909 – April 19, 1999

Eleanor Gearhart Mahan

March 8, 1910 – July, 6 1999

For the house furnishes us with dispersed images and a body of images at the same time.

Gaston Bachelard

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I would like to thank my wife, Lauren, for all her love and support, the members of my committee, Kotaro Nakamura, Jo-Anne Berelowitz, and Larry Ford, all my fellow students who have shared their ideas over the years, and everyone who assisted me in any way.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Dwelling, Houses, and Home: Residential Environments and the Formation of Place

An examination of the meanings contained in that title is in order. Are not dwellings, houses, homes and residences all the same thing? If we look to the dictionary we will find that a dwelling is a building to live in; place of residence; abode; home. A synonym is “house”. Yet there are real differences in which the meaning of this title can be found.

Dwelling

I use “dwelling” here not as a noun but as a form of the verb “to dwell”. For its meaning we look, not to the dictionary, but to Martin Heidegger, from whom we learn, “To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell.”[1] Dwelling is living on earth. But it is more. “To dwell, to

[1] Martin Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 147.

be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free

sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. *The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving.*"[2] It may be that true understanding of the spiritual meaning of Heidegger's words "requires a fundamental change in our very existence, a change that would not be comprehensible to the ways in which we currently think."[3] Nevertheless, simply recognizing the spirituality involved in dwelling gives fundamental meaning to our relationship to the environment. Heidegger relates dwelling to the act of building, but this must not be taken by Western humanity as a call to action for, "Even when faced with environmental disaster that clearly results for our compulsion to act, build, or change, our response to the crisis is to call for more action."[4]

Houses and Home

As English speakers we understand that there can be a difference between house and home. Although these words can be synonymous they are not always so.

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[2] Ibid., 149.

[3] Michael E. Zimmerman, "The Role Of Spiritual Discipline In Learning To Dwell On Earth" in *Dwelling, Place and Environment*, eds. David Seamon and Robert Mugerauer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 247.

[4] ibid., 250.

> (The) wonderful word, "home," which connotes a physical "place" but also has the more abstract sense of "a state of being," has no equivalent in the Latin or Slavic European languages. German, Danish, Swedish, Icelandic, Dutch, and English all have similar sounding words for "home," all derived from the Old Norse "heima."[5]

I have used the plural "houses" and the singular "home" to make the difference clear. "Houses" refers to objects within a class; "home" refers to a concept. We have expressions based on this difference. "A house that's not a home." "Eat you out of house and home." "Love makes a house a home." "Home is where the heart is." A "homemaker" is certainly different than a "housemaker", whatever the latter might be. A housekeeper is an employee. When we speak of the "homeless" we really mean the "houseless."[6] When Dorothy said, "There's no place like home," she certainly did not mean the house that carried her to Oz. "The place we call home" changes with distance. If asked "where is your home?", we might reply "California" or "San Diego" if we are away from it. In our own city we would answer with the name of a neighborhood or our street. If close enough we might even give our address. We are made to feel, or invited to make ourselves, "at home" not "at house." A comfortable place feels "homey."

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[5] Withold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 62.

[6] My spell checker liked neither "housemaker" nor "houseless" although it accepted the "home" versions of the words.

> "The English word *home*, reflecting a 'domicentric' view, can uniquely 'refer with equal ease to house, land, village, city district, country , or, indeed the world,' writes David Sopher. ' It transmits the sentimental association of one scale to all the others...'"[7]
> Home can be a room inside a house, a house within a neighborhood, a neighborhood within a city, a city within a nation. At each level the meaning of home gains in intensity and depth from the dialectical interaction between the two poles of experience—the place and its context at a larger scale...Home is a place of security within an insecure world, a place of certainty within doubt, a familiar place in a strange world, a sacred place in a profane world. It is a place of autonomy and power in an increasingly heteronomous world where others make the rules.[8]

Residential Environments.

The term "residence" is similar to "house." In the jargon of building codes and other laws it is the preferred technical term. We have single family residences instead of houses; multi-family residences instead of apartment houses. The house is the most important building type in the built environment. Looking down on any landscape from an airplane what we see is dominated by houses. If we drive for any time through a city we see more houses than any other type of building. But if we pick up any architectural text we see very few houses. Of all the greatest architects only Palladio and

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[7] Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 26.

[8] Kimberly Dovey, "Home and Homelessness" in *Home Environments, Human Behavior and Environment, Advances in Theory and Research*, eds. Irwin Altman and Carol M Werner (New York: Plenum Press, 1985), 46.

Wright are known primarily for houses. Yet, their work has had very little influence on the residential environment.

The ideas of Le Corbusier have had more to do with residential environments than those of any other modern architect, but in spite of his pontification that, “The design of cities was too important to be left to the citizens,”[9] architects have generally defaulted their role in the shaping of cities and their residential environments to developers. While modern architects design hypothetical deterministic utopias, “it is the property developer...who is primarily responsible for the current incarnation of the western city. Large scale speculative developments...shape the fabric of the present day city...”[10]

At SDSU the beginning class in environmental design is called “The House and Its Environment”. When I took this class it covered a large amount of material that had nothing to do with houses or their immediate proximity. It was clear that the house’s environment could be seen to include most of the built world. I use the term “residential environments” in this paper to include more than just those neighborhoods zoned exclusively for residential use. I include all those areas whose physical form is shaped

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[9] Le Corbusier quoted in Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988). 207.

[10] Deyan Sudjic, *The 100 Mile City* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1992), 34.

primarily by the proximity or inclusion of residences. The residential environment is the hearts of all European and many American cities where mixed residential and commercial use is the norm, the suburbs including strip malls and other commercial spaces that are created to serve the nearby residents, most rural areas not given over to agribusiness, roads and transportation that take people to and from their residences, parks and public spaces that serve people where they live, and so on. In short it is most developed spaces, because they take form from the way people live.

Place

What constitutes a place? Is it the chair where we sit? The room where the chair is? The building that contains the room? The street? The city? The natural environment? A country, continent, or planet? Thinking about these questions leads to others that sound like riddles. "Why is a chair like a city?" "Why is a room like a country?" "Why is a building like a continent?"

> A concrete term for environment is place. It is common usage to say that acts and occurrences *take place*. In fact it is meaningless to imagine any happening without reference to a locality. Place is evidently an integral part of existence. What then do we mean by the word "place"? Obviously we mean something more abstract than location. We mean a totality made up of concrete things having material substance, shape, texture and colour. Together these things determine and "environmental character", which is the essence of place...A place is therefore, a qualitative, "total" phenomenon,

> which cannot reduce to any of its properties, such as spatial relationships, without losing its concrete nature out of sight.[11]

Place is space that has meaning. Yi-Fu Tuan recounts a visit to Kronberg Castle by the physicists Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg. Bohr comments to Heisenberg that the castle becomes different when one imagines Hamlet's living there.[12] The formation[13] of place from space is a common theme in geography and architectural theory. A chair can be like a city or a room like a country because the meanings they contain give rise to similar feelings. These feelings are the spirit of a place.

> *Genius loci* is a Roman concept. According to ancient Roman belief every "independent" being has its *genius*, its guardian spirit. This spirit gives life to people and places, accompanies them from birth to death, and determines their character or essence. Even the gods had their *genius*, a fact which illustrates the fundamental nature of the concept. The *genius* thus denotes what a thing *is*, or what it "wants to be", to use a word of Louis Kahn...(A)ncient man experienced his environment as consisting of definite characters. In particular he recognized that it is of great existential importance to come to terms with the *genius* of the locality where his life takes place.[14]

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[11] Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci* (New York: Rizzoli, 1979), 6.

[12] Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 4.

[13] My choice of the word "formation" is a careful one. "Creation" or "making" would imply that the results of deliberate intent. Architects and planners would like to be able to create place, but the infusion of space with meaning involves many processes beyond intent. I reserve the term "generation" for processes in which complex structures are brought about by simple rules.

[14] Norberg-Schulz, 18.

Our most intimate experience of architecture is in our houses and their surroundings. We may visit monuments or theme parks, work in offices or factories, and shop in malls, but we wouldn't say we lived there. We live in our homes. When we say we live in a neighborhood or in a city, it is not because we visit, work or shop there, but because that is where our house is. Our houses are probably the only architecture that we will ever have possession of. They are, followed by their immediate neighborhoods, our most detailed experience of the environment. It is in our homes that we can customize our environments to suit ourselves; and we do. We all play architect and interior designer to some extent. *Home* improvement is big business, but it is not big architecture. The very idea that a home can be improved implies the making of place. It is not unimportant that the word is "home" and not "house." Improving a "house" implies an improved function—the Vetruvian "commoditas." Improving a "home" implies enrichment of meaning –"venustas."

It is from our homes that we learn to experience space. Our earliest exposure to space around us is in the context of where we live. This is the primary factor in our subsequent understanding of the physical world around us. "Familiarity is a characteristic of the past. The home provides an image

of the past. Moreover in an ideal sense home lies at the center of one's life, and center…connotes origin and beginning."[15] As we grow

> (w)e act out the inevitable process of separation via games and activities in the environment. One way in which children do this is to create their own home away-from-home, like homesteads on the frontier. Such place-making activities are almost universal in childhood, regardless of culture, social context or gender. They are part of the process of growing up.[16]

As adults our sense of place is formed by the way we have learned to interpret environmental meanings. Those interpretations are a function, among other things, of all our previous experiences of space. Those experiences are in turn a function of the way we learned to perceive space and configure it as place. Ultimately, our perception of space and place is formed by our perception of house and home.

The Process of the Formation of Place

In this paper I will show that residential environments play an essential role in our perception of sense of place, not only in that they effect the way we interpret the meanings expressed by a place, but also in the way they effect the formation of place from space. Space is given a unique character by the proximity of residential environments. I believe that that character is

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[15] Tuan, 128.

one of the most important factors in giving that space its sense of place. I will show that residential environments are more likely to have a sense of place, that a strong sense of place is more likely to be associated with a residential environment than any other, and that spaces without associated residential environments are less likely to develop as meaningful places.

In the next three chapters I will lay out the tools that I intend to use in evaluating the way place is formed. The first of these will deal with postmodern theories and how they relate to the concept of place. The end of modern architecture, with its associated paradigms, to create meaningful environments came from its obsession with formalist issues at the expense of place and the exaltation of the egos of Modernist architects at the expense of the environment. Postmodernist architectural practice offers little improvement over Modernism, but postmodern theoretical reactions offer new multi-disciplinary paradigms in which place is often more important than space and form.

In second of these chapters I will discuss meaning and change at length because knowledge of how meanings form and change is essential to any understanding of how space becomes place. I have said that “place is space that has meaning,” so attribution of meaning to space and acquisition

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[16] Claire Cooper Marcus, *House as a Mirror of Self* (Berkley, Calif.: Conari Press, 1995), 23.

of meaning by space are essential elements in the formation of place. I will discuss the concept of dwelling and how it gives us our idea of a sense of place.

Finally, I will discuss the generative processes that form not only physical environments, but social environments as well. These processes are related to the mathematical concept of chaos that has come to be seen as a fundamental paradigm of formation.

In the following chapters I will contrast the important role that house plays in the history of architecture to the virtually insignificant role it plays in the study of architectural history. I feel that the house has long been neglected in architectural history and theory, so I will trace its course through history and establish a more critical reading of its theoretical position.

I will look at the economic and political forces that shape and have shaped the contemporary city, will establish an underlying dynamic of these forces and show how it effects the evolution of the built environment and consequently the meaning of that environment.

Finally, I will use this background to examine structures and meanings of contemporary residential environments, and how these relate to the sense of place. From this foundation I will formulate a theoretical basis for place based design.

CHAPTER II

POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism is marked by an abundance of discourse and interdisciplinary principles. In architecture especially these have been precipitated by "the collapse of the Modern Movement"[17] While Postmodernist theory has addressed many of the problems of Modernism, Postmodernist practice has not. Harry Francis Mallgrave writes,

> Architectural theory can be a heady experience, as a few adventurous souls have taken the occasion to discover. It is perhaps for this reason that so many of our architectural educators have gone to such lengths to exclude it from the architectural curriculum, to shunt the student out of harm's way, as it were. When schools of architecture do offer the pretense of engaging in weighty matters of philosophical import, it is generally limited to carefully diluted readings of Heidegger or Foucault or Derrida (certainly no one from the discipline of architecture), and these measured doses are taken sparingly in the privacy of the design studio where they can be shielded form contact with that other nemesis to “creative” design -- architectural history. Hence in a rather perverse and arcane way, theory in these instances becomes a pretext to ignore, or at least to downplay, architecture's legitimate intellectual development.[18]

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[17] Nesbitt, 13.

[18] Harry Francis Mallgrave, foreword to *Studies in Tectonic Culture* by Kenneth Frampton (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1995), ix.

Similarly, Christian Norberg-Schulz writes, "The architects have shown themselves rather unwilling to work out a theoretical basis for their field, mostly because of the prejudice that theory kills the creative faculty."[19]

The Legacy of Modernism

> The practice of architecture is in crisis.
>
> A range of observers of architecture are now suggesting that the field may be bankrupt, the profession itself impotent, and the methods inapplicable to contemporary design tasks. it is further suggested that collectively they are incapable of producing pleasant, livable, and humane environments, except perhaps occasionally and then by chance.[20]

This is a legacy of Modernism, but it is not so much the fault of Modernist practice as it is the result of Modernism's failure to recognize problems and its own role in their creation or in their solution. Neither has Postmodernist practice, for all its noise about the failures of Modernism, concerned itself with any but the most superficial issues.

Modernism was marked by a "crisis of meaning within architecture."[21] It rejected history in favor of rationalist formalism. This left a void that was filled with unwanted meanings. Architecture set itself up as an autonomous

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[19] Norberg-Schulz, *Intentions in Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1965), 7.

