Framing Places

_Framing Places_ investigates how the built forms of architecture and urban design act as mediators of social practices of power. It is an account of how our lives are ‘framed’ within the clusters of rooms, buildings, streets and cities that we inhabit. Kim Dovey contends that the nature of architecture and urban design, their silent framings of everyday life, lend them to practices of coercion and seduction, thus legitimizing authority and control over civilian populations.

The book draws from a broad range of social theories and deploys three primary analyses of built form, namely the analysis of spatial structure, the interpretation of constructed meanings and the interpretation of lived experience. These approaches, to program, text and place, are woven together through a series of narratives on specific places and types of built environment, such as Berlin, Beijing and Canberra.

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Framing Places
Mediating power in built form

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I have long been fascinated by the meanings and mysteries of places—rooms, buildings, streets and cities; typical and exceptional; wonderful and awful. This book is driven by a belief in the potency of places to touch our lives—in the best and the worst of ways. Such an interest does not fit neatly into the discipline of architecture, which is my background, nor of urban design, urban planning or landscape architecture. Instead it entails a slippage between categories, a crossing of boundaries as regularly as we do in everyday life. I write from a context of teaching architecture and urban design in a university and therefore with a view to the task of designing places. It has always seemed to me that this task is, in a small way, to literally ‘change the world’. But whose interests prevail in this practice of ‘changing the world’? What do justice, democracy or liberation mean with regard to built form? What does ‘change’ mean in a world that is transforming in a bewildering range of ways which often seem both destructive and inevitable. The task of changing the world requires more than a capacity to climb on, or under, the Juggernaut.

Architecture and urban design are the most contradictory of practices—torn between a radically optimistic belief in the creation of the new, and a conservative acceptance of the prevailing order. Architects and urban designers engage with the articulation of dreams—imagining and constructing a ‘better’ future in someone’s interest. This optimistic sense of creative innovation largely defines the design professions which are all identified with constant change. Yet architecture is also the most conservative of practices. This conservatism stems from the fundamental inertia of built form as it ‘fixes’ and ‘stabilizes’ the world—space is deployed to stabilize time. It is this antinomous quality—coupling imaginative innovation with a stabilizing conservatism—that makes the interpretation of place so interesting yet problematic.

This book also arises from a certain tension between academic and public discourse. Social theory has turned its attention towards spatial issues in a major way since the 1980s and scholars such as Foucault, Derrida, Eagleton, Giddens,
Lefebvre, Habermas, Bourdieu and Harvey are widely cited in architectural discourse. Yet these theorists rarely write about the specifics of built form and the ways in which their work is applied to design practice, and public debate is generally superficial. Theory can be used as a form of insulation from the world as easily as a tool of engagement. How does such theory help us to engage in the invention of the future? How does one articulate the ‘public interest’ or decode the meaning of the latest grand project for a public audience? What, if anything, is wrong with another shopping mall, suburban enclave, theme park or corporate tower? The bridge between theory and built forms, between academic dialect and public debate, is crucial to the task of changing the world.

I shall focus primarily on issues of coercion, seduction and authority in built form, addressing only indirectly issues of empowerment and liberation. This negative focus, however, is not an exercise in pessimism. It is infused with an optimistic desire to see the potency and exhilaration of place experience deployed in the public interest. The impulse towards such a role for architecture and urban design is quite rightly strong among design students. Many of the current movements and ‘isms’ of design can be seen in light of the attempt to bypass or resist the appropriations of the market and political power. ‘Rationalism’, ‘archetypalism’, ‘critical regionalism’, ‘community design’, deconstruction and the various retreats into ‘gallery architecture’ or cyberspace can all be so construed. As will become apparent, I reserve both respect and scepticism for most of these movements. However, I have a primary aim to disturb any illusion of autonomy from the mediations of power. The world of architecture and urban design is saturated with struggles over the meaning and use of places. I suggest there is no way around such issues, only ways into them. As human interests are more clearly articulated so are the possibilities for new forms of design and discourse. What follows is a critique born of the desire to clear a space for the realization of dreams; and for a more rigorous debate over whose dreams get realized.
Partners are usually left until last but Sandy Gifford has been an astute, tolerant and loving critic whose contribution to this work has been fundamental. Tony King and Tom Markus generously agreed to launch the Architext series with this book and have been incisive and challenging with their comments. While their contribution has been vital, they are not responsible for the views expressed herein. Ross King and Quentin Stevens have supplied highly useful critiques of an early draft. Karen Franck has long encouraged the project, supplying numerous references and lively responses. Clare Cooper Marcus has been a long-standing support and inspiration.

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I would also like to acknowledge the influences of place. Inasmuch as there can be any such thing as a ‘place of liberation’, Berkeley was such for me as a graduate student in the early 1980s. If some of these ideas were inspired there, they have been sharpened since by the politics of placemaking in Melbourne—a place at the ‘edge’ of the world in several senses.

Some of these chapters have appeared in earlier versions: Chapter 2 appeared in *Evolving Environmental Ideals* (M. Gray (ed.) (1997) Stockholm: IAPS

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The most successful ideological effects are those that have no words, and ask no more than complicitous silence.

Bourdieu (1977:188)

Architecture and urban design ‘frames’ space, both literally and discursively. In the literal sense everyday life ‘takes place’ within the clusters of rooms, buildings, streets and cities that we inhabit. Action is structured and shaped by walls, doors and windows, framed by the decisions of designers. As a form of discourse, built form constructs and frames meanings. Places tell us stories; we read them as spatial text. The idea of ‘framing’ contains this ambiguity. Used as a verb, to ‘frame’ means to ‘shape’ things, and also to ‘enclose’ them in a border—like a mirror or picture. As a noun, a ‘frame’ is an established ‘order’ and a ‘border’. ‘Framing’ implies both the construction of a world and of a way of seeing ourselves in it—at once picture and mirror. In each of these senses, the design of built form is the practice of ‘framing’ the places of everyday life. A frame is also a ‘context’ which we relegate to the taken for granted. Built form can ‘frame’ its subject in a place where not all is what it seems—as in a ‘frame-up’. Through both these literal and discursive framings, the built environment mediates, constructs and reproduces power relations. The ambiguities of ‘framing’ reflect those of the nexus between place and practices of power. This difficult nexus is the subject of this book.

This nexus of built form with power is, at one level, a tautological truth—place creation is determined by those in control of resources. Placemaking is an inherently elite practice. This does not suggest that built form is inherently oppressive. However, it does suggest that places are necessarily programmed and designed in accord with certain interests—primarily the pursuit of amenity, profit, status and political power. The built environment reflects the identities, differences and struggles of gender, class, race, culture and age. It shows the interests of people in empowerment and freedom, the interests of the state in social order, and the private corporate interest in stimulating consumption. Because architecture and urban design involve transformations in the ways we frame life, because design is the imagination and production of the future, the field cannot claim autonomy from the politics of social change. Such a rejection of autonomy entails no suggestion of determinism. The relations of architecture
to social behaviour are complex and culturally embedded interactions. Like the frame of a painting or the binding of a book, architecture is often cast as necessary yet neutral to the life within. Most people, most of the time, take the built environment for granted. This relegation of built form to the unquestioned frame is the key to its relations to power. The more that the structures and representations of power can be embedded in the framework of everyday life, the less questionable they become and the more effectively they can work. This is what lends built form a prime role as ideology. It is what Bourdieu calls the ‘complicitous silence’ of place as a framework to life that is the source of its deepest associations with power.

Any study of the framings of ‘place’ at a range of scales entails engagement with a range of audiences and paradigms of knowledge. The practices of architecture and urban planning have taken divergent routes and adopted different paradigms of knowledge since the late 1960s. After a brief flirtation with the social sciences, architecture has returned decisively to a formal aesthetic paradigm. Urban planning, which began in physical planning, has progressively retreated from spatial design to build a base in social theory and urban studies. Yet this has never been a complete or satisfactory separation and has led to a revitalization of urban design as the bridge between paradigms. If I slip rather easily between references to ‘architecture’, ‘urban design’ and ‘built form’, it is because the boundaries between them are slippery, and because we all slip easily between them in everyday life.

Any study of ‘place’ also entails a bridging of interest across different academic paradigms—particularly the fields and sub-fields of cultural studies (based in post-structuralist critique) and human-environment studies (with a humanist and empirical base). There is no singular methodological position or school of thought on which this work is based. This is a key starting point which deserves some comment. One of the important and liberating lessons of the postmodern movement has been the recognition of difference; the end of singular and privileged ‘metanarratives’ (Lyotard 1984). The proliferation of paradigms of knowledge seems to reflect such a condition. Yet a cursory observation of the internecine battles within these fields and sub-fields would indicate that this lesson has not gone too far. A radical acceptance of difference entails exploring the relations between incommensurable methodologies and interpretations. While rigorous refutation is necessary for the development of theory, the deployment of different and even incommensurable paradigms of knowledge is at once necessary and enlightening. This does not entail collapsing them into newly totalizing metanarratives. Rather, it is a recognition that different knowledges, soundly based within their own paradigms, may be useful to a multiplicitous understanding of built form.

Such a pluralism is especially necessary to the task of this book. It is the very multiplicitous nature of the mediations of power in place that make this pluralism necessary. There are three primary intellectual paradigms which I shall draw upon: spatial syntax analysis, discourse analysis and phenomenology. There is no suggestion that these critiques, of spatial program, representation and
everyday experience respectively, are discrete or unified forms of inquiry. Indeed
the intersections between them are often most interesting. I would suggest that
the cutting edge of theory is to be found between such fields of thought—where
text, place and program intersect.

I realize that such pluralism leaves many kinds of readers uncomfortable—
phenomenologists, cultural studies and spatial syntax folk alike. It is an aim to disturb
these categories a little, to undermine singular viewpoints. In the later chapters I shall
slide between methodologies, seamlessly at times, with a view to revealing the tensions
between them and the opportunities for multiplicitous interpretation. The aim is to
show that the practices of power as mediated in built form are multi-dimensional, they
cannot be simply addressed as forms of representation, lifeworld experiences or spatial
structure; rather places are constructed, experienced and understood within the tension
between these paradigms.

The book begins with theory and proceeds to interpretations of specific
places and project types. The first part, ‘Frames of theorization’, briefly outlines
some theoretical frameworks and deals first with the use (and misuse) of the
concept of ‘power’. It defines some terms and lays the ground for a more specific
‘manipulation’ and ‘legitimation’. These concepts are linked to a set of oppositional
dimensions, along which it is argued such practices are mediated in space. Chapter
2 explores the spatial programming of buildings based on the social theories of
Giddens, Bourdieu and Foucault, coupled with methods of spatial analysis.
Giddens’s structuration theory suggests that spatialized practices of power can
be modelled as enabling and constraining relations between ‘structure’ and
‘agency’. Bourdieu’s theory of the habitus suggests that the built environment
constructs the real as spatial ideology—a congruence between the ‘division’ of
space and our ‘vision’ of the world Foucault’s work suggests that modern power
is a dispersed set of micro-practices, many of which operate through the
normalizing gaze of surveillance regimes. Spatial practices construct subjects
employing architecture as disciplinary technology. As a means of analyzing modes
of control through spatial segmentation I have adapted methods of spatial syntax
analysis of building plans developed by Bill Hillier. Such analysis maps the ‘social
logic’ of architecture to reveal ideology embedded in architectural genotypes.

Chapter 3 explores the theoretical bases for interpreting architecture and
urban design in terms of representation. Much of it stems from the discursive
turn in social theory which seeks to problematize the relation of language to
reality. The human ‘agent’ is in this sense replaced by the ‘subject’ who is enmeshed
and constructed in discourse. Forms of discourse and representation can construct
desires, joys, fears and identities; oppositions between the normal and the deviant.
Truth-effects are produced in representation, social constructions become the
‘real’. Important here is the early work of Barthes in the construction of mythology,
the manner in which arbitrary meanings are naturalized and the discourse of
power is rendered benign. This chapter proceeds to a critique of deconstruction
and the complicities of built form in what I term the ‘meaning market’.
Chapter 4 proceeds to an account of theories of ‘place’. These begin in phenomenology—the lived-space of the body and a certain ontology of dwelling stemming from the work of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger. However, the meanings of place are always social constructions—the primacy of the lived must be reconciled with its ideological framings. Lefebvre and Harvey are useful guides in this task. Place experience is infused with a range of dialectic tensions—vertical/horizontal; inside/outside; local/global; and appropriation/expropriation. And understandings of place require that we reconcile theories of action and representation, program and text.

Part II on ‘Centres of power’ involves interpretation of three cities and three forms of power in space. Chapter 5, ‘Take your breath away’, explores the Nazi use of architecture and urban design, well known for its monumental neo-classical nostalgia. This narrative suggests that such spatial propaganda was marked more by instrumental eclecticism than by style, deploying the combined effects of a range of themes which will have echoes in other chapters to follow. Chapter 6, ‘Hidden power’, is an account of the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square in Beijing. Constructed as the antithesis of the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square is the largest open space in urban history, a signifier of ‘liberty’ and a representation of the ‘people’. Its meanings and global visibility were then mobilized for purposes of resistance in 1989. Tiananmen shows the possibilities of semantic inversion and the inseparability of spatial practices and representations; meanings and uses are never guaranteed. Chapter 7 traces the architectural framings of parliamentary democracy from Westminster through its reproduction in two Australian parliament buildings. It shows how practices of parliamentary debate were framed, reproduced, exported and adapted. The new Australian Parliament House juxtaposes the semiotics of democracy with the practices of autocracy. Parliamentary democracy becomes a spectacle wherein ‘tourists’ displace ‘citizens’.

Part III of the book, ‘Global types’, explores the framing of places in everyday life, using examples of development types which are becoming increasingly global—the corporate office tower, shopping mall and suburban house/enclave respectively. The examples here emanate primarily from Australia and North America—wealthier parts of the capitalist world. Similar developments have and are proliferating in Europe, South America and South-East Asia. Chapter 8, ‘Tall storeys’, explores the meaning of the corporate office tower through the lens of its advertising. The successful corporate tower offers corporate identity, authenticity and authority. It embodies metaphors of strength, stature and strategy, of physical dominance translating into financial domination. Its quest for symbolic capital destroys the values it seeks in a form of ‘creative destruction’. Symbolic capital is not so much created as it is moved around from one temporary landmark to another. Chapter 9, ‘Inverted city’, is an interpretation of the suburban shopping mall as a form of urban inversion. As a collective dream world of mass culture, the mall at once captures and inverts the urban. It is a realm of relative shelter, safety, order and predictability which is semantically and structurally severed from the city. The particularities of place and time are displaced and fragmented as the mall frames sites for the free play of meaning,
a habitat within which we learn to consume. The mall seeks permanent festivity; it is
carnival minus community, economic excess without behavioural abandon, an illusion
of urban civic life. Chapter 10, ‘ Domestic dreaming ’, explores the meaning of the
suburban dream house and enclave. Model houses display an ideal world which is a
mirror in which a suburban subject is constructed and in which we can read the
suburban condition and its cultural values. The house plans reveal genotypes which
reflect and reproduce ideologies of family life—the mediation of age, gender and class
relations. The nostalgic linking of the ideal home to an unchanging past reflects both
a desire for escape and for ontological security in an uncertain world. Many of these
structures and meanings are writ large in the gated enclave—a retreat in both space
and time to a purified ‘community’.

Part IV of the book proceeds to more personal interpretations of specific
localities. Chapter 11, ‘ On the move ’, is about the politics of placemaking in
Melbourne, a city reinventing itself with dramatic forms of urban spectacle to
meet a global market. Public icons mixing civic boosterism with political
legitimation are deployed as logos for a corporate state and as cover for a decline
in democracy. Chapter 12, ‘ Rust and irony ’, is a personal narrative which explores
the dual nature of place/power as both liberation and oppression. Rottnest Island
was a prison which became a holiday camp and then a luxury enclave; where
military space enabled liberation; where the vicissitudes of history opened spaces
for the imagination. This is a story of the contingencies and ironies of place
experience; of the mutability of meaning and the perils of determinism.

In the afterword I open up the question of a liberating design practice—the
dream which has long prevailed as a guiding narrative in architecture and urban
design. This issue is explored through the interpretation of four places, each
driven by such imperatives yet caught in the complicities of power. Such complicity
is the condition of environmental design. As the invention of the future, practices
of placemaking are inherently political. Architecture and urban design are highly
social arts wherein the task is to link aesthetic imagination to the public interest.
‘Community architecture’ is, in a sense, a tautology. Is there any architecture
which exists outside the ‘common’ interest? The academic task is to make clear
whose interests are served. This may produce a certain pessimism in those whose
passion it is to avoid engagement with the ‘meaning market’ or the
instrumentalizing functions of the program. I can only suggest that this is a
temporary condition born of the collapse of illusion. Beyond lie more interesting
and diverse forms of both theory and practice.

This text cannot stand outside the power relations and theories that it
addresses. Languages of representation are primary tools in the practices of power.
Like built form, language is a structure which both reproduces and frames our
experience. As Heidegger (1962) put it, language is the ‘house of Being’. Language
is slippery, subject always to shifting social constructions, to Derrida’s (1974) play
of differance. While I accept Derrida’s arguments, I am also compelled by
Habermas’s (1971) view that systematically distorted communication is a primary
tool of power. In writing this material I have felt persistently torn between two
desires. The first is an enlightenment desire to uncover the practices of power/place relations and construct general theory. The second is the post-structuralist desire to pay attention to the specificities, slippages, doubts and differences. I write from within this problematic. This is no easy task because each of these tendencies creates the space for new and destructive practices of power.

To generalize is to totalize and repress difference. Yet the rug-pulling, neologisms and paren(theses) of post-structuralist critique can be equally complicit with new currents of power and can embody new forms of closure. The retreat into private dialects which characterizes much current discourse often says more about the struggles between fields of discourse than it does about the subject in question. It divides its readership into those who are willing and able to follow in such an intellectual retreat, immunized against attack from those who are not.

I find much of this move towards private dialects unnecessary and disempowering and I shall avoid it where possible. To the extent that theories of power in architecture and urban design become intellectual enclaves, they also become ineffective in public debate. This is a particular problem for this book which attempts to weave together the range of methodologies, each of which has its dialect. While there is a good deal of what I would call necessary jargon, my goal is to use the simplest possible language consistent with rigour. I am inspired in this matter by the work of Berger, who writes:

One does not look through writing onto reality—as through a clean or dirty window-pane. Words are never transparent. They create their own space, the space of experience, not that of existence...Clarity, in my view, is the gift of the way space, created by words in a given text, is arranged. The task of arranging this space is not unlike that of furnishing and arranging a home. The aim is similar: to accommodate with ease what belongs there and to welcome those who enter. There are hospitable and inhospitable writings. Hospitality and clarity go together. (J.Berger 1992:241–242)

My aim then is to be hospitable to a broad range of critiques and audiences, to let theoretical differences co-exist. Indeed I believe that it is in the friction between paradigms that a good many insights are to be discovered.

This book has a critical tone, focusing on the most problematic mediations of power in place. However, there is no intended implication either that there is anything wrong per se with the nexus of place with power, or that there is some ideal form of placemaking which operates outside such framing processes. The design of built form is intrinsically hinged to issues of power precisely because it is the imagination and negotiation of future worlds. The invention of the future will always be contentious and places will always mediate power relations. I have no firm prescription for how designers should practice, except that they should not do so with heads inserted in sand. The hope is that a greater transparency of the practices of power can lead to more imaginative, liberating and empowering placemaking practices.
Part I

Frames of Theorization
Chapter 1: Power

Power is one of the splendours of man that is eminently prone to evil.

*Ricoeur (1965:255)*

DEFINING POWER

The term ‘power’ is widely used, and misused, in a rather global manner to refer to a variety of different capacities and effects. I want to try to avoid this through a short analysis of ‘power’ as a concept. The term derives from the Latin potere, ‘to be able’ – the capacity to achieve some end. Yet power in human affairs generally involves control ‘over’ others. This distinction between ‘power to’ and ‘power over’, between power as capacity and as a relationship between people, is fundamental to all that follows (Isaac 1992:47; Pred 1981). But it is the former of these which is primary. According to Rorty (1992:2) ‘Power is the ability...to define and control circumstances and events so that one can influence things to go in the direction of one’s interests’. The ‘capacity’ to imagine, construct and inhabit a better built environment is what we mostly mean by empowerment here. The capacity to appropriate a room, choose a house, walk to a beach or criticize an urban design scheme are all forms of empowerment. When we say that someone is empowered, we mean their capacity to act is increased. Empowerment is linked with ‘autonomy’ and ‘freedom’, both of which imply a ‘liberation’ from arbitrary forms of power over us. The primacy of power as capacity stems from the fact that power over others has a parasitic relation with power as capacity (Isaac 1992:41). Power over others is largely driven by the desire to harness the capacities of others to one’s own empowerment. These two forms of power, as capacity and relationship, are reciprocal. Yet power as capacity is both the source and the end of this relation.

In everyday life we tend to notice power over while power to is taken-for-granted. This creates the illusion that power over is somehow primary—an illusion which suggests an opposition between power and emancipation. Yet emancipation is precisely a form of empowerment. Oppression and liberation are the two sides of the power coin. While the power to is the primary form of power, linked to empowerment, one person’s empowerment can be another’s oppression.
And power over others can be used for their empowerment. To define power primarily in terms of power over others is a category mistake which constructs a zero-sum game wherein every loss in power is another’s gain. There is a fundamentally important materialist sense in which the struggle for resources is a zero-sum game; space is a finite resource and design is a cake-slicing operation. Yet the exercise of power over can diminish or increase the total power to as resource. In this sense the practice of power is not a zero-sum game.

Power is both positive and negative, it both liberates and oppresses. While my attention will focus on the contentious forms of power over, power to remains the primary form. It is this positive and primary notion of power as the human capacity to imagine and create a better built environment that drives the arguments of this book.

FORMS OF POWER ‘OVER’

‘Power over’ is the power of one agent (or group) over another, the power to ensure the compliance of the other with one’s will. There are many concepts which are partially synonymous with power in this regard, and the distinctions between them are important. For my purposes I want to consider some distinctions between force, coercion, manipulation, seduction and authority.¹

‘Force’ is the overt exercise of power which strips the subject of any choice of non-compliance. Typical examples in built form include all kinds of enforced spatial confinement (prisons and institutions of incarceration) and of enforced spatial exclusion (the medieval fortress; the housing enclave; locks, bars and walls). The use of force in built form is common since all walls, doors, fences and security devices which prevent access enforce spatial practice in this rather obvious manner. Force is a limited form of power since it can prevent action more easily than it can create it.

‘Coercion’ can be defined as the threat of force to secure compliance. It may be construed as a latent kind of force. Coercion is more effective than overt force because it operates under the cover of voluntarism. It gains its power from implied sanctions, which often prevent the subject from ever forming any intention of resistance. When the subject anticipates the exercise of force and acts accordingly, power remains latent. Coercion operates through built form in at least three main ways.

The first of these may be termed ‘domination’ or ‘intimidation’—where the forms of architecture, urban design and spatial behaviour can signify a threat of force. Guards of ‘honour’, military parades and ‘armed response’ signs are overt signifiers of latent force. Public monuments often use the memory of a past use of force by the state to signify such future possibility. Spatial domination through exaggerated scale or dominant location can belittle the human subject as it signifies the power necessary to its production.

Yet there are far more subtle forms of spatial coercion linked to the Latin root coercere, ‘to surround’. For Weinstein, organizational control of space is a form of coercion:
Coercion consists in transforming private, communal, group or cultural spaces into organizational spaces in which people perform actions directed towards the fulfilment of another’s plan, or refrain from performing actions subversive of the realization of another’s plan.

(Weinstein 1972:69)

The built environment frames everyday life by offering certain spaces for programmed action, while closing other possibilities. In a myriad of ways every day we avoid those behaviours and boundaries that we believe will be met with force. Most forms of spatial surveillance and control are coercive in this sense, but to label these forms of spatial control ‘coercion’ is not necessarily to imply sinister motives. While spatial coercion may be clear in intentional terms, in practice there is no clear line between necessary and problematic forms of spatial order.

One of these is ‘manipulation’ —a form of coercion which operates primarily by keeping the subject ignorant. The exercise of power is made invisible to its subject and the possibility of resistance is thereby removed (Wrong 1979). The subject is ‘framed’ in a situation which may resemble free choice, but there is a concealment of intent. A common example from architecture and urban design occurs when representations of design projects are distorted to produce a form of ‘manipulated consent’ by ignorant participants.

Barnes argues that coercion requires both knowledge and ignorance, it is most effective when its subjects are ‘well aware of the direct connection between their behaviour and possible sanctions, but unaware of the longer range indirect connections by which their (compliant) behavior...helps to constitute and sustain the feedback of coercion and sanctioning that controls them’ (Barnes 1988:101). The organization of time and space to mediate social interaction, particularly the visibility and invisibility of others, becomes crucial to effective practices of coercion. The fragmentation of space and time, the loss of a sense of orientation and history, can be conducive to coercive control. Its subjects, according to Barnes (1988:101), ‘should live as atoms, wholly in the public realm, under surveillance, but as far as possible without social relationships’.

‘Seduction’ is a practice which manipulates the interests and desires of the subject. This is a highly sophisticated form of ‘power over’ hinged to the constructions of desire and self-identity, and with significant implications for the built environment. As Lukes (1974) writes:

Is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial?

(Lukes 1974:2, emphases added)
My emphases here are intended to link with the manner in which built form shapes perception and cognition. It structures the taken-for-granted spatial order in a manner that we often see as natural and unchangeable.

There is nothing necessarily sinister about this—all architecture both constructs and meets certain desires. All architectural representation constructs images of nature and order, shapes imagined futures. Seduction carries the implication that desire has been manipulated and that we indulge such desire against our real interest. Thus the concept of seduction rests upon a distinction between ‘real’ and ‘perceived’ interests. Yet this is a highly problematic distinction since it implies that the subject cannot judge their own interests. From what position can one suggest that the pleasure is not real? Architecture necessarily plays upon our desires, the task is to understand rather than to eradicate its seductive capacities.

‘Authority’ is a form of ‘power over’ which is integrated with the institutional structures of society—primarily the state, private corporation and family. Authority is marked by the absence of argument, it relies on an unquestioned recognition and compliance. Based on socially acknowledged rights and obligations, authority is the most pervasive, reliable, productive and stable form of power. It embodies the power to circumvent argument and to frame the terms of reference of any discussion. Yet authority rests upon a base of ‘legitimation’ (Arendt 1986:65). Legitimation is what connects authority to the ‘public interest’. We recognize authority as legitimate because it is seen to serve a larger interest; in the case of the state this is the public interest. Yet legitimation is one of the means by which might is transformed into right (Wrong 1979); the inefficient exercise of force is transformed into unquestioned authority.

The key linkage to built form here is that authority becomes stabilized and legitimised through its symbols. These trappings of authority are important forms of legitimation which become crucial to the exercise of authority (Olsen 1993:33). The symbols of authority are institutionally embedded—from the family house to the corporation tower and the public buildings or urban designs of the state. Rituals, ceremonies and symbolic displays are often a means by which state authority is reproduced under the cover of diplomacy. Such ritual displays have a contradictory capacity to affirm violence and wealth as the base of power at the same time as they affirm friendship and solidarity (Barnes 1988). Buildings and urban designs are often integrated with such rituals and ceremonies. For the state, as Kertzer (1988) suggests, symbolic ritual is much more than window dressing since the nation-state is invisible and its authority would evaporate without the imagery of legitimation. Symbolic ritual enables the collapsing of disparate meanings into a form of political solidarity in the absence of consensus. Rituals of legitimation are powerful because one cannot argue with them—they are the way things are done, the way the ‘real’ is constructed.

While it is important to distinguish between these different forms of power, such practices rarely appear in isolation. The most problematic buildings and urban designs are often a complex mix of seduction, authority and coercion. And the exercise of power can move swiftly from one form to another, thereby
masking itself. It is generally in the interest of those in power to hide conflict, and in the interest of the subject to expose it. A large part of the struggle over power is the struggle to make its operations visible, to bring it into a domain where its legitimacy can be tested. As Foucault (1980:86) argues: ‘power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.’ The struggle to make power visible has to deal with the fact that the exercise of power is slippery and ever-changing. Power naturalizes and camouflages itself, chameleon-like, within its context. The choice of the mask is a dimension of power.