[20] C. Thomas Mitchell, *Redefining Designing* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1993), 30.

[21] Nesbitt, 12.

art unconnected with the everyday world and to dwelling. Modernism rejected ornament and called this functionalism. Never mind that it didn't function. Modern architects believed that they could change the world. They did, but not in the ways they intended. The international style provided a vocabulary for a generation of architects with nothing to say. It doesn't take architects to design glass boxes. Modern architects designed hypothetical deterministic utopias while developers created the built environment. J. B. Jackson writes, “(I)t might be said (and often is said by critics) that the contemporary house is entirely the creation of the housing industry, and therefore not vernacular in the accepted meaning of the word.”[22] It is no coincidence that modern architects showed little interest in housing. Although Frank Lloyd Wright is well known for houses, they are works of art to be collected by the rich, not significant influences on housing as we know it today. Le Corbusier's housing projects are important today for their historical value not their function. It is probably best that some of his more grandiose schemes never happened. As architects became well known they moved beyond houses to bigger, and presumably better, commissions. In the mean time suburban tracts covered the landscape, and the human exodus left the city devastated. Business too found its own tracts in the concrete tilt-

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[22] J. B. Jackson, *The Necessity for Ruins and Other Topics* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 109.

ups and metal buildings of the business/industrial parks. "Metal buildings are the dream that modern architects had at the beginning of this century, finally come true, but they themselves don't realize it. That's because it doesn't take an architect to build a metal building. You just order 'em out of a catalog."[23] The modern city has developed in spite of Modernism not because of it. The so called postmodern spaces are not products of Postmodernist theory or practice, but of late modernity.

Modern architects were notorious for their egos. We now look at the great works of Modernism in the context only of formalist history, museums to architect's egos, not in the context of a sense of place. "(T)he very pomposity of (Wright's) decrees helped inflame a fatal egotism in generations of architects...To live in one of his houses is to be the curator of a Frank Lloyd Wright museum; don't even think of altering anything the master touched."[24] A crisis in the natural environment paralleled the modern development of the built environment. Cities designed for automobiles consumed public space for roads and public air for toxic waste products of the internal combustion engine. Wood for housing consumed forests, while housing consumed agricultural lands. Demand for water increased while its sources became polluted. The automobile and space conditioning for sealed

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[23] David Byrne, *True Stories* (1986), film.

[24] Stewart Brand, *How Buildings Learn, What Happens After They're Built* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 58.

buildings stimulated demand for energy that was fed by fossil fuels and the resulting pollution, nuclear energy and its radioactive wastes that will remain toxic for longer than man has been on the earth, and hydroelectric dams that changed the course of rivers and their associated ecosystems.

Environmental problems are not unique to modernity. Ancient civilizations decimated forests for fuel. Waterways have always been receptacles for waste. There are beliefs in some circles that toxic levels of lead from plumbing contributed to the decline of the Roman empire. (The word plumbing comes from the Latin for lead.) Public health measures were nonexistent. Housing conditions and pollution in the industrial cities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were appalling. But population explosion and urban expansion consumed the world's land, and modern technologies facilitated environmental destruction on a global scale.

Postmodern Reactions

If Postmodernism is, as Lyotard defines it, an "incredulity toward metanarratives"[25] then the application of postmodern theories to environmental practice must not result in the resurrection of the modernist ideal of architectural determinism. Built environments, like natural ones, are

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[25] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

complex and are created not by deterministic designs, but by the generative rules that constitute their structures and the results may be chaotic.

Kate Nesbitt characterizes theory as "prescriptive, proscriptive, affirmative, or critical. Prescriptive theory offers new or revived solutions for specific problems; it functions by establishing new norms for practice...Very similar...is proscriptive theory, which differs in that the standards state what is to be avoided in design."[26] Affirmative theory promotes the status quo. And, critical theory "evaluates the built world and its relationships to the society it serves."[27] These categories are not mutually exclusive.

> (She) approaches postmodernism in architecture from three standpoints: as a historical period with a specific relationship to modernism; as an assortment of significant paradigms (theoretical frameworks) for the consideration of cultural issues and objects; and as a group of themes.[28]

As a historical period I feel that the terms "modernity" and "postmodernity" are more fitting since they separate the time frame from the artistic or discursive aesthetic. The five paradigms she sees are phenomenology, the aesthetic of the sublime, linguistic theory, Marxism, and feminism. These, too, are not mutually exclusive and consist of certain subsets. It is the nature

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[26] Nesbitt, 17.

[27] Nesbitt, 18.

[28] Nesbitt, 21.

of these paradigms that they can be taken as a set. The six main themes she lists are history and historicism, meaning, place, urban theory, political and ethical agendas, and the body. Again these are not mutually exclusive, they consist of a number of sub-themes, and they are not separate from the paradigms above. In the next chapter I will deal with the themes that affect our understanding of environmental meaning.

CHAPTER III

MEANING

"The many tendencies and currents which make up 'post-modern' architecture have one thing in common: the demand for meaning."[29]

Linguistic Theory

Linguistic theory and its derivatives, semiotics, structuralism, poststructuralism, and deconstruction, is central to our discussion of meaning. The linguist, Ferdinand de Sassure gives us a two part sign, consisting of signifier and signified, with an arbitrary relationship between the two. The relationship of words to things, with the occasional exception of the onomatopoeia, is entirely arbitrary.[30] "Words, as everyone now knows, “mean” nothing by themselves, although the belief that the did...was once universal...They are instruments."[31] To Saussure the "linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound

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[29] Norberg-Schulz, *Architecture: Meaning and Place* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), 181.

[30] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (London: Duckworth, 1983)

[31] C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1926), 12.

pattern."[32] So language becomes "a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others."[33] So one sign is based on another which in turn is based on another, etc. etc.; VoilàDeconstruction. Ogden and Richards introduced the concept of a third component of the sign--the referent. So the linguist sign becomes a relationship between a name, a concept and a thing.

Unlike words environmental signs often do mean things by themselves. It is not that meanings are not learned -- they are -- it is that meanings are not arbitrary. Words have no function other than as signs, but environments do. It is a somewhat arcane game, trying to deconstruct environmental meanings into basic syntactic (structural) elements, because as Kevin Lynch says, difficulties arise trying to apply verbal concepts to environments that are neither separable or sequential. In Saussurian semiotics every signified is a symbol of yet something else. Symbolic systems can be deconstructed into a chain of infinite regression by the free association of symbols. This is exactly what has been done by a good number of deconstructionist theorists, such as Derrida, who would have us believe that "texts are always already open to infinite dissemination...The permeation of any text by an indefinite and potentially infinite number of other

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[32] Saussure, 99.

[33] Saussure, quoted in Nesbitt, 33

texts implies that meaning is already indeterminate."[34]

Total deconstruction of a symbolic system is dependent on a Saussurian two part sign -- symbols and thoughts. Before Saussure the connection was assumed to be between symbols and things. Ogden and Richards show us, that although there may not be a direct connection between a word and a thing, there is still a connection. The sign has, not two, but three parts -- symbols and thoughts and things. And the thing, the referent, stops the deconstructive chain at some point by changing the focus of the deconstruction from epistemology to ontology. Deconstruction ends where the rock meets Dr. Johnson's foot.

In the case of an environmental or architectural sign there may well be a direct connection between the symbol and the thing. When something "becomes a symbol of itself", there has to be a connection. Often the connection between symbol and thing is more obvious than the connection between symbol and thought. C. S. Pierce categorizes the sign into icon, index and symbol:

> An icon is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of certain characters of its own an which it possesses just the same, whether any such object actually exists or not. A symbol is a sign which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually any association of central ideas, which

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[34] N. Katherine Hayles, *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science* (Ithica, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 180-181.

> operates to cause that symbol to be interpreted as referring to that object.
> An index is a sign, or representation which refers to its object not so much because of any similarity of, or analogy with it, nor because it is associated with general characters which that object happens to posses, and because it is in dynamical (including spatial) connection, both with the individual object on one hand and with the senses or memory of the person for whom it acts as a sign.[35]

Both icon and index refer in a non-arbitrary way.

To Saussure sign was not only arbitrary but countless.[36] But although the number of potential signs may be countless, the number of meaningful signs is not. New words arise to convey meaning as necessary, but they are usually not arbitrary. They are generated by the rules of the language. We don't usually find names like "Qfwfq"[37], but we could find words like "sporque". In western European languages we can create words to fit new meanings using the generative rules and deep structures of Greek and Latin roots.

Information and meaning are not the same thing. Silence conveys no auditory information or meaning. (Although in an information rich environment, silence can have meaning in itself.) The opposite of silence is

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[35] Geoffrey Broadbent, “Building Design as an Iconic System” in *Signs, Symbols, and Architecture,* eds. Broadbent, Richard Bunt, and Charles Jencks (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1980), 314-315.

[36] Saussure, 73.

[37] Italo Calvino, *Cosmicomics* (San Diego: Harcort Brace & Company, 1968)

not speech or music, but noise; noise is rich in auditory information but not in meaning. Maximum meaning is somewhere between silence and noise. It is generated by the rules and deep structures of language or music. Environmental information and meaning have this relationship; they are not the same.

In the built environment meanings can come from the builder, either consciously or subconsciously, or they can be derived from their context, either cultural or personal. That the Pruit-Igoe could come to symbolize the greatest failure of Modernism, was clearly beyond Minoru Yamasaki's intentions. But that it could come to mean something beyond his intentions would have been clear in an aesthetic that gave proper due to cumulative meaning. The failure of the Pruit-Igoe was a failure of meaning. "Our interviews with tenants have led us to the unmistakable conclusion that living units are assessed by tenants not only on the basis of size and available amenities but on the basis of the life style they symbolize and purport to offer."[38] They were not allowed the freedom to alter the environment and create their own meanings.

Symbolic meanings of the natural environment can come only from a cultural or personal context (unless we believe that they are communications

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[38] Oscar Newman, *Defensible Space: Crime Prevention Through Urban Design* (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1972), 106.

from God). Umberto Eco writes:

> Let us imagine the point of view of the man who started the history of architecture...(T)his hypothetical Stone Age man takes shelter...in a cave. Sheltered from the wind and rain, he examines the cave that shelters him, by daylight or by the light of a fire (we will assume he has already discovered fire). He notes the amplitude of the vault, and understands this as the limit of an outside space...and as the beginning of an inside space, which is likely to evoke in him some unclear nostalgia for the womb, imbue him with feelings of protection, and appear still imprecise and ambiguous to him, seen under a play of shadow and light. Once the storm is over, he might leave the cave and reconsider it from the outside: there he would note the entry-way as "hole, that permits passage to the inside", and the entrance would recall to his mind the image of the inside: entrance hole, covering vault, walls...surrounding a space within. Thus an "idea of the cave" takes shape, which is useful as a mnemonic device, enabling him to think of the cave later on as a possible objective in case of rain; but it also enables him to recognize in another cave the same possibility of shelter found in the first one. At the second cave he tries, the idea of that cave is soon replaced by the idea of cave tout court – a model, a type, something that does not exist concretely but on the basis of which he can recognize a certain context of phenomena a "cave".[39]

The next cave he encounter functions not only as shelter, but as symbol; it has acquired meaning. "As soon as there is a society, every usage is converted into a sign of itself."[40]

Meaning, Function and Time

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[39] Umberto Echo, "Function and Sign: The Semiotics of Architecture" in Broadbent, Bunt and Jencks, 12-13.

In the very title of his book, *Architecture: The Natural and the Manmade*, Vincent Scully[41] tells us that the natural and the built environment cannot be separated. But it should be just as obvious from looking around that everything manmade has profound affect on its natural settings, not only physically, but in meaning as well. This is a function, not only, of the current scale of a particular project, but of the total scale of everything that went before. Primitive man's individual actions could not have much effect on the totality of his world, but contemporary man's actions have significant effect because they occur in the collective space of today's world and the temporal space of man's existence on the planet.

The effect of environmental change on meanings in the environment affects in turn our relationship to the environment. This is the cultural context in which we must be able to interpret environmental symbols. And we must develop a collective awareness of the meanings of what we build, because of the cumulative effect of meanings.

Every object functions both in use and in meaning. Or, in Eco's words, a " "primary" function (which is denoted) and a complex of "secondary" functions (which are connotative)."[42] This secondary function is just as much

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[40] Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, trans. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 41.

[41] Scully, *Architecture: The Natural and the Manmade* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991)

a function of the object as the primary. A door might work perfectly well, but unless it is symbolically recognizable as a door, it cannot "function" as a door. Every day we pass through doors with signs that tell us to "push" or "pull"; the signage is necessary because they do not entirely fulfill their symbolic function. We often see doors with exaggerated pulls or push plates. These attachments serve as symbols of the door's operation. Chairs on display in museums must have signs asking people not to sit on them; their denoted meaning as chairs exceeds their connotative meaning as objects of display. "Denotation indicates specific meaning; connotation suggests general meanings. The same element can (and, I add, "must") have both denotative and connotative meanings, and these may be mutually contradictory."[43]

> The urban environment is a medium of communication, displaying both explicitly and implicitly symbols: flags, lawns crosses, signboards, picture windows, orange roofs, spires column, gates, rustic fences...These systems of environmental sins are almost entirely a social creation and are often unintelligible to the cultural stranger...Environmental forms may be created, or combined in new ways to elaborate the language and thus extend our capabilities for spatial communication.[44]

Meaning creates a broad base for spatial analysis.

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[42] Eco, 25.

[43] Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972; Revised Edition: 1996), 101.

[44] Kevin Lynch *(A Theory of) Good City Form* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 139-141.