The metaphoric content of built form enables it to simultaneously represent and yet mask its associations with power. A metaphor is a figure of discourse where one thing is represented as if it is, and yet simultaneously is not, another. Yet the power of metaphor is linked to its subtlety; it is most powerful when least literal (Ball 1992). Metaphor has the capacity to seduce and legitimize simultaneously while masking these very practices.

Imagination plays a key role in the discourse of power since empowerment implies a capacity to perceive one’s real interests and connect them reliably to an imagined future. As Rorty (1992:13) argues, ‘Imagination is the key to power...it determines the direction of desires’. Or as Machiavelli put it, the public ‘do not truly believe in anything new until they have actual experience of it’ (quoted in Wrong 1979:121). This hints at a crucial role for architects and urban designers as imaginative agents. The capacity to stimulate desire and to enlarge the public imagination can be crucial to the discourses of power.

The discussion above tends to presume that the exercise of ‘power over’ is largely transparent to its agents. Yet for Nietzsche much of what we call civilized life is really a cover for an all-consuming ‘will to power’ (Nietzsche 1968). From this view, which is also rather Machiavellian (Ng 1980), all forms of legitimation are masks for the individual ‘will’. Because the naked ‘will to power’ cannot be legitimized as an end in itself, either self-deceit or hypocrisy is necessary to the effective pursuit of power (Wrong 1979). Self-deceit is easily the most efficient of the two, generally taking the form of a belief that one’s pursuit of power is really a form of public service. Such self-deceit is what Orwell (1954:171) called ‘doublethink’. A key secret to the success of the Party in ‘1984’ was the capacity to hold contradictory beliefs, to deliberately service one agenda while justifying it with another. From a psychological viewpoint Greenwald (1980) argues that the ego operates rather like a totalitarian information control strategy, servicing itself with propaganda in order to maintain control.

The issue of self-deceit has considerable importance for aesthetic discourse. The Nietzschean view is that the aesthetic impulse is founded in the repression of the will to power; art fills the void left by such repression (Eagleton 1990:238). From this view aesthetic experience may be understood as a tension between the hedonistic urge towards the intoxications of power (the Dionysian) and the need to dress such experience in a civilizing facade of purity and order (the Apollonian). Freud posits a similar tension between the ‘pleasure principle’ and
the ‘reality principle’; the pleasure-seeking ‘id’ is in secret collusion with the forces of social order in the ‘superego’ (Eagleton 1990:263).

The nexus between self-aggrandizement and the public interest is particularly complex in public buildings and urban schemes which can serve at once to legitimize authority, gratify the will, turn a profit and reinforce self-deceit. Many interests intersect in the production of built form and they are difficult to unravel. When confronted with arguments about damage to the public interest, architects often seem genuinely offended and deny the importance of political, commercial or personal imperatives.

Self-deceit is a necessary condition to a large range of practices of power and it also afflicts the subjects of oppression. Subjection to unjust authority is inherently distasteful and there is some comfort in the belief that such authority is legitimate (Wrong 1979:121). For the powerless to resist authority means the exposure of conflict, raising the risk of further marginalization and repression (Airaksinen 1992: 117). To remain docile and invisible is a safer choice but it is also a form of co-operation which is nourished by self-deceit.

Those with and without power both have a need for legitimation, but such needs are in a curious inverse relation. The need for legitimation increases as power becomes totalizing; as Wrong (1979:111) puts it, the ‘more absolute the power, the greater the need to believe that the power holder observes self-imposed restraints’. Authority with high levels of legitimation, institutional power which is highly secure, has less need for the trappings of power. Authority relies on legitimizing symbols in proportion to the vulnerability of that authority. This is precisely why monarchies, dictatorships and military states are so full of monuments, parades and ritual strutting—the demand for legitimation exceeds that in a democracy. And these forms of legitimation service the self-deceit of powerful and powerless alike.

There is a complex dialectic whereby overt expressions of power in space tend toward an inverse relation to the security of that power. This is evident in the *nouveau riche* phenomenon of the grand house which attempts to turn new money into social status. It is often the new corporations which attempt the same thing in office towers. Milne (1981) argues in this vein that the Parthenon was in part a legitimizing gesture linked to the threat to Athens from the Peloponnesian War. Likewise the construction of New Delhi coincided with the decline of British colonial power in India (King 1976; Vale 1992). And the recent Australian Parliament House was in part a response to a constitutional crisis (see Chapter 7). The symbolic legitimation of state authority may be linked to the periodic legitimation ‘crises’ which Habermas (1975) suggests afflict the capitalist state on a periodic basis. Such crises occur when subjects of authority lose faith in its fairness. The system then tends to correct itself, perhaps reorganizing power at one level to preserve it at another. As authority weakens its trappings are renewed. The capacity of buildings to symbolize a ‘grounding’ of authority in landscape and nature means that architecture is regularly called on to legitimize power in a crisis.

This linkage of legitimizing gestures to vulnerability is paralleled by another
paradox—oppressive forms of authority can seem more oppressive as their effective authority weakens because the need for self-deceit also weakens (Wrong 1979:111). Writing about democracy, De Tocqueville long ago observed:

When inequality of condition is the common law of society, the most marked inequalities do not strike the eye; when everything is nearly on the same level, the slightest are marked enough to hurt it. Hence the desire for equality always becomes more insatiable in proportion as equality is more complete.

(quoted in Hughes 1994:14)

As self-legitimizing docility evaporates, possibilities of resistance can emerge. The storming of the Bastille was an act of high symbolism (with no functional value) which dramatically marked the collapse of legitimacy of the French state. But similar dialectic shifts in perceptions of legitimacy are apparent in many smaller forms of resistance to authority.

**MEDIATING ‘POWER OVER’**

Power is not lodged inertly in built form. Force, coercion, domination, manipulation, seduction and authority are forms of everyday practice which are inevitably mediated by built form. Such mediations are inherently complex and multi-dimensional and as a beginning I suggest the following set of dimensions of place/power mediations. These dimensions do not constitute a theory and they should not be read as deterministic. They are dimensions along which the dialectics of power in places are played out.

- **Orientation/disorientation** Built form can orient, disorient and reorient its subjects through the spatial framings of everyday life. It constructs a cognitive map through which we imagine our world and give it our attention.

- **Publicity/privacy** Built form segments space in a manner that places certain kinds of people and action under conditions of surveillance while privileging other kinds of people and action as private.

- **Segregation/access** Boundaries and pathways can segregate places by status, gender, race, culture, class and age, creating privileged enclaves of access, amenity and community.

- **Nature/history** Built form inevitably uses metaphor and constructs mythology through a politics of representation. Historically constructed meanings can be ‘naturalized’ to legitimate authority.
• **Stability/change** Built form produces illusions of permanence, of a stable social order, of the impossibility of change. Likewise, images of dynamism and innovation can produce illusions of progress.

• **Authentic/fake** We inhabit a world saturated with simulacra and representation. The quest for authenticity is a quest for authority, **enmeshed in issues of power**.

• **Identity/difference** Places symbolize socially constructed identities and differences—of persons, cultures, institutions and nations. The politics of identity and difference is mediated in an arena of spatial representation and the inertia of buildings can ‘fix’ identity over time.

• **Dominant/docile** A dominant built mass or volume signifies the control over resources necessary to its production. Relative scale in mass or volume, cannot be divorced from discourses of domination and intimidation.

• **Place/ideology** The experience of place has the capacity to move us deeply, to ‘ground’ our being, to open the question of ‘spirit’. Yet the very potency of place experience renders it particularly vulnerable to the ideological appropriations of power.

Hydra was the nine-headed water serpent who infested the marshes of Greek mythology and was slain by Hercules. Yet for every head severed, two more appeared. Power, like the hydra-headed serpent, has many sources and faces. Its practices and mediations are fluid, slippery and hidden. Like the faces of the serpent, the dimensions above are those I detect. Yet there is no Hercules nor any firm ground outside the marsh upon which to stand. We are all immersed in these practices of power and we must learn to deal with the instability.
Chapter 2: Program

How are power relationships mediated through spatial programming? In this chapter I shall examine such a question in relation to the social theories of Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault. The focus here is on issues of spatial practice and not representation, a topic on which they each also have a good deal to offer and to which I shall return in later chapters. I shall then link such work to the spatial syntax analysis of Bill Hillier. The aim is a methodological framework for analysing power as mediated by spatial programs.

STRUCTURATION, HABITUS AND GAZE

Giddens’ theory of structuration is based on a differentiation between ‘agency’ and ‘structure’. ‘Agency’ is simply the ‘capacity’ to transform our world. ‘Structures’, on the other hand, are the organized properties of social systems in the form of rules and resources, the frameworks of possibility within which our capacities are realized or not. The relations between structure and agency are primarily those of ‘enabling’ and ‘constraining’. Structure both enables and constrains the forms of agency that are possible. And at the same time structures are constructed by agents.

From this view architecture can be considered as a form of structure, and the social action it ‘frames’ as a form of agency. Architecture evokes and enables certain forms of life while constraining others with both walls and sanctions. Yet Giddens’ notion of structure should not be considered as physical; language is also a form of structure, and speech is a form of agency. Without the structure of syntactic and semantic rules that we call ‘language’, we cannot speak. The structure enables the agency of speech. Yet speech is also constrained by language and its structuring of reality. For Giddens, structure is not simply external to agency; indeed structure has a ‘duality’ wherein it is ‘both the medium and the outcome’ of social practice or agency (Giddens 1979:69). Thus when we speak we simultaneously contribute to the reproduction of the language. This complex interaction of structure and agency is what Giddens calls ‘structuration’.
Giddens gives spatial relations a key role in structuration theory. Spatial structure is one form of structure, and design is one kind of agency. Power is spatialized in the sense that all agency is situated in time/space ‘locales’—kitchens, board meetings, cities, neighbourhoods, lectures and clubs, ‘Locales’ are akin to ‘places’ inasmuch as they are meaningful centres of everyday life. Everyday life is described by Giddens as a serial time/space path, marked by opening and closing brackets in both space and time which define ‘situations’. Thus the ‘board meeting’ is framed temporally by its time-slot and spatially by its entry sequence, enclosure, art works and outlook. Situations are also framed by clusters of rules which help to constitute and regulate activities, defining them as actions of a certain sort and subject to given sanctions. Thus ‘the predictable character of the social world is “made to happen” as a condition and result of the knowledgeable application of rules and resources by actors’ (Giddens 1979:64). Giddens sees issues of privacy, rules about who shares space or crosses paths with whom, as a key to understanding structures of domination in space. Drawing on Goffman (1959) he gives special significance to the spatio-temporal opposition of front and back regions. Locales are places and settings which structure institutionally embedded practices, including practices of power.

Bourdieu’s early work can be seen as parallel to much of Giddens. He wants to understand the practical mastery that people have of their situations in everyday life, constrained as they are by structures which are not of their own choosing. From scholastic philosophy Bourdieu borrows the term *habitus* to refer to the complex net of structured predispositions into which we are socialized at an early age. The sources of this early work are largely architectural—the Berber house and the Gothic cathedral. The *habitus* is a set of practical taxonomies, divisions and hierarchies which are embodied in the everyday lifeworld of experience and action. These divisions of space and time—of objects and actions, of gender and status—are at once forms of ‘habit’ and of ‘habitat’. Thus the *habitus* is embedded in familiar forms of dwelling and the house is a very important ideological construct as the first such *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977). The *habitus* is thus a form of knowledge, a set of structured beliefs about reality. While it is a set of acquired dispositions, it is also necessary to any world view, as Bourdieu (1990a:210) puts it: ‘A vision of the world is a division of the world’. The *habitus* is the way the ‘arbitrary’ is constituted as the ‘real’, culture seen as nature, ideology inscribed in habit and habitat. *Habitus* constructs the sense of one’s ‘place’ in both the social and physical senses:

the *habitus* produces practices and representations which are available for classification. ...Thus the *habitus* implies a ‘sense of one’s place’ but also a ‘sense of the other’s place’. For example, we say of an item of clothing, a piece of furniture or a book: ‘that’s petty-bourgeois’ or ‘that’s intellectual’.

(Bourdieu 1990b:113)
The *habitus* is both the condition for the possibility of social practice and the site of its reproduction. Social practice then is a form of ‘game’, framed within the *habitus* and its rules, which are rarely written but most often learnt through social practice as one develops a ‘feel for the game’. Whether in a meeting, dinner party, playground, beach, lecture, seminar or restaurant, a set of spatio-temporally structured rules operates. The power dimension of the *habitus* derives largely from its thoughtlessness, it operates beneath consciousness. The dominant modes of thought and experience are not cognitively understood but rather internalized and embodied. Bourdieu refers to the dialectical relationship between the body and space as a form of ‘structural apprenticeship’ through which we at once appropriate our world and are appropriated by it: ‘the “book” from which the children learn their vision of the world is read with the body’ (Bourdieu 1977:89) and *habitus* is society written into the body (1990b:63). Everyday life in architectural and urban space is a product of history which produces more history. As Bourdieu (1977:188) puts it in an often used quote: ‘the most successful ideological effects are those that have no words, and ask no more than complicitous silence.’ The ideological effects of built form lie largely in this thoughtless yet necessary complicity.

Foucault argues that fundamental transformations in power relations have taken place since the eighteenth century, linked to the enlightenment and the parallel rise of scientific rationality, the nation-state, modern institutions, capitalism and industrial technologies. For Foucault, the enlightenment, shining its searchlight of knowledge and truth, brings new forms of domination, masquerading as liberty. This is a new knowledge/power regime which requires that we replace the notion of power as a relation of dominance of one person over another with a concept of power dispersed throughout the social body. Such power is not something ‘held’ by agents; rather it constructs ‘subjects’. Power operates through social and spatial practices and is embedded in institutions. It is called ‘disciplinary power’ because it operates through regimes of normalization and the eradication of deviance. It is a ‘bio-power’, since it acts on and through the body to constitute docile subjects. Such power is productive; it produces and harnesses human agency. To Foucault, such power is dispersed and exercised through micro-practices of everyday life where it spreads by a kind of capillary action.