> A clue or indicator is something that can be seen that tells the observer something that he or she desires to know. Clues help the observer understand the nature of the urban environment being examined. They help answer some of the questions about the past, the evolution, and the present state of an urban area.[45]

Clues are not only of interest to the professional academic observer of the environment, they are what conveys the meaning to the user.

> ...(F)or many architectural objects communication of the secondary function is more important (socially and ideologically) than communication of the primary functions. Therefore the term "function" is not to be understood in the restricted sense assigned to it by classical functionalism.[46]

Functionalism is at the heart of Modernist architectural philosophy. This Modernist ideology is rooted in Sullivan's famous "form follows function" and developed in Mies' "less is more" (borrowed from Robert Browning). Functionalism was the norm from the city functional planning doctrine to the technocratic futurism of Le Corbusier. This ideal was based on the mistaken proposition that the primary function dominated and the secondary function could all but be eliminated. But clues can be misread and function is itself a symbol. Gropius and Meyer's Fagus Works is a building described by architectural historian, Nicholas Pevsner as "a complete facade...conceived

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[45] Allan B. Jacobs, *Looking at Cities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 30.

[46] Eco, "A Componential Analysis of the Architectural Sign/Column/" in Broadbent, Bunt and Jencks, 214.

in glass" with supporting piers "reduced to narrow bands of steel."[47] "Yet, curiously enough, Pevsner himself was living in a fairy world; The Fagus office is not constructed of steel and glass but out of brick, his 'narrow bands of steel' are hefty brick piers some 90 cm. x 70 cm. and with entasis like Doric columns..."[48] "The unavoidable symbolic content of even such simple, utilitarian constructions (was)...ignored by the theorists of the Modern movement."[49]

The primary and secondary functions are not fixed, but shift culturally "in the course of history, or passing from one human group to another..."[50] The changing nature of these functions leads to "codes of enrichment" through which the symbolic content of objects and environments can create new contexts in which to experience them. Eco elaborates six ways that this shift of meaning can occur; I repeat them at length since each of these six is a tool for looking at the meaning of objects from the past in our present cultural context.

> 1. (a) The sense of the primary function is lost and (b) the secondary functions for the most part remain. Such is the case with the Parthenon, which is no longer understood as a place of worship, but a number of the original symbolic connotations of

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[47] Cited by Broadbent in "The Deep Structures of Architecture" in Broadbent, Bunt and Jencks, 120.

[48] Broadbent, 120.

[49] Venturi, Brown and Izenour, 134.

[50] Eco, "Function and Sign", 28.

> which are still grasped, on the strength of an adequate philological familiarity with the Greek sensibility.[51]

The Greek temple cannot be understood today as a “place of worship” because it never was in the sense that we understand a church today. But when we call a church “the house of God” we are speaking metaphorically, but to the ancient Greeks a temple literally was the house of a god or goddess. Athena lived in the Parthenon and access to her house was reserved for the priests.

> 2. (a) The primary function remains and (b) the secondary functions are lost. Antique lamps taken without regard for their original connotative codes and inserted in different stylistic contexts (a rustic lamp included among sophisticated furnishings): their primary function is preserved, as they are still used to illuminate.[52]

Objects in this category will be preserved, not necessarily because their utility remains for often they are technologically obsolete, but in relation to their rarity -- they can acquire an exchange value greater than their use value. A Victorian house could fit into this category; we can understand its function as a home, but not the nineteenth century meaning of home.

> 3. (a) The primary function is lost, (b) most secondary functions are lost, and (c) the original secondary functions are replaced by others, through codes of enrichment. The Pyramids, for example: they may no longer be experienced as a tomb for a monarch, and most of the symbolic code -- astrological and geometric – that presided over their connotative effectiveness

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[51] Eco, 28.

[52] Eco, 28.

> for the ancient Egyptians has been lost, but the Pyramids no connote other things...[53]

Using objects as the referent of later signs enriches the meaning of the original. Enrichment does not necessarily mean that the original is made better or “richer”, but that another layer of meaning has been added. In Olite, Spain my wife, Lauren, described a gothic castle as “Disney like”. What did she mean? Lauren likes Disneyland less than anyone else I know, even denying liking it as a child. Has simulacra become so pandemic that the real has been lost? I don’t think that this is the case here. The original has become “enriched” with a new layer of meaning as a referent of our contemporary symbol. “What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works that preceded it.”[54]

> 4. The primary function becomes the object of a secondary function. This is the case with the ready-made: a selected object of use is made an object of contemplation and then ironically connotes its former use.[55]

This category of change is much larger than just the “ready-made” -- a non-art object used as art in a visual “pun”. Much of what we can call simulacra is created through repeated shifts of the primary function to the object of a secondary function. “(T)o simulate is not simply to feign...(F)eigning or dissimulating leaves the reality principle intact: the

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[53] Eco, 29.

[54] T. S. Elliot, *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 1964), 49.

[55] Eco, 29.

difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between 'true' and false, between 'real' and 'imaginary'."[56] Simulation is not representation, but a perversion of the genuine that comes about through "the successive phases of the image: 1 It is the reflection of a basic reality. 2 It masks and perverts a basic reality. 3 It masks the absence of basic reality. 4 It bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum."[57]

In Jean Baudrillard's first phase of the image, the original primary and secondary functions remain. When the primary function becomes the object of a secondary function, "basic reality" becomes masked and finally disappears. If the object experiences the final shift to simulacrum, (a) the primary function changes and (b) the secondary function becomes the referent of a new secondary function.

> 5. (a) The primary function is lost, (b) another primary function takes its place, and (c) the secondary functions are deformed through codes of enrichment. A cradle from a Mexican village transformed into a magazine holder, put to a new use; the connotations originally connected with the object and its decoration, the connotations valid for the original users, are deformed, so that something different is connoted, such as affinities with contemporary or primitive art, folksy naiveté, "Latin-Americanness", and so on.[58]

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[56] Jean Baudrillard, "Simulacra and Simulations" in Mark Poster ed., *Selected Writings* (1988), 168.

[57] Baudrillard, 170.

[58] Eco, 29.

This is a category of adaptation. It represents flexibility of function and meaning. The urban loft that becomes an artist's studio or a residence, the eighteenth century house converted to a McDonald's, the grain silos of Akron converted to a hotel, all represent shifts of primary function, preserving the original form while transforming the original functions and meanings. Transformations such as these may come in response to the inherent value of the space being transformed; or, they may come in response to some outside influence such as public policy or pressure from the public directly. Such pressure is based on a concern not with the function of the space but with its meaning.

> 6. (a) The primary functions are vague and (b) the secondary functions are imprecise and deformable.[59]

Here Eco uses the example of Brasilia's "Plaza of the Three Powers", but I think a good many works of Modernist architecture and city design fit into this category. It is the only one of the six in which the element of time is not mentioned. Places need not be transformed to fit here; this can be their original function and meaning. Le Corbusier, who once called a house "a machine to live in", conceived a futuristic machine city, La Ville Radieuse, which had certain cosmic implications.[60] It was intended to be a futurist utopia based on modernist architectural determinism; its primary function was

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[59] Eco, 29.

to solve the problems of a congested Paris; its secondary function was an exaltation of technocracy. Today La Ville Radieuse symbolizes an ideal that would have destroyed most of the Right Bank for a technocratic tyranny in which, to use Le Corbusier's words, apartments were "cells." Le Corbusier was as unconcerned with the users of his environments as he was with meaning. Modernist attempts to build without meaning lead inevitably to secondary functions that are "imprecise and deformable". "It is one of the basic assumptions of semiology that creation is dependent on tradition and memory in a very real sense and that if one tries to jettison either one or the other, one is actually limiting one's area of free choice."[61] Environmental psychologists suggest that color and emotion can be linked. A certain shade of green for example may be calming, and therefore a good choice for a dentist's office. This ignores the role of memory, however, since if one comes to associate that shade of green with the dentist's office the effect could easily be the opposite of that intended. Modernists thought that by jettisoning tradition and memory they could make their works mean what they chose. What they failed to see was that context itself could inspire meaning far beyond their intentions.

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[60] Lynch in *Good City Form* gives three "normative" models of the city: cosmic, machine and organic. The three models immediately suggest the symbolic functions of the city.

[61] Jencks, "Semiology and Architecture" in *Meaning in Architecture,* eds. Jencks and George Baird, (George Braziller, New York: 1969).

Type and Typology

"In the post modern period, theorists reconsidered the notion of type as the essence of architecture, seen in some cases as comparable to linguistic deep structure."[62] The idea of an architectural type is not that it is a stand-alone concept on which design is based. Neither is it an ideal which could serve "as a standard by which the individual work of art could be valued."[63] The architectural type is recursive; it is "an element which should itself serve as a rule for the model..."[64] It, also, evolves with use; "the addition of another variant to the series will necessarily determine a more or less considerable change of the whole 'type'."[65] "It is never formulated a priori but is always deduced from a series of instances...The birth of a 'type' is therefore dependent on the existence of a series of buildings having between them an obvious formal and functional analogy."[66]

Giulio Carlo Argan categorizes types as into three: the complete configuration of the building, the major structural elements, and the decorative elements. Thomas Thiis-Evensen repeats these as: the major

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[62] Nesbitt, 240.

[63] Giulio Carlo Argan, “On the Typology of Architecture” in Nesbitt, 242.

[64] Argan, citing Quatremère de Quincy, 243.

[65] Argan, 244.

[66] Argan, 243.

forms, the construction system, and the surface treatment of the major forms. He also includes openings in the major forms.[67] I would categorize architectural types somewhat differently into: archetypes, kinesthetic types, and signs.

The concept of archetype was originated by Carl Jung.

> The term “archetype” is often misunderstood as meaning certain definite mythological images or motifs. But these are nothing more than conscious representations; it would be absurd to assume that such variable representations could be inherited...The archetype is the tendency to form such representations of a motif--representations that can vary a great detail without losing their basic pattern. My critics have incorrectly assumed that I am dealing with “inherited representations,” and on that ground they have dismissed the idea of archetype as mere superstition.[68]

When we turn directly to Jung for our definition of “archetype” we find that the concept--"the tendency to form such representations"-- sounds almost identical to Chomsky's deep structures.

What I call kinesthetic type goes beyond the too narrow definition of kinesthesia as a feeling of movement. I use the term to describe an architectural type that derives its meaning not from any subconsciously or socially constructed model, but from direct sensory experience. Though it is by no means universal, the feeling of vertigo produced by the experience of a

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[67] Thomas Thiis-Evensen, *Archetypes in Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 19.

[68] Carl Jung, *Man and his Symbols* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1987), 67.

high place is quite common. When we enter a Medieval Cathedral we immediately experience it through our senses. We see the height soaring above us and the length leading before us. We experience the light filtered through the stained glass. Sounds are magnified by the acoustic liveness of the space; our footsteps reverberate. When we walk we feel the unevenness of the floor created by centuries of wear. There is a unique coolness on our skin. The place smells of stone. We taste the cool air as we breathe. These are the kinesthetic types that form the Cathedral.

Signs are types that are constructed through experience. In conceiving of the sign as an architectural type, it is useful to use Pierce's three part scheme: symbol, icon and index.

The word “house” is a symbol. It depends on a social contract among the speakers of English as to its meaning. A word may be arbitrarily derived (it could have been “casa” as easily as “house”) but once the social contract is formed, use is no longer arbitrary--at least not for anyone who wants to be understood. In language that social contract is very strong, and it is codified in dictionaries, grammars, thesauruses, etc. It will evolve and change over time, new words can arise and old ones can change in meaning. The social contract on which the architectural symbol depends is weak; there is not general agreement on meanings, and attempts at codification are not commonly accepted.

A triangle on a rectangle is an icon for house. It is, somewhat, culturally constructed, but it is based on a physical resemblance between the sign and a certain form of house. The resemblance is close enough and that form is universal enough that it may be recognized without the existence of a social contract.

An index is a signifier that indicates its signified; an arrow, a fingerpost, or a pointer are all indexes.

In having broken the architectural sign type down into Peirce's three parts, I don't mean to suggest that we need to continue to treat it as if it were three different things, but it is important to realize that distinctions can be made if needed.

Alan Colquhoun relates Typology and Design Method, from a point of view that is primarily phenomenological. ("Our senses of place and relationship in, say, an urban environment, or in a building, are not dependent on any objective fact that is measurable; they are phenomenal.") He asserts that the Modern Movement created a conflict between the principles of biotechnical determinism and free expression. This left "a vacuum...where previously there was a body of traditional practice." Since at some point the solutions to a design problem become indeterminate from the model, the designer must turn to intuition. It was Thomás Maldonado's idea that intuition "must be based on a knowledge of previous solutions applied to related problems." "In the world of architecture...(r)ecourse to some kind of

typology...is necessary...(A) plastic system of representation such as architecture has to presuppose the existence of a given system of representation" A process of change can "renew our awareness of the meanings which can be carried by forms." And the "mathematical tools proper to our culture" which we must apply "are unable to give us a ready-made solution to our problems. They only provide the framework, the context within which we operate."[69]

[69] Alan Colquhon, “Typology and Design Method” in Nesbitt.

CHAPTER IV

GENERATIVE PROCESSES

Place cannot be designed. It was a Modernist belief that the architect could determine a social environment through the design of the physical environment. That belief died in the event that has so often been used by Postmodernist critics to mark the end of Modernism, the destruction of the Pruit-Igoe. The heroic role of the architect is a modernist metanarrative to be viewed with incredulity or skepticism. This is the equivalent of Barthes' "The Death of the Author"[70]; the death of the architect would the birth of place.

"The physical environment of man, especially the built environment, has not been, and still is not, controlled by the designer."[71] What is the nature of an environment that it cannot be controlled by design?

> (W)e must begin by understanding that every place is given its character by certain patterns of events that keep on happening there...These patterns of events are always interlocked with certain geometric patterns in the space. Indeed, as we shall see, each building and each town is ultimately made out of these patterns in the space, and out of nothing else: they are

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[70] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

[71] Amos Rapoport, *House Form and Culture* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 1.

> the atoms and the molecules from which a building or a town is made.[72]

Place is given its character or genius loci by patterns and patterns of patterns. These are deep structures and generative rules that create place.

Deep structures, generative rules, patterns, patterns of patterns. What are we describing here, a built environment or a Mandelbrot Set? Why not both? If the natural environment is generated by the rules of mathematical chaos, then the built environment must evolve in a similar way in spite of the designers intentions. Successful designs must accommodate these processes.

No designer can design every element of an environment. All designs must involve processes. For example, the design of a house involves the process of framing. The designer who has a fundamental understanding of that process need not specify where every piece of wood or nail goes. The carpenters design the frame of the house according to certain generative rules that are called for on the plans, specified in building codes, and evolved from tradition. The plans may call for 2" x 4" studs at 16" on center. The general placement of the nails and studs is specified in the code as a rule from which the carpenter can determine where all they go; their exact placement is up to the carpenter's judgment. Chances are good that the

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[72] Christopher Alexander, *The Timeless Way of Building* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 55 & 75.

carpenter has never read the building code. She knows the rules because she has been taught by another carpenter. He in turn was probably taught by yet another carpenter and so on all the way back to when the rules existed as tradition without being codified.

CHAPTER V

HOUSES AND HOUSING

> Architectural theory and history have traditionally been concerned with the study of monuments. They have emphasized the work of men of genius, the unusual, the rare. Although this is only right, it has meant that we have tended to forget that the work of the designer, let alone of the designer of genius, has represented a small, often insignificant portion of the building activity at any given period.[73]

In Architectural History

It seems self evident that the earliest human constructions were houses. We are not the only species that builds, "houses". Even those that don't actually build often adapt other animals' houses or other natural forms. Insects and arachnids build nests and webs, birds build nests, mammals and reptiles build burrows. Arguably the most accomplished animal builder is the beaver, who alters the course of streams so that it can build its houses. The earliest known example of human constructions are houses. At the encampment at Terra Amata in France there is evidence of huts dating back,

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[73] Rapoport, 1.

quite remarkably, to about 400,000 B. C.[74] The builders of these and other old stone age residences were nomadic hunters. It was not until the new stone age that people began to transform the natural environment by settlement.

The earliest settlements in Western history were built in the Neolithic period. The true reason for people settling is unknown. Early society followed a hunter-gatherer existence and, contrary to popular opinion, it is probable that the shift from hunter-gatherer to agriculture was the result and not the cause of settlement. Primitive agricultural economies would have required a much greater expenditure of energy for sustenance than hunting, so some stronger social force must have caused a desire to settle in one place. One school of thought is that the transition was a spiritual one that resulted from people feeling the need to remain near the burial grounds of their ancestors. Other than shelter the earliest stone age evidence of human habitation is funerary.

> The cave at Monte Circeo, a limestone hill south of Rome, contained a unique chamber where a single battered skull was stood in a trench along the farthest wall, with stones arranged around it in an oval ring. At La Chapelle-aux-Saints in the Dordogne region of southwestern France, a burial had taken place. The dead man had been laid out in a shallow grave filled with tools and animal bones. On his chest a bison leg had

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[74] Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 21.

> been deliberately placed, perhaps as a provision for the world he had slipped into.[75]

"Housing" the dead was a very important function of early architecture. From passage and gallery graves of the Neolithic period to the great pyramids, surviving examples tell us that burial of the dead played a major role in every early civilization. "(The same) method of building was employed for both the living and the dead--tombs were 'houses of eternity.'"[76]

Housing the living, too, would be obviously important. But the archeological record is skewed toward evidence that has survived the ravages of time. Funerary architecture was a product of great collective effort; residential architecture was generally created by families or small groups. "The (Neolithic) settlers normally lived in small individual houses of timber and mud."[77] Funerary architecture was built to last; this was not necessary of houses. People live only one generation; they stay dead forever. Stone lasts longer than timber and mud or even brick. "Stone age" refers to the technology of tools, not houses. The relationship between architectural history and art history places greater emphasis on the monumental and the beautiful than on the mundane. Historical studies

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[75] ibid., 23.

[76] Stephen Gardiner, *The Evolution of the House: From Caves to Co-ops* (New York: Macmillian Publishing Co., 1974), 36.

[77] Kostof, 27.

present individual works that survive rather than a record of fragments that must be painstakingly pieced together into a collective picture of daily living.

> (A)s the historian Daniel J Boorsten points out, is that the evidence according to which we know--or think we know--the past reflects a remarkably consistent bias. It is his thesis that the historical record is all to frequently not only incomplete but skewed: not exactly a survival of the fittest but survival of the richest--of the immovable, the valuable, the durable, the collected and protected, and the academically classified.[78]

Nevertheless, houses are a major part of the archeological record of early cities.

Residential form predates other institutions that seem to be essential to the functioning of a city. The Neolithic settlement at Çatalhöyük in Turkey, dating from the seventh millennium B. C., was built without streets. "The quarter opened up into an occasional courtyard, which also doubled as a lavatory and rubbish dump. Entry to the houses was normally through a hole in the roof reached by a wooden ladder."[79] The physical form of cities evolved in layers. Houses were built on top of earlier houses, streets on streets. Some areas, such as Jerico, have been occupied continuously for many millenniums, with each city built on the ruins of an earlier one. In the Mesopotamian city of Ur the streets served as rubbish dumps. As the level of the street rose over time, thresholds of the houses were raised accordingly

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[78] Rybczynski, *The Most Beautiful House in the World* (New York: Viking, 1989), 6.

[79] Kostof, 50.

until it was necessary to raise the floor as well. The level below could then be used as a family vault until the house was raised to the next level. Not only was the city sustained for thousands of years but it preserved its own history by burying the past and literally evolving on top of it.

The form of the Greek temple, most likely, originated as a house. The elements of the Doric order have been shown to correspond to the elements of earlier wooden construction, which in turn may correspond to a more primitive form of shelter. The plan "began by assuming a house type still common in the eighth century (BC), since apsidal and even long rectangular houses of early date have been found."[80]

Architectural texts often contain examples of houses from ancient cities, like Ur and Thebes. Roman house form was well established and preserved, most notably at Pompeii, and has given us forms still in use such as the courtyard and atrium. But, houses are still little more than a footnote to architectural history, often less important than the paintings on the walls.

We are note likely to find any significant mention of houses or housing in any study of architectural history from the Roman era to the Renaissance; and then it is only likely to be monumental houses or palaces. Andrea Palladio's Villa Rotunda is, arguably, the most architecturally famous and

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[80] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1962), 43.

influential house in the world, having lent its form from Saint Paul's cathedral to Monticello and the University of Virginia, but it is still primarily a monument.

Interestingly enough some of the best preserved early American architecture is houses, but their study as representative of architectural history is singularly neglected. With the advent of the modern era, houses assume a greater place in the history of architecture, but they are still studied as individual monuments without any notice of a context of housing. Although, Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier were the modern architects best known for houses, regional architects such as the Greene brothers and Irving Gill have actually had more influence on the look of our cities. In San Diego County Gill's touch is everywhere and his hand has touched contemporary architects from Charles Moore to Robert Venturi. Craftsman bungalows in the manner of Greene and Greene are a fixture in many older neighborhoods. Wright and Le Corbusier, each in his own way, predicted and anticipated, more than influenced, the shape of the modern city.

Le Corbusier's vision was cosmopolitan. He saw his role as liberating the world from what the city had come to be, by wiping the slate clean and starting over. The Corbusian city was one of a new order of towers and grand avenues, given over to that great symbol of modernity, the automobile. His involvement with the design of houses was almost entirely devoted to apartment buildings and their theoretical transformation of the city. His

residential buildings seem to exist today as relics of a great modern genius, rather than as desirable places, evaluated by scholars, uncritical of modernism's faults, as pure sculpture. Writers on urbanism tend not to be so kind. Their comments range from the mildly apologetic, "Le Corbusier was a great artist who was able to capture the promise and excitement of modernity in extraordinary authoritative images, but the images were not based on the functional organization or economic priorities of real cities,"[81] to holding him responsible for all the failures of modernism and the modern city, "The evil that Le Corbusier did lives after him…"[82]

Wright's vision was typically American and this was reflected in the design of his houses. They were all single family residences on individual lots. Like Le Corbusier, Wright saw the automobile as a liberating feature of the modern world. He rejected "the modern central city as an unnatural and inhumane environment,"[83] and predicted the shape of the American suburb in his experimental Broadacre City, a Midwestern vision of straight streets and large lots. Unlike predecessors, such as Ebenezer Howard, Wright's design had no social agenda,

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[81] Johathan Barnett, *The Elusive City: Five Centuries of Design, Ambition and Miscalculation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 115.

[82] Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 204.

[83] Barnett, 84.

> (h)e just wished to shape its buildings…Broadacre City is a fairly accurate prediction of post—World War II suburban sprawl, particularly areas with large-lot zoning, showing that Wright understood the American public well. What he was unable to do, however, was invent a mechanism that would ensure that this type of suburban and exurban growth would follow any overall design. Thus Broadacre city itself has had very little influence.[84]

Wright must be given credit for understanding the American temperament. If there was any area where he was widely influential in affecting residential life, it was in opening up the typical floor plan. Prior to Wright the typical American house was divided into many rooms: bedrooms, kitchen, dining room, living room. These were separated by walls and often doors. Wright's house plans were open. He dissolved the boundaries between functions such as cooking, eating and living. This was the foundation of our contemporary houses.

Wright and Le Corbusier cannot be held responsible for what came to pass in our cities and suburbs. I repeat that their visions were accurate predictions of how things were to be, rather than causes.

> The reason is, quite simply, that just about the only factor that determines the shape of the American city today is unregulated private profit: profit from the speculation with land, profit from manipulating land and buildings, and profit from the actual construction and subsequent lease or sale of buildings. With a very, very few exceptions, the buildings constructed in our cities

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[84] Barnett, 84-85.

> are built without the slightest regard to matters of urban design.[85]

CHAPTER VI

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the Middle Ages it was natural to take land for granted. It was there, and there was more than enough of it. Its value depended on whether or not it was arable, and when it ceased to be cultivated it became worthless again. Therefore, the ground on which buildings stood had no value in itself and, consequently, could not be made an object of speculation. The buildings, alone, could be bought and sold...In the 19th century, on the other hand, it was the modus operandi of land speculation which left its impression on most cities. The main object of the enormous housing schemes of the period...was to provide large and safe incomes for the promoters.[86]

In the United States most land use decisions are made on a local level. Unlike Europe, we have never had a Federal interest in building or planning. There are no regional governments and States have little interest in the design of spaces other than on occasion their own capitals. It is on a

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[85] Peter Blake *God's Own Junkyard* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 40.

local level that those with the greatest financial interest in land use decisions are most likely to have the greatest political influence. "If the developer has the

right political connections, the variance is granted; if he has not, he will soon cease to be a developer--and someone else, who does have the right political connections, will come along and perpetrate what his predecessor failed to achieve."[87] But it is not necessarily true that political connections make people successful developers. It is often connections to development that makes local politicians. Harvey Molotch says, "that the political and economic essence of virtually any given locality, in the present American context, is growth." He goes on to suggest that the indicator of successful growth is a rising population. "The people who participate with their energies, and particularly their fortunes, in local affairs are the sort of persons who--at least in vast disproportion to their representation in the population--have the most to gain or lose in land-use decisions." Thus, a key role of local government is "boosterism" that promotes growth often in competition against other localities. People often become involved in local government to "wheel and deal to affect resource distribution." Interest in symbolic issues is an aftereffect of a need for power for other purposes" and

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[86] S. Rasmussen, *Towns and Buildings* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1979).

[87] Blake, 41.

is supported by "nonsymbolic money."[88]

Joel Garreau's Edge City describes the development and growth process in the American city, "It was stunning how completely it was the developers who turned out to be our master city builders."[89] But, the phenomenon is by no means limited to this country. Sudjic's remark that I quoted earlier was directed in part at the Canary Wharf development in London.

In California an after effect of Proposition 13 (that limited increases in local property taxes) is that local governments have turned to physical growth not only as a means to economic growth, but as a source of revenue as well. Thus cities have developed a vested interest in growth. The trouble with this is that it is basically a Ponzi scheme--a pyramid that is always about to collapse. Growth increases the demand on local infrastructures, social and physical, and on the natural environment. When this can no longer be funded through more growth, it becomes necessary to shift the burden to the users. This in turn creates an economic climate that is no longer "business friendly" and the locality looses its competitive edge in attracting or keeping businesses. Businesses move to localities that can still afford to finance the cost of growth with more growth. This is the case with California business

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[88] Harvey Molotch, “The City as Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 82, no.2 (1976)

[89] Joel Garreau, *Edge City* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 326.

leaving for localities in States like Utah, Idaho and Montana. The people in those localities will eventually have to pay the piper; in the meantime their politicians are reaping the benefits.