The most important of the spatial micro-practices whereby disciplinary power transforms human beings into subjects is the ‘gaze’, a practice of disciplinary control through asymmetrical visibility. This is at once the gaze of science and of the state, the knowledge/power regime. Foucault speaks of the complicities of architecture in a long elaboration of various techniques that made it possible to locate people, to fix them in precise places, to constrict them to a certain number of gestures and habits’ (Foucault 1988). A normalizing regime is established and the gaze of surveillance controls deviations from it. The easiest way to understand the spatial dimension of Foucault’s work on power is through his account of the growth of disciplinary institutions from the eighteenth century. Around that time he notes that prisons turned their efforts from spectacles of punishment to techniques of
normalization and ‘cure’. The coercion of surveillance began to replace the force of violence. Bentham’s invention of the panoptic prison serves as an ideal for Foucault’s concept of this new form of institutionalized power (Foucault 1979). Not knowing whether a guard is present, the subject must always act as if it were so. Herein lies the key to efficiency, the discipline is self-enforcing, power relations are internalized. Written into spatial relations, power is taken for granted. In one sense the agents of such discipline can see without being seen while the subjects are seen but cannot see (Dandeker 1990). Yet the very notion of ‘agency’ is effaced since the enforcers have scarcely any power and are under surveillance themselves.

Foucault argues that such bodily discipline structured through space/time organization has spread from the early institutions to become a dominant feature of industrial capitalism. It included the partitioning of space according to rank, class and grade along with temporal regulation of ritual, routine and marching in time (Dandeker 1990:25). Such a form of power has major advantages over the force which it often replaces. It drives power underground, makes its operations invisible as it utilizes the subject’s capacities in the task of their own oppression. It is continuous, cheap, decentralized, efficacious, and difficult to target (Fraser 1989). Bio-power holds its subject at a deep biological level, controlling bodily gestures, habits and desires. It disciplines both body and soul.

Foucault’s insights have been profound, yet his conclusions are mostly pessimistic—for instance he would abolish incarceration rather than reform prison design. For Foucault we are more broadly implicated in a kind of internalized ‘fascism’ that infects us all: ‘the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us’ (quoted in Miller 1993:369). Yet if one regards power as a two sided-coin, the ‘will to power’ is not entirely negative. It follows from Foucault that to abolish practices of power in built form is to abolish built form. The important task is to accept the inevitability of mediations of power and to engage with them.

SPATIAL ANALYSIS

While one may usefully explore differences between these three theorists, my interest here is in their complementary contributions and in the overlapping focus on ways in which power relations are embedded in spatial programs. I would suggest a pluralistic epistemology which acknowledges the inhabitants of buildings as both ‘subjects’ and ‘agents’, and seeks to understand the multiple ways in which buildings both empower and disempower.

But how are we to specifically investigate such issues in relation to built form? With some important reservations I believe that methods of space syntax analysis, developed by Hillier and Hanson (1984), are useful for the analysis of programmatic issues of power in architecture. Hillier and Hanson suggest that architectural discourse, with its roots in representational critique, has bypassed a deeper social structuring of architectural space because these structures are not
visible. They seek to uncover deep socio-spatial structures, the ‘genotypes’ of architecture. Genotypes are not formal ‘types’ or ‘archetypes’ as often debated in architecture. Rather they are clusters of spatial segments structured in certain formations with syntactic rules of sequence and adjacency. Genotypes are institutionally and epistemologically embedded. Thus shops, factories, schools, offices, libraries, houses, suburbs will be reproduced from a limited number of spatial genotypes each linked to specific social institutions with forms of knowledge and production. This is the sense in which Hillier and Hanson (1984) suggest that genotypes embody a *Social Logic of Space*.

Beyond such a general recognition of Hillier’s claims I want to adapt one of the methods of space syntax analysis while maintaining some distance from the methodology. The primary form of syntax analysis (gamma analysis) proceeds from a technique of mapping buildings into a cellular structure using the external entry points as a base. The building plan is translated into a structural diagram of how life is framed within it. In Figure 2.1 three similar plans with different doorways yield three quite different syntactic structures. The linear structure is a string of spatial segments in sequence, known in architecture as the enfilade. There is no choice of pathway from one segment to another. The ringy or looped structure is the opposite inasmuch as it connects segments to each other in a network, with multiple choices of pathway. A fan (or branching) structure controls access to a range of spaces from a single segment, like a corridor or hallway. In practice nearly all buildings are structured in combinations of these basic syntactic structures.

Hillier and Hanson identify a range of properties, applying to any syntactic

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**Figure 2.1**

Primary syntactic relations

Based on Hillier and Hanson (1984) and Robinson (1994)
structure and which are argued to be of social significance. First, the ‘depth’ or
‘shallowness’ of any segment from the external entry can be determined, along
with the overall depth of the structure. A deep structure requires the traversing
of many segments. This has implications for how many boundaries and points of
control one crosses in penetrating into the building. In Figure 2.1 the linear
structure is twice as deep as the fan or the ring.

Another key dimension of syntactic analysis is the degree of ‘ringiness’
versus ‘control’. To what extent are spatial segments interconnected by looping
pathways as opposed to being controlled by a linear or branching syntax? The
ringy structure is defined by its multiple and lateral connections, many possible
pathways through it and dispersed control. The linear or fanned structure controls
circulation and social interaction in certain key spaces. The degree of ‘control’ of
a given cell is the degree to which access to other cells must pass through it. Thus
a hallway or foyer which is the only access to a cluster of rooms has a high level
of control over the flow of everyday life. The linear structure produces a spatial
narrative with very strong levels of control in all cells except the deepest. The fan
structure gives access to many segments from a single segment of control. The
looped or ringy structure offers many possible pathways, diverse encounters—
the flow of life through space is only loosely controlled.

According to Hillier and Hanson (1984), spatial syntax structures social
relations of two primary kinds: those between inhabitants (kinship relations or
organizational hierarchies) and those between inhabitants and visitors. For instance,
in the western cultural context, domestic space is primarily segmented along age
and gender lines. Bedrooms separate adults from children, enable sex between
adults and constrain it between children. But the domestic syntax also mediates
relations between those insiders and visitors in spaces such as living, dining and
family areas. However, these spatial mediations are not simple since higher levels
of segmentation and privatism in domestic space also enable increasing levels of
sexual assault and domestic violence to proceed, unconstrained by the social gaze.

A key issue for Hillier and Hanson (1984) is the depth to which visitors are
permitted to penetrate into the structure. Traditionally, the deeper cells of the
structure were occupied by the inhabitants or controllers and the shallower cells
by visitors. Positions of power were then located deep within a tree-like or linear
structure. Traditional centres of power often developed an enfilade of rooms,
framing a spatial narrative through which visitors were led. The depth of the
inhabitant was an indicator of status, and the depth to which visitors were
permitted to penetrate also indicated their status. Figures 2.2 and 2.3 show the
plan and spatial syntax of the ceremonial entry to the palace at Versailles under
Louis XIV, which developed a very deep lineal sequence of cells (R.Berger 1985;
Perouse de Montclos 1991). This building frames a representational narrative as
visitors proceed through the salons of Venus, Mars and Mercury in the approach
to the throne room of the Sun King. The path then turns at the Salon of War
(the ‘turn’ of history) to enter the Gallery of Mirrors, which places the gardens
on display whichever way one turns, the ultimate in prospect and refuge. A
similar sequence for the approach to the queen is mirrored on the other wing of the palace. Like most such deep structures, Versailles had a ‘stage door’ to enable private entry and exit without traversing the deep structure. A very similar syntax can be detected in the English country house as an architecture of power. Girouard (1978) documents how an enfilade with a back entry developed in the seventeenth century and then declined along with the power of the monarchy in the eighteenth.

The relation of power to depth is not simple and a key insight of Hillier and Hanson’s work has been to identify what they call the ‘reversed building’. The syntax of such buildings ‘reverses’ the traditional power relation by locating their powerless ‘visitors’ in the deepest cells within the structure where they are placed under surveillance. This is the structure of Foucault’s disciplinary institutions (prison, hospital, asylum, school and factory) which establish a new kind of interface between controllers...
and visitors, linked to new forms of knowledge and practice. Hillier and Hanson’s work is an advance on Foucault inasmuch as they distinguish between a diversity of reversed buildings and different degrees of reversal. Prisons, hospitals, factories, schools and offices can all have different forms and degrees of institutional control.

The great achievement of spatial syntax analysis has been the interrogation of the plan through which buildings reveal a social ideology embedded in structural genotypes. For Markus (1987) buildings are ‘classifying devices’ which reproduce such classes through the framing of social relations. In general terms he suggests that buildings locate classes of similar status at a similar depth, with their members located one segment deeper. His more recent work (Markus 1993) analyzes the asymmetries of power embedded in a large range of institutional building types emerging from 1750 to 1850: town halls, baths, markets, libraries, galleries, schools, factories, prisons, hospitals and asylums. While the mapping of these genotypes is historically important, Markus also raises theoretical issues relevant to further work. Drawing upon Gorz (1989), he suggests that social relations in buildings can be construed along an opposition of power versus bonding. ‘Power’ is here construed as a form of constraint; ‘bonding’ is about love, friendship and solidarity—a liberating and possibly subversive unity of interest. From this view buildings both embody and reproduce various distributions of power, and they can affirm or deny the development of bonding:

Spaces can be so linked that communication is free and frequent, making possible dense encounters between classes, groups and individuals. These are the basis for community, friendship and solidarity. The alternative is controlled movement, under surveillance, for narrowly defined purposes of production...buildings always have double meanings in making concrete both power and bonds.

(Markus 1993:25)

I suggest that Markus is right to theorize this tension between the quest for control and freedom, and to suggest that a ringy syntax is one condition of solidarity. Yet as Markus points out in relation to the airport terminal, buildings are increasingly called upon to produce an illusion of freedom, solidarity and liberation, coupled with the reality of control, manipulation and surveillance. And the ringy syntax of the open plan office and school can be interpreted as new forms of control (Hillier and Hanson 1984:195). As I shall show in Chapter 9, the deep ringy structure of the private shopping mall is conducive to certain forms of pseudo-solidarity framed by the instrumental imperatives of consumption. The deterministic conflation of physical enclosure with social constraint, or of open space with liberty, is a dangerous move. An open syntax can operate as a powerful signifier of solidarity and democracy in the absence of the practice.

A few words are in order with regard to the ways in which I have used spatial syntax methods in this book, and about the status of the spatial analysis diagrams. Hillier’s work is at times highly difficult to understand. This is a language
of ‘distributed’ and ‘non-distributed’ structures which reveal ‘integration’ values measured by a formula for ‘relative asymmetry’ with evidence in the form of complex mathematical tables. Hillier’s more recent book (1996a) extends his arguments, transforming the modernist metaphor of architecture as a ‘machine for living’ and applying it to the analysis of the effects of spatial structure on social behaviour. His work has gained increasing currency in fields of practice such as the programming of large facilities, urban design (Hillier 1996b; Hillier et al. 1993) and crime control (Hillier 1988). However, it is widely regarded within the design professions as positivist, determinist and a return to the ‘scientific’ approaches of the 1960s (Holyoak 1996). Much of such disparagement stems from the inaccessibility of the work, a rather blind anti-determinism and a pursuit of formal issues to the exclusion of program.

I believe that such disparagement is wrong and that spatial syntactic analysis is a major advance in our understanding of spatial structure. However, I would also suggest some important limits. While cellular analysis is not the only method of syntactic spatial analysis it is the primary one for interior space, which is presumed to be fundamentally cellular: ‘by and large, a building consists of well-defined spaces with well-defined links from one to the other’ (Hillier and Hanson 1984:16). Cellular analysis then enables exact measurement of structural properties to be determined. While the maps of traditional centres of power such as Versailles are relatively unproblematic, many contemporary buildings defy clear segmentation. Many of Hillier’s key insights have been into new open-plan genotypes such as the school, office, factory and hospital, but these insights still rely upon a certain measurable clarity of enclosure and segmentation. How do we generate a social understanding of the spatial syntax of flowing and fragmented spaces which deploy security cameras and new forms of transparency and opacity? What are we to make of trends in architecture which pursue deliberate ambiguities of enclosure, visibility and permeability? Is there scope for a ‘liberation’ from the architecture of ideological control in a systematic disdain for the program or are we encountering new forms of ideology, new spatial genotypes? I would suspect the latter but we shall need methods which can map and clearly communicate the emerging production of space with all its ambiguities, fragmentations and layering of the virtual and the real.

I would not wish to predict the future of syntactic analysis yet I would argue that the more complex its mathematics, the more difficult it becomes to use in design practice. And as technical difficulty increases, so does the danger that such approaches may be appropriated as ‘instrumental reason’ into new practices of power—defended from everyday critique by their technical ‘difficulty’. I am by no means suggesting any such complicity within Hillier’s work, but I am interested in the prospects for its use in practices of empowerment through what Habermas (1984) terms ‘communicative action’.

With this in mind, my use of such methods departs from those of Hillier and his colleagues in some important ways. I do not find the numerical values useful, but I suggest that the diagrams themselves have the potential to reveal
structural properties of ringiness, depth and control in a more immediate manner as a language for communicative action in spatial programming and interpretation. There is an earlier and somewhat parallel precedent for such a view. Christopher Alexander was the leading proponent of mathematical approaches to design methodology in the 1960s with his seminal text ‘Notes on the Synthesis of Form’ (Alexander 1964). Yet in a later preface to this book he rejected the focus on mathematical method in order deal directly with spatial ‘patterns’ as design discourse, a move which led to the well-known ‘pattern language’ (Alexander et al. 1977). With all its problems the pattern language approach to design has had enormous impact largely because of its usefulness as a base for communicative action. This is not the place for a critique of the pattern language (Dovey 1990), yet many of these patterns are fragments of spatial syntax. And a great deal of everyday spatial programming is ‘patterned’ in such a manner. Codes and standards for institutions and building types often incorporate what can be construed as syntax diagrams. Hillier (1996a) himself suggests that his is a non-discursive spatial theory, which does not lend itself to lineal explanation. One primary potential, in my view, lies in the diagrams themselves as modes of communicative action.

My aim in using spatial analysis diagrams is to build some bridges between the different forms of analysis which inform this book—spatial programming, representation and lived experience. The syntax diagrams are useful not only because they reveal a deeper structural program, but also because of the manner in which they structure representational regimes and construct experiences of place. In other words places are framed syntactically; it is necessary to look beyond the form of the plan, to how spatial segments are named and given meaning. To return to the Versailles plan, it is the representational narrative enfilade of planetary rooms which indicates its importance as an approach to power. Neither the representations nor the spatial structure can be privileged here; they operate in an integrated manner. A technically ‘correct’ syntax diagram, including all servant and private access, would be impossibly complex. And it would not show the forms of control and representational framing designed into the building.

It is important to note that the diagrams are not plans, they are designed to reveal depth, ringiness and linearity—the modes of access and control through the spatial structure. Differences in cell size are to facilitate labelling and do not reflect spatial size. Lines occasionally cross to achieve accuracy of depth in multi-storey buildings, they do not indicate points of social encounter. Clusters of cells may be grouped in rounded boxes for purposes of clarity.

Finally, I suggest that there are prospects for basing methods of spatial analysis in the social theories introduced above. What makes space syntax analysis potent as a method is that it maps the ways in which buildings operate as ‘structuring structures’, it maps the \textit{habitus}, the ‘divisions and hierarchies’ between things, persons and practices which construct our vision of the world. Building genotypes are powerful ideological constructs which frame our everyday lives.
They are at once the frames and the texts, in which and from which we learn spatial practices. Our ‘positions’ within buildings lend us our ‘dis-positions’ in social life. The spatial ‘di-vision’ of our world becomes a ‘vision’ of our world. The buildings we inhabit, our habitat, our spatial habits, all reproduce our social world. Syntactic analysis opens up questions—what kinds of agency are enabled and constrained by the particular building genotype within which it is structured? And whose interests are served? How is everyday life ‘bracketed’ and ‘punctuated’ into socio-spatially framed ‘situations’ and ‘locales’? In relation to the gaze, how does architecture frame realms of asymmetric visibility? What regimes of normalization are enforced and in whose interest?

Beyond our position as mute subjects, framed within such genotypes, we are also and at the same time agents producing these programs and structures, changing their forms, uses and meanings. There are lessons here for both disempowerment and empowerment. In this regard there is potential to breathe new life into theories of human-environment interaction as a base for design programming. Studies of privacy, territory, proxemics, cognitive mapping and behaviour settings have all been attempts to develop a humanist base for environmental design research and practice. However, in my view much of the theory developed within the human-environment paradigm has not realized the early promise. For instance, Altman’s (1975) seminally important dialectic model of privacy regulation is thoroughly based in the construction of ‘identity’ through the dialectics of ‘boundary control’. Such theory is saturated with questions of power—who controls which boundaries, constructing which identities and in whose interest? Likewise Rapoport’s nonverbal communication approach shows how effectively architectural settings can be “coded” to produce ‘appropriate’ behaviour (Rapoport 1982). Yet questions remain of how and in whose interest the ‘appropriate’ is framed. Spatial analysis can reveal ways in which built form marks territory, enables and constrains proxemic relations, frames behaviour settings and constructs cognitive maps. And much of the work in these areas could benefit from being situated in relation to recent social theory and their critiques of power relations.

If grounded in a broad range of current social theories, space syntax analysis has the potential to revolutionize architectural programming. The prospect is to build a more critical context within which one might judge the spatial construction and reproduction of social practices. Yet any attempt to transform the practices of spatial programming will have to deal with the fact that designers are generally not in charge of it. Markus (1993:317) argues that there has been an unwritten historical pact formed between the architecture profession and its client groups whereby control over the building program has been traded for control over formal imagery. In other words the architecture profession has defined itself primarily as a practice of representation. This division between formal and functional issues in architecture diminishes the engagement of architects with issues of power. It enables the ‘brief’ to be written in a technical and value-free language, placing its decisions and elisions beyond debate (Markus 1993:152).
This division between form and program is an ideological division which is ultimately untenable. It serves to sustain the illusion that architecture can be practiced in a realm of autonomy from social power. While this division also marks these early chapters it will then disappear. In the experiences of place in everyday life there is no line between the ways our lives are programmed and the meanings of built form.
Chapter 3: Text

I now want to turn to issues of representation in built form, to the ways in which the meanings of places are constructed in text. Such theory stems largely from the discursive turn in social theory and the realization that language is not a transparent medium through which we view the world, rather language constructs the subjectivity of those who use it. This involves a focus on the modes of representation or webs of discourse through which the world is encountered. The central role of the individual as agent of action is thrown into question, as are concepts such as ‘culture’, ‘nature’, ‘identity’, ‘community’, ‘history’ and so on. The ‘human being’ as ‘agent’ is in this sense replaced by the ‘subject’ who is enmeshed and constructed in discourse. Discourse embraces all of the practices through which meanings are communicated, not just speech and writing. The built environment, like food, fashion or film, is a primary form of discourse.

Discourse is entangled in power relations since ‘subjects’ are constructed according to certain interests. These include the interests of the state in maintaining power and social order; private interests in stimulating consumption; and those of dominant classes, cultures and groups in the maintenance of privilege. Forms of discourse and representation construct desires, joys, fears and identities. They construct oppositions between the normal and the deviant. Truth-effects are produced in representation, the ‘real’ becomes a social construction.

MYTH

The work of Roland Barthes on the semiotic construction of mythology remains most useful for readings of architecture and urban form.¹️ This work derives from the semiotics of de Saussure and the attempt to construct a general science of signs. For de Saussure the ‘sign’ is a conjunction of ‘signifier/signified’, like two sides of a coin considered as form/content or image/meaning. The red light is a signifier, the imperative to stop is the signified. It is axiomatic to early semiotics that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary—there is no necessary
relationship of image to meaning. While this arbitrariness is contentious, confusion of the ‘arbitrary’ with the ‘necessary’ is fundamental to Barthes’s political interpretation of sign systems. For Barthes many signs are not innocent—they problematize relations with our world. Meanings may be ‘cooked’ to produce truth effects and his call is to enter the ‘kitchen of meaning’ (Barthes 1988).

Barthes’ concerns are with the way society produces self-effacing signs that do not look like signs, linked together in ‘codes of domination’ which sustain authority and which he calls ‘mythologies’. The promise of his early work was that by decoding myth one can strip it of its power; that to bring such symbolic power into the light is to dissolve it. For Barthes myth is structured out of the distinction between denotative meanings (red light means ‘stop’) and connotative meanings (red rose means ‘passion’). The connotative signified is slippery, indeed easily slips into a chain of meta-signifiers such that the meaning becomes ‘a fragment of ideology’. He uses the term ‘myth’, because such signs evoke a way of seeing or making sense of the world and tell us a story. Most importantly myth enables arbitrary meanings to appear natural: ‘myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal’ (Barthes 1967:91–92). Myth is the use of language to depoliticize speech, myth transforms history into nature.

In this early work Barthes recognized a world beyond textual analysis upon which myth is constructed: ‘Wine is objectively good, and at the same time, the goodness of wine is a myth: here is the aporia. The mythologist...deals with the goodness of the wine, not with the wine itself’ (Barthes 1973:158). The ‘aporia’ here is the theoretical impasse to which we are led if we follow the implications of semiotic analysis—we cannot discuss ‘the wine itself except as text. The attempt to explore the limits of the text through textual analysis leads to an endless chain of signifiers and to the semiotic adage that ‘there is nothing outside the text’. There is then no escape from the chains of language, and Barthes focuses on the need to ‘cheat speech’ from within, to dislocate and displace its operations and closures. This is the deconstructive turn.

DECONSTRUCTION

In his later work Barthes (1974, 1976) distinguishes between what he calls ‘readerly’ versus ‘writerly’ texts. A readerly text has pre-given meanings, is popular, easy to consume and requires little effort. By contrast, writerly texts invite the reader to construct meaning, subvert passive consumption and challenge the reader into consideration of its code of construction. Such a text unsettles cultural assumptions and tastes, and brings our relations with language to a crisis. The writerly text is related to the experience of Jouissance, a state of bliss or loss of ‘self’ that can come from the reading of a writerly text. This is not the easy pleasure of the readerly text but the almost erotic joy of complicity in the undermining of language and meaning. Jouissance is seen as a form of resistance
to the socially constructed ‘self and an evasion of ideology. By contrast the pleasures of the readerly text are seen as those of relating to the prevailing order, with its roots in dominant ideology.

This later work by Barthes suggests that western discourse has a tendency to privilege a closure of meaning, the closure of ‘truth’ over the openness of metaphor. Readerly texts, he suggests, have a tendency ‘to arrange all the meanings of a text in a circle around the hearth of denotation (the hearth: center, guardian, refuge, light of truth)’ (Barthes 1974:7). The deconstructive task is to undo this closure. Barthes’ use of the spatial metaphor of the circle and hearth parallels the manner in which the deconstructive move in architecture has targeted the meanings of architecture as enclosure and stability; hearth and home.

Deconstruction is more commonly associated with Derrida, for whom it is a more fundamental attack on western metaphysics and a set of tactics for the destabilization of meaning (Derrida 1974; Morris 1982). There is an avowed aim to expose any buried metaphors and conceptual oppositions in a text, and in general, to pull the rug from under any presupposed correlation between language and reality. Deconstruction in this way is intended to open up a text to multiple interpretations wherein any definitive meaning is forever deferred. Thus deconstruction opposes any notions of structure, unity, identity or authority that serves to immobilize the play of meaning. Derrida draws on Heidegger (1962) who refers to language as the ‘house of Being’, and who invented the practice of writing words like Being 'under erasure' —the score marks intended to signify that Being is framed but not revealed by language.

These attempts to ‘cheat speech from within’ have been given a new twist by Derrida and others but there is an earlier precedent in the critical aesthetic theory of Adorno (1974). For Adorno the culture industry brings aesthetic production into complicity with forces of domination. The ‘aura’ of aesthetic production becomes manufactured and geared to a standardized market (Adorno and Horkheimer 1993). The culture industry forges an alliance of art with advertising and political propaganda. It involves the colonization of the psyche as the unconscious is plundered and dreams are appropriated for profit (Arato 1987). And it does not deliver: ‘The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises…the diner must be satisfied with the menu’ (Adorno and Horkheimer 1993:35).

Adorno saw the task for aesthetic practice as a critique of the conditions which produce it. Emancipatory thought must think against itself, to illuminate truth through what he termed a ‘negative dialectic’ (Jay 1973). He proposed an aesthetic which divests itself of complicity with power by becoming a kind of weapon: ‘A successful work of art…is not one which resolves contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure’ (Adorno 1974:224). One can read here the seeds of the decentering deconstructive move, a claim of the power of aesthetic discourse to disrupt ideology and to generate critical thinking. Adorno also privileges the writerly over the readerly text—the
reception of ‘critical’ work is limited to experts and must protect itself from the appropriations of the culture industry by its ‘difficulty’. Thus cultural production resists complicity with power only by a retreat from popular reception (Arato 1987:219). This critical distance also entails a severing of form from function. For Adorno it is the uselessness of art, its exemption from instrumental function, that gives it subversive potential. The retreat to an elite aesthetic code is also a masking process; the power of aesthetic form is defended by controlling access to its meaning.

A famous debate between Adorno and Benjamin hinged on this question of an elite versus popular art. Benjamin (1978, 1992) agreed with the attempt to shock the audience out of aesthetic ideology but differed on the issue of popular reception. He believed in the capacity of popular dream-like images to generate a revolutionary aesthetic through the commodity forms themselves. He saw a power in ‘dialectical images’ to turn aesthetic ideology against itself and break the spell of desire (Gregory 1994:231). Unlike Adorno’s retreat to an inaccessible formalism, Benjamin recognized a role for figurative and mimetic representation. Dialectical imagery comes from taking fragments of the past out of their contexts and forming new juxtapositions, ‘wish images’ which can awaken collective memory (Jay 1973).

Deconstruction has been applied with dramatic impact within architecture and urban design through the work of Eisenman, Tschumi, Libeskind, Hadid, Koolhaas, Gehry and others (Jencks 1988; Wigley and Johnson 1988). As a formal style it has been identified by warped planes, oblique angles and exploded parts. It exploits discord, discontinuity and distortion to construct a decentred subject who will find difficulty in establishing the presence of the building. The architectural ideal of pure form is attacked. As Wigley and Johnson (1988:91) put it: ‘Deconstruction gains all its force by challenging the very values of harmony, unity and stability, and proposing instead a different view of structure: the view that the flaws are intrinsic to the structure’. Deconstruction offers a challenge to the taken-for-granted language of built form and place. It calls such language into question, often using the Heideggerian tactic of writing under erasure, producing images like ‘stair’ the which leads nowhere or the ‘door’ which does not open. Functional signifiers are used for play, supposedly without signifieds. The role of architecture in the grounding of social order and the signification of function is thrown into doubt. The promise of deconstruction in architecture lies in the challenge to spatial ideologies, to social ideas about the use of space.

There is no doubt that the deconstructive turn has reinvigorated the forms of architectural and urban design discourse. While any argument for emancipatory potential is usually tacit, Ross King (1996) sees such work as part of a long-standing quest for spaces of emancipation, conducted through architecture and urban design. The claim is that new forms of representation bring new worlds into existence and that ‘a new social order—and experience of space, time and the self—can come about’ (R.King 1996:168). The potential of deconstructionist design lies in a kind of ‘shock value’—the capacity of built form to challenge deeply held ideologies and belief systems, and to thereby create a space for the new.

Yet inasmuch as such work carries an implicit claim to address issues of power, emancipation and social change, there are reasons to be sceptical. Eagleton
Chapter 3: Text

(1990:360) has written of Adorno’s aesthetic that he offers ‘as a solution what is clearly part of the problem...sickness as cure’. Such a charge might be extended to some deconstructive work in architecture and urban design. Werckmeister (1991) suggests that deconstructive thought has developed a ‘citadel’ mentality by retreating into an elite realm of discourse wherein ‘aesthetic lament and political apathy feed upon one another’ (Werckmeister 1991:18). The aesthetic of crisis, alienation and violence makes horror acceptable; an ‘aura’ of topicality and resistance is coupled with a neutral political stance. In this view deconstruction is a new orthodoxy posing as emancipation: ‘deconstructive thinking has reached an autonomy which reinforces the self-assurance of its liberating role’ (Werckmeister 1991:20).