"Emerging trends are tending to enervate the locality growth machines. First is the increasing suspicion that in many areas, at many historical moments, growth benefits only a small portion of local residents."[90] Growth brings obvious problems to the social and physical environment of a place and often "costs existing residents more money." Statistical evidence questions the relationship between growth and jobs. "(G)rowth is certainly less of a financial advantage to the taxpayer than is conventionally depicted, and ...most people's values are...more consistent with small places than large."[91] James Sundquist writes:

> The notion commonly expressed that Americans have “voted with their feet” in favor of the great cities is, on the basis of every available sampling, so much nonsense...What is called “freedom of choice” is, in sum, freedom of employer choice or, more precisely, freedom of choice for that segment of the corporate world that operates mobile enterprises. The real question, then is, whether freedom of corporate choice should be automatically honored by government policy at the expense of individual choice where those conflict.[92]

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[90] Molotch, 156.

[91] Molotch, 157.

[92] James Sundquist, *Dispersing Population: What America Can Learn from Europe* (Washington D.C.: Brookings, 1975) quoted in Molotch, 157-158.

There has been a growing anti-growth political movement active in some cities, San Diego prominently among them, a "mixture of young activists, middle-class professionals, and workers, all of whom see their own tax rates as well as life-styles in conflict with growth."[93] There is also an interest in "Non-Growth as a Planning Alternative."[94] Middle class NIMBY opposition to LULUs represents a growing force in local politics and land use decisions. (Not In My Back Yard, with which we must all be familiar by now; and, Locally Unwanted Land Use.)

Both the progrowth point of view and the slow/no-growth/NIMBY point of view can be seen as manifestations of Nietzschean Individualism.[95] Whether or not this is true, they both elevate self-interest above community and result in "proscriptive measures like zoning and building codes designed to prevent harm to the public, there is a startling absence of positive values or virtues asserted."[96] Building codes and zoning regulations differ considerably in intent and in effect.

Building codes are written on a regional (soon to be national) level by officials with little or no financial stake in the outcome of the process. They

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[93] Molotch, 165-166.

[94] E. Finkler, “Non-Growth as a Planning Alternative” ASPO Report 283 (1972).

[95] Phillip Bess, “ Communitarianism and Emotivism: Two Rival Views of Ethics and Architecture” in Nesbitt .

[96] Nesbitt, 370.

are enacted on a local level usually by the locality adopting the code verbatim or close to it. There is often some sort of state building code that serves as a default code in lieu of local regulation. The purpose of building codes is to assure that buildings will be structurally sound, safe, healthy and sanitary at some minimum level. Building codes do serve as generative rules for architecture, but to the limited extent that they deal most frequently with accepted industry practices. They have a good deal to do with the form of an individual building, but little to do with the way cities are formed. They do not effect land use decisions. They have no economic impact except on the individual builder. They have little function as means of control.

Zoning regulations, on the other hand, are both written and implemented on a local level. They are often enacted by officials with a financial or emotional stake in the out come. The alleged purpose of zoning is protection of the health, safety and convenience of the public. The actual purpose is to effect land values. They are generative rules for the physical and economic form of large portions of the environment and therefore have a large effect on social structures. They regulate land use decisions. They have substantial impact on large parts of the community. They are means of control.

The current form of the American city is largely the result of zoning. Zoning effects land use, which effects land values, which effects land use.

In an area where apartments are permitted, single family dwellings may also be permitted; but the fact that apartments are permitted raises the land value so that single family dwellings will not be built. The generative rules that most shape our cities have nothing to do with architects, little to do with planners and everything to do with politics and the interests of a financial elite.

In order to effect the environment designers must become involved in the politics that shape it. This point of view has seldom been espoused by architects. Even the political agendas of the pioneers of Modernism seemed to be grounded in their belief in determinism; they thought they could accomplish political goal through architecture, not necessarily the other way around. City planners on the other hand have come to realize that their role can often be better served through an overtly political agenda. This has led to a shift from physical planning to “advocacy” or “equity” planning. "Regardless of who was mayor, the staff of the Cleveland City Planning Commission consistently operated in a way that was activist and interventionist in style and redistributive in objective. Our overriding goal, articulated in the Cleveland Policy Planning Report...was 'to provide a wider

range of choices for those Cleveland residents who have few, if any, choices. ...The approach has been called 'advocacy' or 'equity' planning..."[97]

[97] Norman Krumholz, “A Retrospective View of Equity Planning” in *Journal of the American Planning Association,* 48 no. 2 (1982), 259.

CHAPTER VII

HOMES AND ENVIRONMENTAL PERCEPTION

We begin to experience the world at home. Most of us are either born in a hospital (or birthing center) or at home. In the former case we are usually brought home within a couple of days. In the latter case we are at home from the very beginning of our lives. Within this environment we experience the fulfillment of our basic needs. As mom or dad satisfies our hunger or changes our diapers, we learn to associate comfort with their faces. They take care of our physical and emotional needs. As our awareness grows and we come to see more and more of our physical surroundings, the natural association of that environment is with the people who are there and the comfort and feeling of security they provide. Before we even have a verbal awareness we have a sense of home as related to comfort and security. But, "(t)hings are not quite real until they acquire names and can be classified in some way."[98]

The child's first experience of the physical environment is the crib where it sleeps and the parent's arms. Its first sensory experiences are smell

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[98] Tuan, 29.

and sound. As visual ability develops it becomes aware of physical features of the room it is in. All the while the child is made to feel secure, so that it cannot help but associate its environment with feelings of security. Those associations are the beginnings of an ability to form a sense of place. "Place, to the child, is a large and somewhat immobile type object. At first large things have less meaning for him than small ones because, unlike portable toys or security blankets, they cannot be handled and moved easily; they may not be available for comfort and support at moments of crisis."[99]

As a child begins to develop its world expands further. It is taken into other rooms, into other houses, and perhaps into other environments. Its experience of these spaces will always be in relationship to earlier experience of space. When the child is first allowed to explore the world on its own that is within the context of the home. The child's initial reaction to the experience of the new is fear. Not until the child is able to overcome this apprehension and feel safe can it comfortably venture into these new spaces. A sense of security and a sense of safety are not the same thing. A great curiosity causes the baby to explore the world, perhaps even at great physical risk, but there must be emotional security, a sense of being at home in the place. As a child grows fear comes to play another role in the experience of place. "(M)ost of us also recall some environments that scared

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[99] Tuan, 29.

us, a setting we returned to, and dared ourselves to enter, to overcome our fears.[100]"

The first world we know is our house, and the first emotional relationship we have to space is a sense of being at home. This develops at the same time we are learning language skills and other complex symbolic structures. Like Umberto Eco's early man, for whom the cave comes to symbolize shelter, the child must invariably come to associate home with a feeling of security. And just as the idea of cave comes to convey the generalized context of shelter, the idea of home comes, very early in life, to convey a generalized feeling of safety and comfort. As the word "home" becomes part of the vocabulary, it, too, comes to have these meanings.

The experience of the environment expands outward from the house. The yard is a new source of learning about the world, as are the houses and yards of friends and neighbors. At first a child is not allowed to explore these spaces alone. A trusted adult, who continues to provide a sense of security in these new places, must accompany the child. The world gradually expands outward from a center that is the home. "A child's idea of place becomes more specific and geographical as he grows."[101]

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[100] Clare Cooper Marcus, *House as a Mirror of Self* (Berkley: Conari Press, 1995), 30.

[101] Tuan, 30.

> As we start to mature into early childhood, we begin to explore the space we occupy: we touch and throw and hit and crawl to discover the nature of the "stuff" around us. Gradually, and with greater assurance, we begin to explore the world outside the protection of home. First under the watchful eye of an adult and then alone in a setting that adults may have created partially for our safe use...[102]

With these symbolic and emotional tools we make our way toward independence in the world. Throughout adolescence and early adulthood our homes are the standard by which we judge our experience of schools. As adults, it is homes and memories of home that shape our feelings about the workplace. The quality of our experience of public spaces will always be found in our earliest relationship to the public spaces our childhood neighborhoods, real or imagined. The public spaces of childhood are not necessarily truly public. They are the spaces of collective activity: a vacant lot, an empty school yard, a street.

"As we change and grow throughout our lives, our psychological development is punctuated not only by meaningful emotional relationships with people, but also by close affective ties with a number of significant physical environments, beginning in childhood."[103] Lucy R. Lippard writes,

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[102] Marcus, 23.

[103] Marcus, 4.

"...my notions of place are inextricable from all the places I've lived and been, and from accounts of other localities that have moved me."[104]

Nostalgia is a powerful emotion in our perception of place. "Place can acquire deep meaning for the adult through the steady accretion of sentiment over the years."[105]

> Our senses have a way of reconnecting us, without warning, to memories of times and places long ago, and in particular to memories of childhood...Childhood is that time when we begin to be conscious of self, when we start to see ourselves as unique entities. It is not surprising that many of us regard that time as an almost sacred period in our lives. Since it is difficult for the mind to grasp a time period in abstract, we tend to connect with it through memories of the *places* we inhabited.[106]

Reminiscences

I have written a personal chronology of my own experience of the places of my childhood. The writing was a cathartic exercise, allowing me to formally examine how my own perception of place was formed and how memories have changed over time and in turn have changed that perception. This function would have been fulfilled even had I chosen to omit the these reminiscences from this text. I include them, however, to allow, you, reader

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[104] Lippard, 5.

[105] Tuan, 33.

[106] Marcus, 19-20.

to share this process, and to compare your memories to mine, to arrive, as I did, at a greater understanding of the connection of memory to place.

I was born in Ohio, but I have no memory of it, having left when I was only a few months old. My mother has always held nostalgic feelings for the house there; she often told me how much she loved the house – never a mention of the town or even the setting. The first home I knew was in Wichita, Kansas. I lived in two houses there. I have fleeting memories of the first. It was there that I learned that the Santa who delivered presents was actually a neighbor in disguise. We bought a new car. We built a new house. It was actually an addition to my grandparent's house; it was converted to a duplex. We moved in and lived there for a while. The house was across the street from a park where I would often go with my father or grandfather. This was the only house that my mother had any input in designing and she was quite pleased with some of the features. When it snowed in the winter, there was a hill for sledding. My grandfather, a surgeon, had made my sled and I was very proud of it. At that time "homemade" was better than the best offered in the stores or advertising. My best friend lived a few houses away. I was in kindergarten.

My father was called up from the Marine reserves to active duty at the beginning of the Korean War. We moved to Norfolk, Virginia, where we lived in two houses on the same street in a period no longer than a year. I have little recollection of the first, but can remember the second quite well:

perhaps the memories of the neighborhood are continuous, while the memories of the houses are clouded. The street was a cul-de-sac. The houses on one side backed on a swamp. I can remember being there without the presence of a parent, but never alone. There were real dangers like poisonous snakes and ivy. I fell into a stream once and heard that there was a water moccasin nearby. As a child I repeated this story when I wanted to impress someone, usually an older child. I once had poison ivy pointed out to me. The swamp was our neighborhood public space and a place of dreams and nightmares. We survived a hurricane during which many of the neighborhood's weeping willow trees were blown down. Ours fell on the house, but cushioned by its leaves, caused no more damage than a slight leak. The house was rented anyway and we soon moved. The friends I remember best were two older kids next door. I imagined myself as their great buddy, but they probably saw me as a pesky little kid. I was in first grade.

We moved to California. My father had been transferred to Camp Pendelton. While we waited for quarters on the base, we lived in a motel on the beach in Oceanside. Although our stay there could not have been more than a few weeks and I have no memory of the room or rooms, I still remember this place as a home. Our home at Pendelton was a row house in a complex of perhaps six units in an officer's area of the base. There were quite a few other buildings within the area and as far as I know every unit had

children. The area was small and surrounded with open space, punctuated with ravines eroded into the otherwise flat landscape. The real dangers here were also poisonous, snakes of the rattling variety and oak, as well live ammunition which was accessible to the older kids who were allowed on account of their age to wander farther into the wilderness and to the younger kids through exposure to the older kids.

It was a wonderful place to live. We had within our area a two room school house, the officers club with a swimming pool, a theater which, for the price of a nickel, showed a movie every Saturday complete with serial shorts to-be-continued the following week, and plenty of open space. With so many other children to choose from, my friends were numerous. I was in second grade.

When dad was released from the Marine Corps, we stayed in California. It took me a while to realize that we would not be returning to Wichita, which I considered home; Norfolk and Camp Pendelton were known to be temporary from the start. We moved into a house in Oceanside, where I lived in my memory for many years, although I now realize that it was only ten. My mother, who lived there for another thirty years, continued to believe that her life was marked by moves. The few years without attachment to place were more significant in her mind than 40 years of stability. My grandparents retirement and purchase of a house two blocks away brought

home to me (pun intentional) the fact that we would never be moving back to Wichita.

The population of Oceanside at that time numbered in the twenty-thousands. I walked or biked to school, as did everyone I knew. I don't think there was a school bus. Downtown, too, was within walking or biking distance. The neighborhoods were subdivided before the invention of mass produced housing tracts and had been mostly built up during the 1940s and 1950s. Each house was unique and there were still vacant infill lots, which were public spaces for us kids. They served as unstructured environments for a pick-up game of ball, marbles or any other activity that required nothing more than toys and imagination.

Our street was three blocks long, starting almost level at the intersection of what was then Hill Street and is now named Pacific Coast Highway in a nostalgic attempt to recall the past. Our block, the middle one, was on a slight slope that increased up a hill in the next block, which ended in a small canyon, our own special public wilderness. The canyon ended in a slough which could be reached by trekking the canyon itself, or by a longer route along the streets. The vacant lots, the undeveloped areas, and the streets themselves were our public spaces. The dangers were cactus in the canyon, mud in the slough, and traffic in the streets. The latter was not enough of a threat for parents to prohibit us playing there.

Today I can nostalgize, or even rationalize, this place of my memories as prototypically small town America, but I am more inclined to believe that this is more the result of places like this forming prototypes than fitting them. The clouds that form over memories with time tend to reinforce this process by creating a memory place more in keeping with the prototype than the original necessarily was. "As we recall memories from our childhood, or listen to those of our friends, we may start to question: Did this really happen? Was there really a place like that?"[107]

[107] Marcus, 39.