Saul (1997) has suggested that while deconstructive critique demonstrates how language is enmeshed in self-interest, it becomes complicit with a corporatist ideology that there is nothing other than self-interest. In a world where public debate is paralyzed by a mix of propaganda, rhetoric and private dialect, deconstruction further undermines the debate and adds new dialects. In a similar vein Hughes argues that deconstruction breeds a paralyzing ‘culture of complaint’:

The intellectual...is thought to be as helpless against power and control as a salmon in a polluted stream, the only difference being that we, unlike the fish, know the water is poisoned...We hold it true that truth is unknowable; we must suspect all utterances, except the axiom that all utterances are suspect. It would be difficult to find a worse—or more authoritarian—dead end than this.

(Hughes 1994:63)

There are clearly no easy escapes from the complicities of language with power; ‘difficult’ discourse can be a cover for new forms of power. In this vein Ghirardo (1994) has suggested that Eisenman’s enormous influence within architecture has rested on a chameleon-like ability to remain one step ahead of the ability of his audience to understand and critique his work. Indeed she suggests a political conservatism in the practice of the most ‘radical’ of architects:

Eisenman’s formalism...is...an ideological manoeuvre that deflects attention from the other factors involved in the production of building, in order to ensure the survival of a notion of architecture that transcends history, social circumstance, and politics by excluding such matters from consideration...it effortlessly summons nostalgia for the days when architecture was a gentleman’s enterprise rather than a profession.

(Ghirardo 1994:73)

She is suggesting a hijacking of the liberating impulse in architecture under cover of the very discursive spaces made available by deconstruction. Eisenman defended this attack by organizing seventeen responses from supporters.2 Ghirardo clearly pressed a raw nerve and the marshalling of numbers suggests an ossification of
Frames of Theorization

deconstructionism into orthodoxy. The retreat of deconstruction into an abstract vagueness is exacerbated by the recently published collaboration of Eisenman with Derrida (Derrida and Eisenman 1997), where the book is punched with a grid of holes. The argument is literally full of holes as Heidegger’s tactic of writing under erasure is pursued into a theoretical cul-de-sac. But Chora L Works surely ‘works’ in one sense—it liberates its market from the obligation to read.

The claims of deconstructive designs can be tested, I suggest, only when they are built. In this regard Libeskind’s holocaust museum in Berlin, based on the material construction and lived experience of a ‘void’, is a far more interesting prospect than a text with holes in it. The ‘shock value’ cannot be judged in the design magazines but only in the lifeworld. I shall return in the final chapter to some of the prospects and problems of deconstruction in design. But for now I would make a distinction between deconstruction as a form of discursive analysis and as a form of aesthetic discourse. As analysis—the unpacking, decoding and unmasking of the texts through which places are constructed and experienced—deconstruction is a primary method in what follows. However, this is only one method among several. As aesthetic discourse we need to take care since it is clear that the formal styles of deconstruction are as easily appropriated as any other language, as Eisenman makes clear in an interview: ‘[A] corporation in the heartland of America called us and said they wanted a new corporate headquarters that is not like the castles of commerce of the 70s and 80s...They are the kind of people that...my architecture [is] talking to’ (Adams et al. 1995:38). It is a paradox, as Pecora points out, that symbolic capital can be ‘used simultaneously to signify both the exchange or commercial value of the architect’s skills and the architect’s ability to renounce all mere exchange value’ (Pecora 1991:46). There is nothing new in this role for architecture, nor in the illusion of autonomy from the market. Designers are the suppliers to a ‘meaning market’ and the avant-garde have a key role.

THE MEANING MARKET

The shift from modernism to postmodernism has been broadly characterized by Lyotard (1984) as a loss in the credibility of universal theory (metanarratives) coupled with increased attention to difference (local narratives). While this shift has embodied liberating aspects, in Jameson’s terms it also brings a new wardrobe of cultural clothes for capitalism and a new ‘depthlessness’ of cultural life (Jameson 1984). It involves a triumph of surface over depth that in architecture has detached built form from its social context. At the same time the economic value of aesthetics, of architecture as ‘symbolic capital’, has increased. Architectural style has become both a form of currency and a decisive component of political life. This new politics of the image permits the aesthetic surface to subsume matters of substance. The detachment of form from social life has allowed a seemingly radical break with modernism to mask a deeper conservatism—a commodification of meaning under the aesthetic guise of a revival of meaning. The interpretation
of postmodernity as a new conservatism has been led in architectural critique by Lipman and his collaborators. Through a range of critiques—from Venturi in the USA (Lipman and Parkes 1986), to rationalism in Europe (Lipman and Surma 1986) and historicism in the UK (Harris and Lipman 1986, 1989)—the production of meaning under postmodernity is argued to be a new incorporation of aesthetics into older structures of power. Architecture becomes enmeshed in a ‘meaning market’ (Harries et al. 1982; Lipman and Harries 1984).

Baudrillard (1975, 1981) has long pointed to the ways in which the commodity has become a self-referential sign whereby ‘use value’ becomes displaced by the ‘exchange value’ of the sign. In this view the production of things is displaced by the production of signs—it is the meaning which is produced and consumed. This triggers effects of hyperreality or surrealism, wherein the distinction between real and imaginary disappears (Featherstone 1991:69). There are important lessons in the early Baudrillard, yet claims for the disappearance of use value are exaggerated and dangerous. The semiotic adage that ‘there is nothing outside the text’ can become self-fulfilling. The depthlessness which Jameson points out in urban experience is evident in much of the representation of built form in design magazines, studiously replicated by design students across the globe. Architectural drawings have gained value as art, as the ‘end’ rather than the ‘means’ of architecture. Free-floating signifiers which do not signify a lived future are thereby depoliticized and insulated from social critique. Architects and students alike are inducted into a kind of commodity fetishism, a focus on formal imagery and away from the site, program and social context. The significance of places in people’s lives is often reduced to the signification of meaning, a ‘text’ to be decoded.

There is clearly a congruence between shifts in the marketplace and in architectural ideology (Sarfatti Larson 1993). The market for new meaning creates an appetite for distinction and therefore for increased turnover in fashion. A voracious meaning market demands of architects both the manipulation of taste and new images to feed it. In this market, as Ewen (1988:52) puts it: ‘Style is something to be used up, part of its significance is that it will lose significance’.

**TASTE AND SYMBOLIC CAPITAL**

Within this context I want to return to the work of Bourdieu—in particular, his more recent theory on ‘fields’ of cultural production and ‘symbolic capital’ (Bourdieu 1984, 1993). Unlike the *habitus* which is a ‘feel for the game’ (a cluster of divisions, dispositions and rules), the ‘field’ of social practice is like a game board wherein agents are positioned with certain forces available and resources at stake in any given moment. The field differs from the *habitus* as the arena differs from the rules. For our interests here there are overlapping fields of discourse such as art, education, housing, urbanism and architecture. The definition of the ‘field’ is often part of what is at stake. Can a urinal become ‘art’? Is a bicycle shed ‘architecture’? The stakes available in any field are defined
by Bourdieu as four kinds of capital: economic, social, cultural and symbolic (Bourdieu 1993; Jenkins 1992:85). ‘Economic capital’ is any form of wealth that is easily and immediately turned into money: buildings, shares, land and cars. ‘Social capital’ is the social connections of place and community, often inherited through class membership. ‘Cultural capital’ is the accumulation of credentials, knowledge and skill, acquired through education and upbringing. Social and cultural capital are often combined in the employable sense of confident manners and taste that erases its origins to appear natural or inborn. ‘Symbolic capital’, which may be construed as a sub-set of cultural capital, is the value of the distinction or honour which accrues through superior aesthetic ‘taste’. Symbolic capital is embedded in built form as that portion of its exchange value that can be attributed to its symbolic content. Thus a painting is all symbolic capital and a factory is mostly economic capital. Most architecture is somewhere between.

Bourdieu is interested in fields of cultural production such as literature, painting and architecture, which are defined in terms of an opposition between a popular mass culture and an esoteric avant-garde. The avant-garde occupies a sub-field of restricted production wherein work is largely defined by its opposition to popular culture for mass consumption. One of Bourdieu’s key contributions has been to identify this sub-field as a primary source of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1884, 1993). Within this sub-field, popularity and economic profit are disavowed. Indeed the prestige of an avant-garde producer is diminished by popular success, since it is sustained by symbolic opposition to the mainstream. The avant-garde sub-field of restricted production has a certain autonomy from the market, which is necessary to its radical innovations. Popular culture, being geared to the market, has less autonomy, yet it relies upon the autonomous avant-garde to supply new meanings for this market. For Bourdieu art is neither socially determined nor autonomous. He sees a certain autonomy for aesthetic producers, but only within a social framework which authorizes and legitimizes. The supposedly autonomous formal properties in art are shown to be a key source of symbolic power.

A key point for Bourdieu is that fields of cultural production are generally structured in a manner which sustains the authority of those who already possess it. The legitimacy and value of the symbolic capital at stake in the field is at once presupposed and created through the operations of the field. Bourdieu uses the phrase ‘symbolic violence’ to refer to the power of a dominant class to frame the field in which symbolic mastery will be determined. Within this field, the criteria of symbolic distinction favour those who have already imbibed a basic disposition towards it through the habitus of home, school, gallery and theatre. To enter a field with any success one must possess the cultural capital and the ‘feel for the game’ of investing it.

The sub-title of Bourdieu’s (1984) book Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste reveals it as an oblique attack on the primary canon of aesthetic philosophy, Kant’s Critique of Judgement (1974). For Kant, aesthetics is at once subjective yet universal. Art is not that which pleases the senses nor serves any personal interests—rather than serving functions aesthetic experience transcends
to a higher moral order. Yet as Eagleton points out, this ideal of aesthetic experience as universal truth is a paradigm case of ideology, a fusion of taste with truth:

Part of what we enjoy in the aesthetic...is this experience of pure contentless consensus where we find ourselves spontaneously at one without necessarily even knowing what...we are agreeing over...we are left delighting in nothing but a universal solidarity beyond all vulgar utility. (Eagleton 1990:96)

Bourdieu wants to expose the Kantian view as based in symbolic domination. ‘A work of art has meaning and interest’, he argues, ‘only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code...The “eye” is a product of history reproduced by education’ (Bourdieu 1984:2–3).

For Bourdieu, art serves a key role of reinforcing distinctions between people—it divides its audience into those who do and do not understand it. A key social function of ‘taste’ is to establish this social distance; aesthetic judgements which appear to mark distinctions between things turn out to mark distinctions between people (Featherstone 1991:18). Social classes pursue aesthetic strategies to distinguish themselves from the class below and to identify with the class above. These distinctions are constructed upon a set of binary schema such as: complex/simple; difficult/easy; formal/functional; original/reproduction; unique/common. In each case the former binary term is privileged over the latter, not by argument but by ideology. The difficult, complex and unique are judged more highly by legitimate taste. Legitimate taste is characterized by a contemplative distance from everyday life, indeed as Fiske puts it, ‘the taste for “distance” in art is part of inhabiting a definable habitus’ (Fiske 1992:155). Distinction in a given field is made valuable the more it is made scarce and difficult to understand. For Bourdieu each of these structural oppositions ‘refer back, more or less discretely, to...the opposition between the dominant and the dominated’ (Bourdieu 1984:469). Forms of domination, based in cultural capital, are made to appear as pure aesthetic judgements.

Much of the history of art involves the avant-garde attempting to overturn these structures and redefine the field through various forms of semantic inversion. To place a urinal on display as sculpture, or a blank canvas as art, is to invert the schemas of unique/common, original/reproduction, complex/simple and formal/functional. These are paralleled in architecture by deconstructive designs which look unfinished or under collapse—attempts to defy the alliance of architecture with authority and social order. Yet Bourdieu’s point is that the radical aesthetic can achieve success within the field only as already constituted. Thus the urinal becomes ‘unique’ when framed for contemplation, the blank canvas becomes ‘difficult’ as a painting.

This phenomenon is evident in the way the avant-garde uses popular imagery. When popular symbols are appropriated into legitimate taste, as with a Warhol painting, a contemplative distance between the subject and the work, never present with the soup can, is introduced. For Bourdieu the avant-garde
fulfils a role in the system of keeping the images within the market from becoming stale; it changes and enlivens the field without disturbing the foundations. The appropriation of popular and even vulgar images can be incorporated into the dominant aesthetic if they are properly framed for contemplation and consumption. Thus art produced as resistance against a dominant class can be framed, emptied of subversive power and appropriated as a means of further demonstrating distinction. From Bourdieu’s position those who answer Adorno’s call to use the autonomy of the aesthetic to develop weapons against it are entering into complicity with it. Symbolic power is the power to appropriate radical images designed to unsettle and to use them to reinforce the field (Bourdieu 1984:254).

Bourdieu does not refute the value of Kantian aesthetics so much as he shows how it is based in a social formation and structured in opposition to the popular and the functional. The field of cultural production is structured such that the cultural capital necessary to legitimize aesthetic appreciation can be acquired only by freedom from economic necessity. Thus the aesthetic power of legitimate taste is based on the economic power to keep necessity at arm’s length (Bourdieu 1984:55). A building which violates its own function or metaphorically places its meanings ‘under erasure’ will appear senseless to many but does make sense within the field of architectural production and its avant-garde. Within such a field the new imagery at once reinvigorates the meaning market, redefines symbolic capital and constructs the identities of its agents. At the same time it also reproduces and legitimizes the definition of the field—celebrating the architect’s control over form while often abrogating responsibility for the program.

Symbolic domination operates by relegating distinctions of taste to the taken for granted, making class distinctions appear natural. Thus the symbolic capital accrues to those who inherit the social capital and imbibe the cultural capital (Jenkins 1992:139). Without the necessary cultural capital, imbibed through the habitus, attempts to climb the aesthetic hierarchy can lead easily to kitsch—the badge of the nouveau riche. Thus the difficulty and complexity of high art maintains its superiority to low and obvious easy art; the superiority of the legitimate taste is naturalized. Thus dominated classes make symbolic choices and identify themselves within a field of values which are constantly redefined negatively in relation to their own values (Bourdieu 1984:250).