CHAPTER VIII

MAKING PLACES

> Part of the process of growing up is learning to do without our parents, to move bit by bit away from their nurturance and watchful eyes, and to test ourselves in those parts of the environment that are "not home." We act out the inevitable process of separation via games and activities in the environment. One way in which children do this is to create their own homes-away from-home, like homesteads on the frontier. Such place-making activities are almost universal in childhood, regardless of culture, social context, or gender...Whether these places were called forts, dens, houses, hideaways, or clubhouses, whether they were in the home or were found, modified, or constructed, they all seem to serve similar psychological and social purposes—places in which separation from adults was sought, in which fantasies could be acted out, and in which the very environment itself could be molds and shaped to one's own needs. This is the beginning of the act of dwelling, or claiming one's place in the world...These poignant memories of fort-building reveal an early recognition of the human need to claim space by changing the environment.[108]

In adulthood, too, the making of place plays an important role for the psyche. For most of us our houses are the only environments which we can affect significantly. Occasionally we can make something more than superficial changes to our work spaces, but usually we just add pictures and

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[108] Marcus, 23-28.

decorations to make them more like home. Even in the most restrictive "planned communities", homeowners are given some freedom to customize their personal surroundings. People who buy a mass produced house in a tract will provide their own furniture, decor, and landscaping. The last adds the element of time to the process of place making. Through natural processes individual spaces become more diverse.

> You bind the goods and trappings of you life together with your dreams to make a place that is uniquely your own. In doing so you build a semblance of the world you know, adding it to the community that surrounds you.[109]

Models of Residential Development

Much has been written about the development of cities, both planned and unplanned. The literature concentrates on the religious, political, social and economic forces that have come to affect the physical environment. Kevin Lynch give three models of city form: the cosmic, the machine and the organic. But description and analysis of development within these models both by Lynch and many others has tended to focus on only a limited number of influences, especially those moving downward from large to small scale features. These serve as reasonable explanations of the evolution of large scale physical features of towns and cities, but the contributions of small

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[109] Charles Moore, Gerald Allen, and Donlyn Lyndon, *The Place of Houses* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974), vii.

scale features to the chaotic processes that affect the whole has been almost entirely neglected. New meanings of the word "chaos" serve to illustrate changes in thinking about natural processes. The description "chaotic" need no longer mean that a system is without order; seemingly random small scale events can produce large scale patterns. Within the organic model of development there is an underlying order, transmitted from small to large scale features. "(O)ur cities are shaped not only by planners but also by the often idiosyncratic decisions of large numbers of separate citizens."[110]

Until well into the 19th century there was little regulation on the division of land. Town and city plans when they existed, whether in cosmic, baroque radial, or gridiron patterns, served mainly to lay out streets and roads, and locate civic buildings. In spite of the intentions of planners, the underlying fabric of most communities grew organically. "(P)re-urban land division may well be the most fundamental determinant for the irregular city-forms of all ages."[111] Almost anyone who owned land could sell a piece of it. Zoning laws were a product of the 20th century. Anyone with the money could buy land and build a house, a store or a factory. Patterns of land use were social

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[110] Rybczynski, *City Life Urban Expectations in a New World* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 30.

[111] Kostof, *The City Shaped: Urban Patterns and Meanings Through History* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 57.

and economic creations. The rich, who could afford it, did not need to live in close proximity to the factories they owned. The poor, who lacked transportation, needed to live near their work. Factories and tenements occupied the same urban neighborhoods. Shops and services were provided near the source of need.

Most European cities grew around some medieval core. Physical and social features were well established by the time baroque planners envisioned change.

> The fact is than no city, however arbitrary its form may appear to us, can be said to be "unplanned." Beneath the strangest twist of lane or alley, behind the most fitfully bounded public place, lies an order beholden to prior occupation, to the features of the land, to long-established conventions of the social contract, to a string of compromises between individual rights and the common will.[112]

Wholesale replacement of cities did not occur on a clean slate, but on a background of existing elements. Ring roads replaced medieval city walls and allowed growth outside the historical boundaries. Boulevards were cut through existing areas, but large pockets were left untouched. Very little land use designation left organic evolution as a viable mechanism for change. Political restrictions to physical development were not so limiting as to produce an overall uniformity.

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[112] Kostof, 52.

"Colonialism disrupts the passage from a rural to an urban landscape which is the benchmark of human settlement."[113] In New England and the North, land division tended to be along a smaller gridiron pattern. In the South it followed a more traditional agrarian model with larger plantations. Spanish cities in North America were built according to the "Law of the Indies," and land-grants left a permanent legacy on the West.

> The Land Ordinance...of 1785...effectively divided all unsettled land in the United States into a vast grid of regular six-mile-square townships, each subdivided into a checkerboard of square-mile sections. Since country roads were usually located along section lines, and towns tended to spring up at crossroads, it was convenient and natural that their streets should follow the same orthogonal geometry.[114]

"The term 'conspicuous consumption' was invented by the American economist Thorstein Veblen in 1899 to describe the behavior of a new wealthy class in displaying their affluence."[115] It was affluence that differentiated the suburbs from the city. Rural areas were still largely poor. But the advent of the automobile changed this. The need for roads changed the physical landscape, the new mobility brought by the automobile and streetcars changed the social landscape, and "(t)he development of mass production techniques...(brought) previously unaffordable goods within the

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[113] Kostof, 59.

[114] Rybczynski, 106.

[115] Edward Relph, *The Modern Urban Landscape* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 89-90.

financial range of large segments of the population."[116] In 1911 F.W. Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* was published, putting forth new ideas of efficiency in production. Henry Ford's implementation of these principles on the scale of the assembly line produced the Model T. This was not only the first affordable automobile, but wide spread introduction of the assembly line principle created economic change that increased demand for the automobile as well as other consumer goods. Conspicuous consumption became mass consumption. "Houses became the object of displays of new bourgeois affluence, not on a grand scale but at least sufficiently to show that one was no worse off than one's neighbors."[117]

Although few people, today, have the opportunity of building their own house, it remains the dream of many. The custom house, designed and built for an individual, depends on the availability of building lots. At one time land was subdivided and sold as individual or small groups of lots. A person wanting to build a house would simply buy one. A contractor could buy one or several and erect houses for sale. Neighborhoods developed organically; the development process created diversity while local vernacular vocabularies of construction assured continuity and harmony. Local services grew according to local demand. Densities were high enough to assure that

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[116] Relph, 90.

[117] Relph, 90.

services would be provided nearby. "This is a subtle sort of urban design, but it is design, design that proceeds not from a predetermined master plan, but from the process of building itself."[118]

Today when this model of development occurs, it is usually in a rural community, a community that sees itself as rural, or a community with a strong identity of being apart from a metropolitan area. Division of land occurs on a small scale and consequently infrastructure development must be on a small scale. A notable consequence of this is that waste disposal is often provided on site with septic systems. This results in larger lots and lower densities. While this is often desirable to individuals it produces a community in which the availability of services occurs over a larger area. The infrastructure dollars that are available are spread thinner, so that the quality of improvements such as roads will not be as high as with higher densities. "The more dwelling units per given length of street, obviously the lower the infrastructure cost per unit."[119] Lower densities combined with the notion, inscribed in public consciousness of taken-for-granted automobile use, and the idea, created and reinforced in zoning, that business and residential uses don't mix, the result is larger areas without neighborhood

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[118] Rybczynski, *City Life*, 90.

[119] Craig Whitaker, *Architecture and the American Dream* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1996), 35.

services. Where they do occur services are concentrated in commercial ghettos—strip malls.

Since World War II the economics of the market place have favored mass production of housing. The developer subdivides land and the builds houses, often by hundreds, sometimes by thousands. The developer is required to provide complex infrastructures, so higher densities are economically desirable. Mass production dictates uniformity, so monotony replaces harmony and diversity must be faked, through minor manipulations of floor plans and distortion of details.

> They substitute stereotype for personality, relentlessly casting the house buyer into a minimal exchange with his surroundings. They offer the inhabitant little, and he asks less, till finally the buyer's interest in making a house the center of his own world is reduced to nothing.[120]

"Real estate agents ignore the adage 'a house is not a home' and persistently advertise 'lovely homes' as though a home could be found ready-made."[121]

Provision of services is not something that can be allowed to occur naturally. The developer must set aside land for commercial use. Since, this cannot be done on the basis of occurring need but must be done a priori, it involves a large investment on the part of commercial entities, whose interest

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[120] Moore, xiii.

[121] Lippard, 29.

is best served by large scale development. Again the automobile is taken for granted, so services are concentrated into planned malls without relationship to the place of need.

> "Good neighbors" remains an American ideal, but it has been pointed out that subdivisions and anonymous bedroom communities are often devoid of gathering places where neighbors can plan strategies and discover mutual strengths. Bars, cafés, and other meeting grounds have been zoned out of many areas.[122]

Home "Improvement"

Residential place making must occur within an established model of community development. The days of staking a claim and settling in the wilderness are long past. Even those fortunate enough to build their own houses must buy land that has undergone the process of land division. The vast majority of people rent, buy homes in established neighborhoods, or buy newly built condos or homes in the suburbs. It is most often within the context of a pre-established physical environment that domestic place-making must occur.

"Place exists at different scales. At one extreme a favorite armchair is a place, at the other extreme the whole earth."[123] We make places the same way as we have learned to perceive them; we move from the specific to the

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[122] Lippard, 24.

general, starting with the details. It is here that we have the most control. Renters have very little say in the modification of their houses. "Working-class poor people do not live in homes and neighborhoods of their own design...(T)he physical structures do not reflect the dweller's ideals."[124] The very poor may not even be able to choose their homes or neighborhoods but must live within an unfriendly marketplace. Home owners, especially the more affluent, may have greater opportunity to modify their environment. Renters generally can only change the inside of their houses; owners can change the outside and affect the processes that act on the neighborhood and ultimately on the city. (Later, I will discuss the inherent irony of people choosing to live under draconian restrictions of their right to use or change their houses.)

The act of arranging the details of our homes is an act of building, in the sense that Heidegger relates the two. Therefore, it is an act of dwelling. "Building seeks to transform space into place. Such transformation depends on a prior sense of place."[125] Charles Moore, Gerald Allen and Donlyn Lyndon categorize houses as comprised of three orders: "the Order of

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[123] Tuan, 149.

[124] Tuan, 171.

[125] Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1997The MIT Press,), 213.

Rooms, the Order of Machines, and the Order of Dreams."[126] The first two of these affect the denotative function of the house but they can also serve the third, the Order of Dreams. It is within this that meaning is created. "The dreams which accompany all human actions should be nurtured by the places in which people live."[127] As soon as we take possession of a house, we start to make it a home by modifying and customizing it. Home improvement is big business. We try to make our houses like our memory houses and our dream houses.

> According to (Gaston) Bachelard the house (or houses) of our childhood, together with other houses in which we have lived, only visited, or perhaps just read about or glimpsed in illustrated books, furnishes material for our dreams of houses; it serves to make concrete or to schematize our idea of the archetypal home...
> (W)e all dream of houses. But not always of the same house; sometimes our dreams are of huts, sometimes of palaces, sometimes of intimate shelters that shut out the outside, sometimes of tents open to the forest and its animals; sometimes they lead back into the past, sometimes into the future. We must navigate among a multitude of such dreams when we attempt to imagine our ideal house.[128]

In the process of transforming our personal environment we not only follow dreams, but we also find them. "Genuine dwelling means not so much a

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[126] Moore et. al.

[127] Moore et. al., 124.

[128] Harries, 205 & 209.

being at home but at most a continuous journeying home, a continuous homecoming, haunted by changing dreams of home."[129]

The process of dwelling begins with choosing a house. There are many factors involved here that usually must be weighed one against the other: rent or buy, what we can afford, house or apartment, size, number of rooms, schools, churches, transportation, shopping, work, safety, landscaping, etc., etc. Obviously some of these will be more important than others and priorities will vary considerably from one individual to another. Some considerations will be practical; others symbolic -- considerations of meaning. Often symbolic factors will out weigh the practical. Once a house is chosen we begin the process of making it into our home. we attribute learned meanings to new spaces as part of making place. We cannot buy a home, just as we cannot buy dreams. Even if we could buy dreams they would still only belong to someone else. And so we must make our own home just as we dream our own dreams.

Just as the choice of a house depends on many things the extent to which we will invest time, money and emotions in making it a home will be subject to a decision making process. The longer we expect to stay the more

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[129] Harries, 213.

we are willing to invest. "Permanence is an important element in the idea of place."[130]

Things

The most basic act we can do when we take possession of a residence to make it our home is to furnish it with our own things. Even in the most temporary of residences, a hotel room, people often bring pictures of loved ones. "(T)he objects with which we surround ourselves in that most familiar and stable environment—the home—are particularly salient expressions of self."[131]

> Children claim walls by drawing on them, and they control the territory of their rooms by spreading about their toys, dolls, and other possessions...Adults act similarly, claiming the space of their house with ornamental chairs, tables, and plants instead of toys, and affixing someone else's painting to the wall rather than drawing there themselves.[132]

Our stuff is rich with meanings, meanings it has acquired over time. Meanings connect objects to other places, people and times. In surrounding ourselves with objects we connect our home to those meanings. "(T)hings

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[130] Tuan, 140.

[131] Marcus, 63.

[132] Moore et. al., 225.

that have special meaning for you...can add dimension to the place you inhabit and to its capacity to nurture your imagination."[133]

Frank Lloyd Wright had no use for people's accumulation of stuff. He did not like the spaces where stuff collects, attics and cellars. His houses were furnished with objects of his own design, and there was little room for the personal expression of the occupants' dreams and desires. Karsten Harries writes,

> Bachelard's dream house, on the other hand, has both cellar and attic. To the latter one can escape from the family, perhaps from reality. Attics are thus good places to think, dream, play, write poetry. Poets belong in garrets and I wrote these words in an attic. Once again the question returns: to what extent is Bachelard speaking from his own French, European, bourgeois perspective, and to what extent is the describing phenomena that remain alive for us? Should a house have an attic and a cellar, corners and nooks where one can hide things and oneself? Wright wanted the house to offer a broad unified shelter, a simple space that was easily surveyed and gathered around a central hearth....Still, perhaps we need houses in which doors can be slammed shut and things shoved out of the way, into some cellar, attic closet, to be forgotten for many years, only to be rediscovered much late, perhaps only by children or grandchildren.
> In our buildings...we need spaces that play the part of the subconscious, spaces where we store what we do not seem to need, spaces where the relics of our lives are allowed to accumulate, spaces where we may rummage some day to be confronted with some long-forgotten aspect of our past, spaces that provide our dwelling with a usually obscured continuity, Attics, cellars, and closets are such spaces.[134]

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[133] Moore et. al., 226-229.

[134] Harries,.207-209.

In this passage the connections of things, memories and place are made clear. How many of us did not at some time as children experience the magic of discovering some long forgotten treasure in some hidden place. And how many of us, as adults, do not retain as part of our sense of place an association of memory, things, people and dreams. Perhaps we may even have some of those treasured objects still as part of the furnishings that make our home. "Home is an intimate place. We think of the house as home and place, but enchanted images of the past are evoked not so much by the entire building, which can only be seen as by its components and furnishings, which can be touched and smelled as well..."[135]

In the book, *A Pattern Language*, Christopher Alexander and his co-authors offer "Things from your life" as their final pattern in answer to "...lastly, when you have taken care of everything, and you start living in the places you have made, you may wonder what kinds of things to pin up on the walls."[136] In spite of their many patterns designed to make places from towns, buildings, and construction, arrangement of "things from their life" may be the best opportunity many people have to make space into place.

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[135] Tuan, 144.

[136] Alexander, Sara Ishikawa and Murray Silverstein, *A Pattern Language* (w York: Oxford University Press, Ne1977), 1165.

"What we place in and around our home are material expressions of our identity, self-disclosure in a safe and private environment."[137]

Styles

In buying, building or decorating a house people have a choice of style. This choice is most often exercised within a very conservative range of possibilities. Modern architecture in its attempt to reject style for pure form created its own stylistic genres. People will select a style for what it means to them and unornamented anti-historical modernism often meant nothing. Instead they want something that is familiar to them with meanings shared by others. "On the whole, people who made their houses recall far-flung historical precedents must have done so because these precedents meant something to them"[138] Sometimes, this has created houses that are almost literal revivals of historical styles, but more often it has meant the incorporation of certain stylistic elements into contemporary buildings. This has often resulted in the kind of historical eclecticism in vernacular building that Postmodern Historicist architects have made deliberate. "Revisiting the architecture of other epochs is a search not so much for knowledge as for

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[137] Marcus, 79.

[138] Moore et. al., 127.

patterns an forms that still seem relevant."[139] Styles can help us find a sense of place through inclusion of shared meanings, but they cannot create it.

In the process of vernacularization of past forms and finally in mass production of the resulting styles the true origins of the forms become lost. Kimberly Dovey discusses the transformation of form and meaning with the example of window shutters that have undergone change from operational shutters to fixed shutters which retain the proportion of the original and finally to fixed shutters that are out of proportion to the window they seem to serve. "(T)he possibility of 'shutting' (is) now entirely denied."[140] In the first part of this transformation, as Eco would have it, the primary function, shutting, becomes the object of a secondary function. In the second part of the transformation, both the original primary function is lost and the secondary function is replaced by a new secondary function; the "shutters" now become part of the culturally shared connotation of "window."

Color

Another basic change we can make in our home environment is color. Interior color choice is an option often open even to renters.

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[139] Whitaker, 4.

[140] Dovey, "The quest for authenticity and the replication of environmental meaning" in Seamon and Mugerauer, 34.

> Color has its own set of connotations, and the decision to paint a room one color or another can substantially alter its character. Those connotations are not simple. Color, it seems to us, is like proportion; though there are endless and often conflicting rules for its use, its chief characteristic is that it says something to people, based chiefly on their recollection of previous experiences...Connotations of colors may have the effect of heightening their inherent qualities or masking them...Individual colors, or particular groups of colors, may recall something special to some...and be liked or disliked for that.[141]

The learned meanings of colors are of greater significance in the making of place than are the supposed universal psychological properties. The choice of colors in residential design is one that attaches meanings to surfaces; and those meanings are not necessarily shared among large groups of individuals. Even white is not without the ability to carry serious and multiple meanings. For me white walls suggest Andalusia and the Mediterranean, for someone else they might mean the coldness of snow or unornamented modernism. Alexander suggests that it is not the colors themselves that are important so much as the warmth of the light.[142] So, to the same person, white walls in warm light could suggest the Mediterranean sun and in cold light, snow.

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[141] Moore et. al., 225-226.

[142] Alexander et. al., 1153-1156.

Texture

"Materials as well have connotations composed of their color and their texture..."[143] Obviously color and texture both serve to carry meaning. White stucco and white clapboards have entirely different connotations. The meanings of materials are both subtle and complex. A material such as wood has inherent meaning as a natural material and associated meanings that are learned. These latter meanings come from our past experiences of wood as a building material as well as wooden objects. Wood that is painted has different connotations than wood that is simply stained or left natural.

A material's texture is a always a tactile as well as a visual experience, and may often offer acoustic and olfactory properties as well. Material's relationship to the passage of time is expressed in the word "patina." "Different materials are differently affected by the passage of time, they speak of different attitudes to time and thus of different ideals of building and dwelling."[144]

The choice of appropriate materials is as much a choice of meanings as it is a practical choice. Synthetic materials, often chosen for practical or perceived-to-be-practical reasons, are often given the form of genuine materials in an attempt to retain earlier meanings. Kimberly Dovey suggests

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[143] Moore et. al., 226.

"that the phenomenon of fakery is essentially a replication of meaning...(and) that inauthencity emerges out of the very attempt to retain or regain authenticity." He goes on to say,

> Our successive appropriations and identifications from past experience forma kind of ontological ground of meaning. In as much as experience is culturally shared, so are these meanings. This ground of shared meanings constitutes the very experience that the fake tries to replicate.

Dovey quotes Charles Jencks as writing, "when synthetic wood and stone can be manufactured which out perform and are visually indistinguishable from their natural counterparts, then it becomes pedantic and efféte to insist on having the 'real' material." To this he replies that

> (P)eople do care. No one wants to be deceived—not by people, places, things or materials. Despite their isolation from the design process, most individuals desire to know about their world at depth...While it may be pedantic to insist on having the "real" stone, it is not pedantic to insist upon knowing the difference. This awareness is fundamental to the way in which people experience their world.[145]

Jencks' assertion presupposes the technical superiority of synthetic materials and their ability to visually duplicate the natural. But, the ability of fake materials to out perform their natural counterparts is open to question as is their success in replicating environmental meaning.

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[144] Harries, 122.

[145] Dovey, 36-39, quoting Jencks, *Architecture 2000: Predictions and Methods* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), 117.

This is primarily a problem in residential construction. Commercial building generally operates on a higher budget allowing for the use of the genuine rather than the artificial and more often than not involves architects and clients who are willing to expose the use modern materials honestly. Residential construction, especially in remodeling, is most often done without the influence of a professional arbiter of taste and often attempts to preserve earlier and more conservative residential meanings. "Much of what passes for inauthenticity is evidence of out attempts to regain a sense of home through synthetic surface effect."[146]

Until recently, artificial materials simply had the advantage of being cheaper than natural. Now we have fakes that pretend to offer less maintenance or even be superior in the long run. But, these materials seldom offer as completely satisfying a visual experience as the real and almost never have comparable tactile qualities. The very claims to superiority made for these materials show that they will never have the same relationship to time as their real counterparts; if they require less maintenance, then they will not age well. In short their ability to convey their intended meaning is never complete.

Vinyl siding is a purely visual material; it has no tactile qualities. And, on the visual level it lacks the details of comparable wood siding. Yet it

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[146] Dovey, 48.

attempts to convey the same meaning as wood siding. Vinyl is not inherently a bad material. Why, therefore, must it be made to look like bad wood? Natural building materials have infinite variety in their colors, textures, and patterns. Their synthetic counterparts have only limited variety. Artificial stone is visually and tactually close to the real, but patterns are repeated. Photographic reproductions of wood grain in laminates will never reproduce the variety in real wood. But the use of these materials exemplifies the need for traditional environmental meanings. People want their houses to look like they think houses should look like. But those who can afford the best will always opt for the real materials. Synthetics are a poor man's substitute. The most successful artificial materials are the ones that do not attempt to replicate the natural but merely suggest it. Solid surface counter tops are a high end material because of their inherent honesty. Split face concrete block does not attempt to fake stone but only to suggest it. Concrete pavers are not trying to replicate cobblestones but to suggest their meaning and function.

Materials can, therefore, with varying degrees of success convey learned meanings into the built environment. These meanings are desirable because they imbue that environment with a sense of place.

Ironic Gates and Non-Places

One of the greatest comforts of place is a feeling of safety. Any feelings of nostalgia for past time and lost places we have are feelings that those times and places were safe. We form our ability to make sense of the physical environment from the original feelings of home that came from the safety provided by our parents or other care givers. The sense of fear which we began to feel when we were allowed to challenge the world on our own terms was not a sense of dread but of awe.

> The unlocked door is a potent symbol in the collective memory of the white-flight generation. As if you've never heard it before, or perhaps knowing you've heard it a million times, as a rhythm of ritual and truth builds during your second decade on the rosary. "We *never* had to lock our doors. Everybody knew everybody. We weren't afraid." Afraid was later. Afraid was coming.[147]

Our experience of the world was, therefore, a challenge and not a threat. So it has come to be that to a good many people a sense of place is equated to a sense of safety. This is probably rightfully so, but when that sense of safety is equated to isolation, the true character of place and dwelling is lost.

Perceived threats to safety come not only from the threat of physical violence, but from the possibility of minor annoyances, of nonconformity. Seemingly safe residential environments become bastions of uniformity, often gated. The Irvine Chamber of Commerce wrote to Dean MacCannell,

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[147] Ray Suarez, *The Old Neighborhood: What We Lost in the Great Suburban Migration, 1966-1999* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 12.

> If you are looking for a great place to live—Southern California style (try) Irvine, Calif. *Uniformly designed homes in Irvine, Calif., are controlled by the strictly enforced rules of the planned community.* In this cluster of quiet villages the scent of the Pacific freshens the air above homes all painted in earth tones...Life is zoned by a master plan around the university campus, industrial parks, living and recreation areas, green belts and shopping centers. Residents may observe the five-member City Council in action from their homes, all wired foe cable TV. *Neighborhood committees make sure that dwellings are painted in bland colors and that lawns are trimmed.* Even the citizenry is fairly homogeneous: surveys show that 56 per cent of all families have annual (1982) incomes of $40,000 or more, &3 percent own their own homes and most household heads are college graduates. Some may find the uniformity over powering, but to most it is a small price to pay. The schools are rated superb. Crime, though a problem, is not rising as fast as the population. Urban fears are no part of life in Irvine. Says language teacher Susan Salessi: "I feel very safe. I don't have to drive long miles to work, to the beach, to enjoy all the cultural activities I could want. Here I have everything."[148]
> (Emphasis mine.)

Reading between the lines here reveals that most of the residents are white and upper middle class. Exclusion of the poor is designed to exclude the demographics most likely to be poor—minorities.

The irony here is that these so called "communities" attract some of the most politically conservative people, people who rally against "big government" and for property rights. But by buying into "the strictly enforced rules of the planned community" they are sacrificing their precious property

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[148] Dean MacCannell, *Empty Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers* (London: Routledge, 1992), 81.

rights to pseudo-governments, that wield authority from civil contracts. Property rights are so limited that even the choice of color is not up to the home owner. Landscaping, which often provides the only natural process in differentiation of seemingly identical houses, is so severely restricted that time will have little effect in the making of place in these spaces. People in these communities are often so restricted that they cannot use their residences as they see fit. One common restriction is the amount of time during the day that a garage door may remain open. Such a restriction is clearly contrary to the traditional, but not designed, use of the garage as a neighborhood meeting place. Hanging out in the garage with the door open invites interaction with passer-bys. People have sacrificed the ability to make place out of space by the giving of meaning.

> In short, they find in their alienation from their own passions, from the greed and lust that they cannot acknowledge even to themselves, in their on self-imposed lack of freedom at the level of appearance, exactly what they think they should fear most, not from themselves but from "Socialism." [149]

They would do well to remember the admonition of Ben Franklin that, "They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

A feeling of safety comes with a sense of place. These non-places try to substitute safety for place and in doing so essentially prohibit place

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[149] MacCannell, 80.

making. They create physical environments that have little relationship to the passage of time. There are no commercial spaces within these enclaves, and virtually no real public spaces. Transportation is limited to the automobile since there are no destinations that are otherwise accessible. They are designed to prevent all interaction with other classes and to limit any interaction among strangers that can be perceived as threatening. The residents are not permitted to alter their own environments in ways that might threaten the uniformity of the space.