Bourdieu’s work can be seen to suggest a rather dismal prospect for designers who seek a retreat from codes of aesthetic domination in the private language of ‘writerly’ texts. And this problem is most apparent in architecture, the least autonomous of the arts. The complicity of architecture with the mediations of power cannot be addressed and indeed can be fueled by a retreat to the supposedly autonomous field of aesthetic representation. Once reduced to text, all architectural signifiers are available for appropriation into new codes of domination. Lest Bourdieu’s critique sound too totalizing, there is surely a residual autonomous capacity within aesthetic production. Despite the machinations of the meaning market, the aesthetic of built form retains a capacity to ‘change the world’. Yet to understand this capacity we must understand the world as more than text.
Chapter 4: Place

Having explored theories of spatial programming and representation I now want to turn to the concept of ‘place’ itself. What is it that is being ‘framed’? Initially this entails a focus on the ‘lifeworld’—on the phenomenology of place. There is a substantial literature on the phenomenology of place in architecture, geography and urban studies.¹ My interests here are to incorporate such ideas into the critique of power and built form and to examine its intersections with theories from Chapters 2 and 3. There is no intention, however, of trying to collapse such positions into a grand theory. Indeed the tensions between them are important to many of the interpretations to follow.

PHENOMENOLOGY

Fundamental to the phenomenological position in philosophy is that one cannot presuppose a world prior to our lived experience of it. In Heidegger’s terms there is only ‘being-in-the-world’. The phenomenological call was for a ‘return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962:viii, original emphasis). This is a call to bracket the ‘real’ or material world and to give a certain primacy to the ‘lifeworld’—the everyday world of lived experience. It follows that the phenomenology of space entails a primacy of lived-space over abstract conceptions of geometric space. A key insight from Merleau-Ponty (1962) is that the body is a figurative ‘bridge’ between ‘being’ and ‘world’. ‘Space’ is not an abstract set of relations (nor an ‘ether’) within which the lifeworld is structured. Rather, the lived experience of the body-in-space is the primary relation from which all conceptions of space are constructed. From such a view geometry is an intellectual tool, distinguished by its usefulness rather than its truth. Our understandings of space emerge from action, indeed space is to be defined as ‘a certain possession of the world by my body, a certain gearing of my body to the world’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962:250). The experience of ‘place’ is also based in such a primary relation of body to world. Places are centres of meaning constructed out of lived experience (Relph 1976).
If we are to grant such a priority to lived-space, based in a gearing of body-to-world, we must deal with the issue that lived-space is not homogeneous nor arbitrary. The shared structures of lived-space—the upright stance; modes of action and perception; the importance of the visual sense—are fundamental to the social constructions of place experience, no matter how socially mediated they inevitably are. This leads to a dangerous question: to what extent, if at all, do these universal conditions lead to certain social constructions of meaning? To put it another way, is there any intersection between the ontology of dwelling and the mediations of power in space? My answer is a tentative yes, although in the end the question must remain a mystery.

Since any suggestion of ‘essentialism’ is anathema to most current theory I shall digress briefly to frame what I am suggesting. My position is that while all meanings are socially constructed, social critique cannot exhaust our understandings of how built form frames our lives. What I am arguing against is the intellectual polarization into essentialism and anti-essentialism which risks a form of mutual blindness. For the anti-essentialist, the idea of universal is such a conservative one that it seems that to open that door even a crack is to risk undermining theories of social construction. Since universal cannot be changed, any admission of them would seem antithetical to the quest for liberation. Yet essentialist explanations of built form and place remain highly attractive to those for whom they offer the prospect of an authenticity which touches the human spirit and cuts through the appropriations of the meaning market. Such attractions are dangerous, whether they issue from ‘rationalists’ like Rossi (1982) or phenomenologists like Norberg-Schulz (1980). Yet such danger is not eradicated by a denial of the universal. Indeed, I am suggesting that the polarization protects a conservatism on both sides. On the essentialist side it allows free rein to mythologies of nature, spirit and authenticity which can press very seductive and potent buttons. On the other side it allows the mediations of power to proceed on the presupposition that questions of spirit, authenticity and sources will disappear with enough deconstructive critique. My aim here is to open up the possibility that while all meanings are socially constructed, some may be constructed on deeper foundations. And most importantly here, this does not lend them any immunity from the colonizations of power.

Theories of ‘dwelling’ must open up questions of ontology—of ‘authenticity’ and of ‘spirit’. These are very dangerous questions indeed—Heidegger’s academic response was to write terms like Being under erasure and to avoid the question of spirit (Derrida 1989). However, his political response in mistaking Nazism for authenticity illustrates the danger. The linguistic line from ‘authenticity’ to ‘authority’ is a strong one and the idea of the ‘author’ as source runs through it. We may skirt the language of ‘authenticity’ and pronounce the ‘death of the author’, yet the questions do not disappear.

Berger has a way of approaching such a problem in art criticism which I find useful. With his early reputation based in the social critique of art, his later work is often directed at the ‘mystery’ that remains when the critique of art as
visual ideology’ is exhausted. He suggests that seeing and imagining have primacy as ways of understanding the world: ‘my starting point is phenomenological, not deductive’ (J.Berger 1985:9). To treat art as purely visual ideology is to reduce it because it necessarily eliminates the experience of ‘looking’ (J.Berger 1985:202). The lived may be myopic but there is a conceit involved in any attempt to ignore it. For Berger the quest for authenticity is not a quest for essences but for ambiguities: ‘Authenticity comes from a single faithfulness: that to the ambiguity of experience’ (Berger 1992:216). He draws a distinction between ‘mystification’ and ‘mystery’: ‘Mystifications protect power. Mysteries protect the sacred’ (1992:218). These mystifications share a good deal in common with Barthes’ ‘mythologies’. Such a relationship between ‘myth’ and ‘mystery’ is a key to understanding the mediations of power in built form.

DWELLING

According to Harries, architecture has a certain power to stabilize both ‘being’ and ‘world’, to defend us against the ‘terror’ of both space and time: ‘Architecture is an act of self-assurance in the face of the terror of the infinite’ (Harries 1996:231). This capacity of architecture to ground and shelter, stabilize and protect a fragile sense of being is fundamentally connected to the mediations of power in built form, both power to and power over. Following Harries (1996:180) I now want to frame the experience of dwelling in terms of two dialectic oppositions—vertical/horizontal and inside/outside.

The dialectic of vertical/horizontal is constructed from the upright stance of the human body. The lifeworld is structured as a horizontal plane between earth and sky. Its vertical dimension, reflecting the body, is decidedly asymmetrical. Vertical symbolism permeates the language of power and domination: the ‘highness’ of kings, the ‘upper’ classes, the ‘high’ table, social ‘climbing’ and so on. We construct theories (like buildings) on a solid ‘base’—our ideas like our lives are ‘grounded’. Such a symbolic dimension is linked to the upright stance of the body. The word ‘stand’ shares a root with ‘stasis’, ‘stable’, ‘state’, ‘statute’ and ‘establish’. The vertical ‘stands’ against the horizontal as a form of aspiration towards presence. This does not imply that the meanings of vertical forms are determined by the structures of lived-space, only that such meanings are constructed within the context of this dialectic.

Diagonal forms play upon this tension between vertical and horizontal, embodying a certain perceptual dynamism. The pyramid is a potent formal type in which diagonal forms are stabilized—it embodies the capacity to represent both dynamic aspiration and stability at the same time. Variations on the pyramid are associated with the quest to stabilize power from the Egyptian quest for immortality onwards. The Egyptian pyramids stood for an ‘eternal present’, grounding the kingdom in a timeless immortality while repressing absence and death (Mugerauer 1995:31). This is a chthonic form, asserting the timeless over
the temporal, reason over unreason, and symbolically joining the pharaoh to the
gods. Yet this does not imply that the meaning simply inheres in the form; indeed
there is both a persistence and a transformation of meaning. In an incisive
decoration of Pei’s design of the glass pyramid in the Louvre, Mugerauer
shows that there is at once a reaffirmation, yet also a displacement, of meaning:

Architecturally and epistemologically, presence and immortality are again
affirmed as dominant over absence and death, but now...the mastery
depends on the inversion of the traditional meanings...Understood as the
displacement of the earlier traditional architecture of eternal presence by
continuous reaffirmation of temporal presence, Pei’s pyramids have their
meaning as part of our posture and strategy for today’s power.

(Mugerauer 1995:51)

There is a need to theorize the persistent appearance of the pyramid form,
variations of which appear in the Eiffel Tower, Washington Monument, Australian
Parliament House and a plethora of postmodern corporate and retail atria. Clearly
the pyramid does not have a consistent meaning for pharaoh, slave, tourist, citizen
and consumer. Yet it would appear to have a potent and persistent capacity as a
grounding of various forms of power.

The vertical/horizontal dialectic is that between aspiration and grounding.
Architecture cannot avoid such engagement. Wright’s prairie houses were both
hearth centred (vertical) and earth hugging (horizontal)—they constructed a range
of potent meanings about democracy, landscape and individual ownership. Tatlin’s
famous (albeit unbuildable) design for a Bolshevik monument was composed of
diagonal forms spiralling into a tower, its potent expression of a liberating spirit
relied strongly upon a vertical/horizontal tension.

I turn now to the inside/outside dialectic which is founded on the distinction
of “here” versus “there”; a projection of the lived body-space and its constructions
of identity into the larger world. This dialectic can be linked to what Douglas
(1973) theorizes as natural systems of symbolic classification. These are systems of
ritual, manifest in social classification systems, yet which proliferate cross-culturally.
For Douglas it is not the meanings which are universal but rather the modes of
symbolic focus. A prime example is the proliferation of symbolic ritual associated
with bodily orifices and the purification rituals associated with passage through
them (Douglas 1966). Every culture constructs such meanings, but which particular
constructions depends on the social diagram which is being mirrored: “The rituals
enact the form of social relations and in giving these relations visible expression
they enable people to know their own society. The rituals work upon the body
politic through the symbolic medium of the physical body” (Douglas 1966:128).
Such rituals are twofold: they identify a zone of purity and order while excluding
pollution and disorder, and they ritually defend the body against danger.

For Douglas this is not simply a focus on body orifices, it projects into the
built world which becomes a kind of prophylaxis: it mediates the penetrations of
‘otherness’ into our lives; it keeps ‘dis-ease’ at bay. The inside/outside dialectic becomes ordered along the lines of enclosure/openness, safety/danger, home/journey, familiar/strange, self/other and private/public (Dovey 1985b). The ritual control over passage through certain significant architectural boundaries seems connected to this ritual control over bodily orifices. This does not mean that the meanings of eating or entering are universal, only that they are universally given ritual meaning. Since these rituals are fundamentally about order and threats to that order, they are also necessarily mediations of power. As Douglas (1966:3) argues: ‘the laws of nature are dragged in to sanction the moral code’.

The inside/outside dialectic may be manifest in other ways such as Appleton’s (1975) prospect/refuge theory, which suggests a general spatial preference for edge conditions where one can see without being exposed. When manifest in built form this is clearly geared to practices of social power—the commanding view of the corner office, the panoptic guard tower, seeing without being seen. There are potential connections here with the theories of *habitus* and spatial syntax outlined in Chapter 2. The segmentation of space structures the lifeworld with boundaries and thresholds, all strongly linked to the constructions of identity. The inside/outside dialectic is a fundamental dimension of spatial programming—it structures social relations between insiders and outsiders.

Consider two examples which illustrate these dialectics: Bachelard’s house of dreams and Corbusier’s Villa Savoye. Bachelard (1969) suggests a phenomenology of the house which is strongly based in each of these dialectics. In a manner linked to Jungian interpretation, the garret is associated with dreams and the cellar with the subconscious. He writes also of the tension between inside and outside, the intimate and the immense. Bachelard’s book is based in French poetry and is highly ethnocentric yet it also touches more universal dimensions that we would be foolish to ignore.

In what appears to be a contrast, Corbusier’s Villa Savoye is a modernist icon which eliminated the cellar and attic along with the roof and most of the ground floor which became an entry with a hand-basin—the purification rite. Having largely severed relations with the earth, Corbusier establishes a new relationship with the sky (the roof terrace) and a new inside/outside dialectic (the transparency of strip windows). This was a very potent architectural type precisely because it operated upon the vertical dimension and the inside/outside dialectic. For its professional architectural audience, this design suggested a new mode of dwelling—playing upon a dream of liberty in an abstract upper world, where one washed one’s hands of the earth on entering. The meanings of Villa Savoye are by no means exhausted by such interpretation; the design is inconceivable outside its class and gender relations (Colomina 1992:98–104) and the struggle for professional reputation. Yet without the symbolic potency of the vertical/horizontal and inside/outside dialectics, this building would be reduced to an arbitrary play of imagery.

The lesson here is not that we should or should not have cellars, garrets or roof-terraces. It is that the ways in which the forms of dwelling give voice to dreams—of being ‘grounded’ or ‘liberated’—are constructed in relation to these
dialectics of vertical/horizontal and inside/outside. These dimensions are neither trivial nor benign. Urban types such as the detached house, housing enclave, shopping mall and corporate tower are linked to them, incorporating problematic mediations of power which I shall describe in later chapters. I do not suggest that such types are in any way natural; they have emerged as global types in response to historical conditions of capitalism. While recognizing the primacy of social constructions of meaning, the universal dialectics outlined above cannot be disregarded. While it may appear that such dialectics are simply the trivial material structure of biology and gravity, such a view implies an avoidance of the lifeworld and a return to the ‘realist’ attitude which phenomenology holds in brackets. In my view, questions of the ontology of dwelling will continue to haunt social theory until the intellectual polarization of essentialism and anti-essentialism dissolves.2

A phenomenological approach to place experience has not always had positive outcomes in terms of architecture and urban design. The currency and intangibility of concepts such as ‘sense of place’ has been widely exploited by the market to legitimate design projects however damaging. The shopping malls, office towers and housing enclaves to be discussed later are examples where ‘sense of place’ is reduced to scenographic and rhetorical effect as a cover for place destruction. Such mythologizing of ‘sense of place’ and *genius loci* is made possible when critique is conducted within the confines of formal expression. The phenomenology of Norberg Schulz is a good example, constructing the myth that cities like Prague and Rome have sprung in some autochthonous manner from their natural sites, while remaining silent about the construction of meaning through social struggle (Norberg Schulz 1980). Phenomenology should not be a quest to define some presupposed ‘sense’ or ‘spirit’ of place—it should be an opening to the world, not a reduction of it. Phenomenology is a necessary but limited approach to the understanding of place. The key problem is that the focus on the lifeworld can involve a certain blindness to the pronounced effects of social structure and ideology on such everyday experience. From this view a focus on experience runs the risk that the ideological framings of place remain buried and hence powerful.