CHAPTER IX

CONTRASTS

There are notable patterns of contrast within environments with a sense of place. As truly chaotic elements these contrasts exist independently of the scale with which we examine these places. The same relationships between seeming contradictions exist in rooms, homes, neighborhoods, communities and cities. The presence of these contrasts is vital to the formation of place. If they are lacking so is the sense of place.

Variety and Harmony

The most basic pair of contrasts vital to a sense of place is variety/harmony. When something is not harmonious we say that it is “out of place.” But an environment without variety is boring. Within a room we will always find a diversity of furnishings; each piece will have different functions and meanings. Yet the room is most satisfying when there is some sort of harmony among the furnishings. This could mean a harmonious style or, surprisingly, the opposite. If a number of elements are chosen for contrast, harmony can exist within that selection because of the contrast. A collection, for example, could be of similar items from one state, or it could be dissimilar

items representing all 50 states. Rooms within a house, too, are varied in use and meaning and are harmonious in their inclusion within a unified whole.

Vernacular building will by definition produce both variety and harmony: variety because of the multiplicity of vernacular designers and harmony because of the limited vocabulary of elements. Developers of housing tracts try to reproduce this contrast by building units of consistent style and diverse detail, but they fail to produce meaningful places because the harmony is in reality only repetition and the variety an attempt to cover this up with surface elements; the vocabulary of both style and detail is too restricted.

Diversity is an important part of any residential environment. Economic and ethnic diversity in a place need to be combined with a shared sense of purpose. Too many of the middle class, especially the white middle class, have come to see diversity as a threat. Migration to the suburbs, homogenized spaces lacking in a true sense of place, often in flight from diversity, has significantly change patterns of the built environment.

> A feedback loop was established that destroyed the heart of some of America's great cities: Those Americans given a leg up in the new economy…pulled up stakes from shared institutions, weakening them, and took their presence, influence, and money elsewhere. For each family that decided to stick it out, the decision to stay became harder and harder to make as the quality of common life sagged. The migrants were the Americans most likely to demand solutions for the municipal problems, most likely to vote, and most likely to get attention.

> The more this group left…behind, the more those left behind needed them.[150]

Diversity, especially ethnic diversity is a source of vitality. Local ethnic restaurants are often the only fast food alternatives to corporate packaging. For every Pizza Hut and Domino's there are often several local pizza joints. Ethnic markets offer varieties of shopping that does not even come close to being matched by the corporate supermarkets. Given increased interest in eclectic foods cookbooks often suggest ethnic markets as the source of ingredients. Ethnic owned stores and liquor stores provide an alternative to stripmalled 7-11s and are often the only neighborhood markets around. Cultural diversity is inherent to a sense of place, but it often lacking in suburban surroundings.

Balance and Asymmetry

In creating a pleasing composition balance needs to be achieved without symmetry. Pleasing environments need balance as well. Symmetry is an artificial concept. In nature it is an illusion. In the built environment symmetry is seems contrived and seldom lasts long. The introduction of any natural element such as landscaping will modify designed symmetry. Two trees of the same variety, for example, will be balanced but never identical.

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[150] Suarez, 15.

The human form at first seems symmetrical, but never is. Human occupation of the environment is balanced but not symmetrical. In this country and most others driving is done on the right side of the roads. Indo-European languages read from left to right. This establishes a priority of left and right. Pictures from countries where driving is done on the left seem odd. Mirror image photographs of our own environment are easily identified even when they lack asymmetrical graphic elements. Pedestrians meeting on the side walk will often pass each other on the right, at least where right side driving is common.

Balance in nature, however, is the norm. Gravity dictates balance. It is not by coincidence that the word denotes our ability to stand as well as an equal distribution of elements. Nature, as well as people, tends to fill space with objects. This may occur at various densities, but it is always balanced at some scale. In chaotic systems the distribution of stuff occurs in similar fashions regardless of scale. Even environments comprised of designed elements are chaotic on various scales. On a small scale a building is chaotic because the designer cannot control the individual users. On a large scale the built environment is chaotic because at some level the designers control or the cooperation of multiple designers breaks down and a natural balance is achieved.

Continuity and Change

Continuity and change have the same relationship to time that harmony and variety have to space. Just as too little variety makes space boring, too little change makes time boring. Continuity and change are part of the natural process. As we grow older we change, yet aging represents a basic continuity. We may like to meet new people but we value old friends. We keep the same furnishings in our homes and rearrange them. Home itself is continuity. Growing is change. Home nurtures growth.

Landscaping, the introduction of plants into the built environment, is a fundamental part of giving space meaning because it is the essence of the continuity/change pair. Annual plants bloom and reseed themselves or are replanted. Perennials go on year after year but always remind us of the season. We plant trees not for what they are but for what they will become, often they out live us. Year after year they grow, changing imperceptibly, but changing nevertheless. If the time-scale of our viewing is large enough the change is dramatic.

Built environments, like plants, can change in small increments. Environmental meanings grow from the cumulative effect of small changes. If change is too rapid it is a shock to the psyche and comprehending its connotations becomes difficult. These connotations are intimately linked to time, so continuity and change are both vital.

Age and renewal are linked to continuity and change. We value old things in special ways; antiques have meanings not shared by new things. But to allow aging without maintenance is to encourage decay. J. B. Jackson suggests that "the necessity for ruins (is to) provide the incentive for restoration and for a return to origins."[151] Graceful aging of environmental form gives patina. Patina encourages enriched meanings. Sometimes decay itself adds meaning. Found objects are often used as the material of décor. Objects that have no value as antiques and would not otherwise be considered decorative can be considered interesting if not beautiful simply because of their condition.

In order to age gracefully the built environment must be able to adapt. Old functions become obsolete and new functions must take their place. Environments that cannot adapt in function come to have negative connotations. They become symbols of their own inability to serve any further purpose. Replacement becomes inevitable. Spaces that can adapt take on new meanings and resources become available to facilitate that adaptation through renewal.

Comfort and Surprise

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[151] Jackson, 102.

It goes without saying that in order to have a sense of place there must

be a feeling of comfort. But comfort alone is not enough. I have examined the irony inherent in sacrificing a sense of place for a sense of safety—safety that can only be felt in remembrances of a true sense of place. Comfort must be paired with surprise. Comfort and surprise are like all the other contrasts that make up places, too much imbalance in one direction produces boredom and too much in the other is shocking. Comfort is by definition not boring; boredom is uncomfortable. But comfort without surprise eventually yields to feelings of complacency. When this happens it is often compensated for with a heightened need for change. But a true sense of place cannot be felt if comfort is matched directly with change without the elements of consistency and surprise.

Surprise come in many forms. Beauty is always a source of surprise and comfort. We fill our houses with meaningful stuff, whether art or artifact, that gives comfort in its familiarity and surprise in its beauty. Beauty is of course subjective. I don't mean to suggest that home environments are always pretty or even should be, but people are unlikely to have many things they consider ugly around them, nor are they likely to feel that beauty alone is reason enough to include something in their homes. But beauty ultimately provides a sense of both comfort and surprise. The word "awe" tends to express this inherent relationship.

Fine and Coarse Elements

Meaningful environments must contain both fine and coarse elements. The terms “fine” and “coarse” as I use them are distinctly linked to the scale of examination. I use these terms differently than Kevin Lynch does when he refers to the grain of settlement as fine or coarse.[152] Houses are a coarse element in neighborhoods but a fine element in the city. Neighborhoods may be a coarse component of cities and fine on a regional scale. The idea that small elements make up larger ones that, in turn, make up still larger ones may seem self evident, but what is not self evident is that the relationship between the fine and the coarse is similar at all levels. This is one of the chaotic principles of natural processes.

Houses play a very important role in the development of this hierarchy of fine and coarse elements at different levels. The environmental details we perceive most intimately and most frequently are on the residential level. It is in this environment that, as infants, we learned environmental perception; as children we learned the making of place; as adolescents, we learned the freedom to make our own place; and, as adults, we make our places. We are most familiar with the details of our houses and their environments. We

spend more time at home than anywhere, with the possible exception of our workplaces, but at work our attention is elsewhere. We know our neighbors' houses, our block, our neighborhood and our local institutions deeply. Each of these is a detail that allows us to construct images of larger things.

Houses are physical building blocks of neighborhoods, as well as metaphorical. The house is the most common architectural unit as well as the most varied. On a larger scale houses comprise the order of rooms, while all the other building types are of the order of machines. The order of dreams, too, is one of houses, for it is in our home where we learned to dream and continue to do so.

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[152] "The grain of a mix is *fine* when like elements, or small clusters of the, are widely dispersed among unlike elements, and *coarse* when extensive areas of one thing are separated form extensive areas of another thing." Lynch, 265.

CHAPTER X

FORMATION OF PLACE

The formation of the built environment is a culmination of processes. Long gone is the Modernist conceit that good environments are a product of an autonomous designer. All environments, urban, suburban or rural, take their form from smaller pieces. Those pieces may be the work of architects and they may not, but the overall effect on environmental form comes from the totality of the process of its formation. A neighborhood is a collection of houses, each one different, each one the product of some individual's making of their home from the physical thing that is the house. Every detail of each home has meaning to its owner. The sum of those details and the processes of their combination into a whole give the meaning to the home itself. The basic idea of home is a shared meaning understood culturally. But each individual interprets that meaning differently. With a collective understanding of the idea of home comes an understanding that your neighbor does not express that idea exactly as you would. The residential environment is an accumulation of different interpretations of common meaning of home, just as it is an accumulation of houses. This accumulation of meanings gives character to larger pieces of the environment.

The processes by which meanings collect to make place from space, by which dwellings collect to form neighborhoods, and by which neighborhoods collect to form communities are chaotic natural processes. The process of change in the physical environment is nonlinear. It has only been in recent years that we have been able to understand the structural similarity of systems of vastly different origin.

Dereliction, gentrification and renewal all follow the same form. They are cumulative effects but they begin with small events. As homes in a neighborhood become vacant the values of other homes decrease, pressure to relocate becomes greater. People with mobility leave forcing greater decline. Services decrease increasing the migration. On the other hand, money infused into a neighborhood increases property values resulting in greater interest in investment. The first step in these processes can be small; the resulting change can be large and rapid.

Just as building units accumulate to form larger units, meanings accumulate to form larger meanings. Place is formed from cumulative meanings of dwelling, deeply linked to the passage of time. The process of physical dereliction and loss of sense of place are closely related. Both can occur rapidly from seemingly insignificant causes. The process of gentrification or renewal can be accompanied by significant changes in environmental meanings, but a real sense of place comes from the residents—the dwellers whose lives are linked to the space. In English the

words “reside,” “dwell,” and “live” can at times be interchanged. “I live at 123 Maple Street.” has as easy a meaning as “My house is at 123 Maple Street.” It is within the inherent connection between living an home, that one finds the connection between residential environments and place.

Non-residential parts of the built environment are more likely to be designed by “professionals.” But these represent only a small fraction of the totality of physical building. And they represent an even smaller fraction of the totality of environmental meaning. Seen from above, any city is dominated by houses, both in total volume and in shear numbers. All of those houses, whether designed by an architect, sold as part of a development or built by the owners themselves, are repositories of meaning. Larger units, whether we call them neighborhoods, communities, towns or cities, are collections of those individual meanings as well as individual buildings. The cumulative meaning is greater than the sum of its parts, because it represents the cultural concept of home, as well as all the collective individual connotations of the homes that comprise it.

Not only is the concept of place formed around collective and individual ideas of home, but the very way that those ideas are formulated is itself a product of home. “For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the

word."[153] It is from the concept of home that we give meaning to our physical universe. To give meaning to space is to make from it place.

[153] Gaston Bachelard, "Poetics of Space", in *Rethinking Architecture*, ed. Neil Leach, (London: Routledge, 1997), 86.

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ABSTRACT

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The title, *Dwelling, Houses, and Home: Residential Environments and the Formation of Place*, was carefully selected. "Dwelling" refers to the concept introduced by the philosopher, Martin Heidegger, and developed by architectural phenomenology. "Houses" refers to the residential building type. And "home" refers to the sense of rootedness we find, and can apply not only to the house, but to spaces of vastly different scales.

Place is something that is created out of space not only by the physicality of building but by the meanings accrued by these constructions. It is my contention that the primary mechanism for the formation of environmental meaning that contributes to the sense of place is the residential environment. By this I mean not only houses, but other buildings and land uses within that sphere of influence.

Modern architecture seemed almost oblivious in its agenda to the place of meanings in the built environment. Theoretical reactions to the failure of modernism to address issues of meaning and place offer a unique position for the examination of the way place is formed. Typical of these postmodern reactions is an interdisciplinary approach that offers a broad cultural foundation for analysis.

Generative processes and chaos are a recent development in the field of mathematics that have offered new insights into properties of structures in the sciences, social sciences and arts. The residential environment is fundamental to the generation of both the physical form of towns and cities and their sense of place.

Architectural history and theory have traditionally had little to say about houses even though they constitute the major building form in numbers as well as the amount of space occupied. The role of houses and housing in the formation of cities and towns is greatly influenced by political and economic considerations.

It is in our homes that we learn to perceive the built environment, therefore our perception of what constitutes a sense of place will be deeply rooted in our experience of home. For most people their houses and homes will be the only opportunity they have to affect the built environment and its meanings. The overall form of the cities and towns will be greatly influenced by the contributions of individuals to their own homes and the processes by which those homes come to represent a collective whole.

There are a number of contrasting elements that are essential to a feeling of place. These are variety and harmony, balance and asymmetry, continuity and change, comfort and surprise, and the contrast of fine and coarse elements. All of these are present to varying degrees within the residential environment and they exist regardless of scale.

Residential environments play a major role in the creation of a sense of place. Individual elements combine to form a whole whose meaning is found in the collective meaning of the elements as well as social and physical structures related directly and indirectly to residential use.