Some of the phenomenological literature engages a language of ‘archetypes’, largely derived from Jungian psychology where archetypes are formless structures of meaning in the collective unconscious (Jung 1967; Cooper Marcus 1995). I propose to avoid use of the term because I believe that it is the source of misunderstanding and polarization.3 The term has been used to imply that forms can convey meaning independently of the social constructions of language. Clearly, I think this is a false promise, but before I abandon its use I want to point out that the very dilemmas I outline here are embedded in the etymology of ‘archetype’. The root it shares with architecture, *arche*, means both ‘source’ and ‘ruler’. The ‘archetype’ is both an original type and a ruling type. The language of archetypes is the language of power.

Most critiques of architecture as socially constructed are entirely dismissive of the kind of universalizing which occurs above. For those wishing to understand the mediations and complicities of architecture with power, this dismissal is a
serious error. To establish a certain social construction of meaning is not the same thing as to refute universal sources. The power of architecture to ‘touch us’ is an important complicity with social mediations of power. My point here is not to promote a universal theory of dwelling but to suggest that a recognition of it may aid our interpretations of the mediations of power. The fields of architecture and urban design show a widespread use of towers, walls, gateways and entries to mediate relations between people. There is a ‘meaning market’ wherein such forms have potency, regardless of how we theorize such meaning. The more such forms seem universal then the more they seem to transcend the glib, banal and placeless products of the market. In this way the dwelling experience can be subjected to a colonization process by the forces of economic or political power.

This colonization process is akin to what Harries sees as the transformation of ‘arche-symbols’ into ‘meta-symbols’ (Harries 1988:39). As part of the philosophical struggle to free our thinking from subjection to language, post-structuralism has undermined the relation of language to truth. But in doing this we also sever the language of built form from dwelling; the sign triumphs over space as signification substitutes for significance. Formal expression becomes a matter of arbitrary and abstract play. I suggest that the play of meaning and the constructions of place in built form are neither arbitrary nor innocent, and that they must be seen as a dialectic of the social and the universal. The dismissal of either is dangerously myopic. Ideological critique has demonstrated a contingency (uncertainty, indeterminacy) of architectural meaning, not a proof of arbitrariness. The meanings of place are subject to the vagaries of a voracious meaning market with little autonomy from the struggle for privilege, power and profit. The ontology of dwelling embodies a power which may be used and abused.

**IDEOLOGY**

What then of the ideological constructions of place? Ideology constructs place experience and design process at all levels as a necessary framework of belief—about the ‘good life’, the ‘nice house’, property, human rights, identity, privacy, family and the individual. These are also beliefs about the state, authority, justice, democracy, class, status, gender, race, efficiency and the public interest. The built environment is a primary medium for the techniques of establishing, legitimizing and reproducing ideology at every scale from the house to the city. While ‘ideology’ has a traditional meaning linked to ‘false consciousness’, it also has a broader meaning as a necessary relationship between consciousness and the structures of the material world (Williams 1980). As such, ‘ideology’ is integrated with the ‘web of meaning’ we call culture. While ideology limits experience and action, it can also be construed as a necessary set of spectacles which enables us to see. To transcend ideology would be to render the world meaningless.

Without an understanding of ideology, design and research activities that aim to make the experience of place more agreeable can serve to legitimate and
reproduce prevailing relations and practices of power. On the other hand place cannot be reduced to ideology unless some pre-reflective structure is to be asserted. This assumes an elite viewpoint, akin to the fish who claim that they alone can see the water. To approach the tasks of environmental change from such a viewpoint is to risk imposing an equally oppressive ideology from above. And well-meaning designers, in a zest to create a ‘sense of place’, can often achieve much the same end. What is needed is a framework which integrates place experience and its ideological critique, and which rejects both social determinism and the implication of an autonomous subject. I now want to briefly discuss some contributions in this regard.

The work of Henri Lefebvre couples a concern for the social constructions of spatial ideology with the importance of lived experience. For Lefebvre the concept of ‘space’ defies traditional categories—it is at once a means of production and a commodity; both a social product and a means of social reproduction and control. Thus places are both engines of wealth and forms of wealth; we make places and are made by them. For Lefebvre the production of space occurs along three different but related dimensions or levels (Lefebvre 1991:38–39) –space as ‘practiced’, ‘conceived’ and ‘lived’. ‘Spatial practice’ is the material and functional reproduction of a society, incorporating competence in everyday spatial routines. ‘Conceived’ spaces involve the intellectualizing of space through codified languages of planning schemes and design discourse. The ‘lived’ is the sensual world of everyday life—the ‘space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate’ (Lefebvre 1991:39).

Lefebvre construes this triad as a series of dialectics between space as practiced, conceived and lived. The production of the ‘lived’ is the result of struggle between appropriation and expropriation of space (Lefebvre 1971:88). Urban form is a social ‘mirror’ which helps to constitute and transform social reality. Lefebvre wants to understand the ways architecture and urban form can touch and disturb human existence at some depth. He criticizes phenomenology for a limited focus, constrained within the immediacy of the lived. Yet he wants to reconcile the lived and the everyday with the lessons not only of Marx, but also of Nietzsche and Barthes. This includes a concern for bodily experience and its pleasures—the pursuit of places of joy and jouissance (like the beach) which may escape the totalizations of the market (Lefebvre 1991:384). Such places are produced and constructed out of struggles between the appropriation of place for profit and for play. His call for the ‘right to the city’ (Lefebvre 1996) is not only about rights of access but also about rights to play and appropriation. Such appropriations are linked to practices of liberation, but these are not so much liberating places as they are ‘moments’ of possible transformation. At the same time Lefebvre is interested in the ways space can construct illusions of freedom, forms of control operating under the guise of innocence and transparency (Lefebvre 1991:389–391). The practices of power can be hidden within the structures and representations of space. Lefebvre’s work has been instrumental in opening up new interpretations of space and place, particularly our understanding of the fragmentations of place experience in the postmodern condition (Jameson 1984; Soja 1989).
The work of de Certeau is also interesting in this regard. For de Certeau, like Lefebvre, the meanings of place are continuously constructed and reconstructed through action in everyday life: ‘Like words, places are articulated by a thousand usages’ (de Certeau 1985: 131). Places are the warehouses of memory, always haunted with a myriad of possibilities for meaning and behaviour. Against Foucault, he celebrates the possibilities of resistance to any disciplinary regime. As disciplinary power in space becomes more totalizing, it also becomes more available for subversion: The surface of this order is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning: it is a sieve-order’ (de Certeau 1984: 108). For de Certeau, meanings can be inverted, mediations of power can be reversed. Just as Bourdieu suggests that the most liberating works of the avantgarde can be deployed in service of privilege, de Certeau suggests that the most totalizing sites of oppression can be sites of liberation. Resistances and appropriations can insinuate themselves into the very pathways of discipline. De Certeau’s optimism can be exaggerated, yet it is a powerful and inspiring antidote to any totalizing pessimism.

LOCAL/GLOBAL

David Harvey’s recent work engages in a quest to reconcile space as a social construct with a critical return to lived experience. He theorizes a dialectical relation between ‘space’ and ‘place’ as between the general and the particular, the global and the local.

what goes on in a place cannot be understood outside of the space relations which support that place any more than the space relations can be understood independently of what goes on in particular places.

(Harvey 1996:316)

Place experience and the spatial strategies that sustain it are not mutually exclusive positions but each contains the necessity of the other. Harvey wants to reconcile differences between Marxian and Heideggerian approaches to place. The concern for the particularities of place is linked to the manner in which place is the site for dwelling, the locus for collective memory, the ‘materialization of a history’. He echoes Heidegger in basing social and community life in dwelling practices and suggests that place becomes more important in a world where the authenticity of dwelling is increasingly enmeshed in global commodity culture.

Place experience gains importance in a globalizing world for several reasons (Harvey 1996:297–298). The meanings of place become accentuated when threatened by the homogenizing effects of global capital. Yet at the same time the greater mobility of capital produces a greater choice of location and more sensitivity to the qualities of place. And finally the market responds with investment in the constructions of place identity, fueled in turn by an over-investment in the
property market. One result is that we cannot understand urban development unless we understand both the phenomenology of place and its ideological constructions across broader spatial fields. Harvey argues for the pursuit of a dialectic between the ‘places’ of everyday dwelling and the ‘spaces’ of global production, calling attention again to the myopia of the lived:

what we learn from sensuous interaction with the things we touch and the processes we directly encounter is different from what we need to know to understand the processes of commodity production and exchange that put our global breakfast upon our individual tables...immediate experience is so authentic as to permanently tempt us to regard it as all there is and so ground our sense of being, of moral responsibility, and of political commitments entirely within its myopic frame.

(Harvey 1996:313)

There is a conundrum here in that communities which want to resist forms of urban transformation ‘are generally better at organizing in and dominating place than they are at commanding space’ (Harvey 1993:24). The local capacity to win battles in defence of place is considerable, yet the politics of place alone is doomed to failure if it remains trapped within the myopia and parochialism of the local.

The recent work of Giddens on constructions of identity is interesting in this regard. Based in Heideggerian notions of being-in-the-world coupled with Erikson’s theories of ego-identity, Giddens argues the importance of ‘ontological security’. Closely linked to the phenomenology of 'home', ontological security is ‘the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action’ (Giddens 1990:92) Ontological security is strongly embedded in place, not necessarily as enclosure but as ‘a defensive carapace or protective cocoon which all normal individuals carry around with them as the means whereby they are able to get on with the affairs of day-to-day life’ (Giddens 1991:40) Sustained by the routines and habits of a familiar world this figurative ‘carapace’ brackets out aspects of our world which would otherwise engulf us and cause paralysis of the will. This is clearly resonant with the inside/outside dialectic.

Giddens suggests that globalization and modernity have transformed the very tissue of place experience. In the modern world local/global tensions infuse all places. But this does not signal a loss of ‘place’ any more than it is a loss of self-identity. Rather it is the end of the closed local place; the romantic view of the harmonious village is in many ways a nostalgic response to this loss. For Giddens the importance of local place relations rests in the necessity for ontological security within a world which has been tranformed by globalization. Yet the local is infused with global/local tensions:

The reassurance of the familiar, so important to a sense of ontological security, is coupled with the realization that what is comfortable and
nearby is actually an expression of distant events and was ‘placed into’ the local environment rather than forming any organic development within it. The local shopping mall is a milieu in which a sense of ease and security is cultivated...Yet everyone who shops there is aware that most of the shops are chain stores.

(Giddens 1990:140–141)

Such a construction of place necessarily has a collagist character; it is revealed in a collision of signs and images rather than one narrative replacing another. It gives the experience of place a phantasmagoric character wherein the global and local, the familiar and the strange become inextricably intertwined (Giddens 1990:108). The global proliferation of shopping malls, housing enclaves and office towers can be read in terms of the global framings of everyday life under regimes of global capitalism. They at once iron out differences between places and yet construct the very places of familiarity and ontological security.

For Hannerz (1996) the local sustains importance as the site of everyday face-to-face interaction, bodily experience and the development of a sense of home in childhood experience. Unlike the mediations of virtual space and telepresence, the immediacy of local place is regarded as more ‘real’ (Hannerz 1996:27). While the proliferation of the virtual through telephone, television and computer have transformed the experience of place, the layerings of virtual and ‘real’ are not seamless. For Hannerz the local place has a new significance ‘as the arena in which a variety of influences come together’ (Hannerz 1996:27). This intersection is between what he terms ‘habitats of meaning’—in Bourdieu’s terms the habitus is being reconstructed out of these intersections. The task of understanding place experience in conditions of globalization is twofold: ‘the global sometimes has to be brought down to earth, the local has to be brought up to the surface, to be demystified’ (Hannerz 1996:28). Wilson and Dissanayake (1996) suggest that a ‘transnational imaginary’ shapes local constructions of identity. They note the rise of ‘multi-local’ (‘glocal’) marketing strategies linked to the rise of Frampton’s ‘critical regionalism’ as an aesthetic of ‘resistance’ (Wilson and Dissanayake 1996:4; Frampton 1983). Clearly places cannot be designed in any presumed autonomy from such global/local tensions.

Sennett also writes of how socio-economic change transforms local identifications with place (Sennett 1997). The decline in security of workplace identity, with people moving and losing jobs and careers more frequently, stimulates the investment of identity in house and neighbourhood. The local place is called upon to serve as a refuge against the market. This can lead to a claustrophobic retreat into neo-traditional places of exclusion, intolerance and fantasy. On the other hand it can lead to a more vital relationship between local and global, self and other. For Sennett, the diversity of urban and global life can sustain a more healthy self-identity but not in the absence of the sustaining qualities of local places:
Baudelaire famously defined modernity as the experience of the fleeting and the fragmented. To accept life in its disjointed pieces is an adult experience of freedom, but still these pieces must lodge and embed themselves somewhere, in a place that allows them to endure.

(Sennett 1997:69)

Augé portrays the increasingly fleeting and fragmented nature of ‘supermodernity’ as a disappearance of place: ‘If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place’ (Augé 1996:77–78). Included as ‘non-places’ are spaces of transit and temporal occupation—freeways, transit lounges, aircraft cabins, supermarkets, hotel rooms, leisure parks and large retail stores as well as the informational spaces of telepresence. ‘Non-places are the real measure of our time’, suggest Augé (1996:79). While such sites and their placeless experiences proliferate, they surely cannot be defined as outside social relations, history or identity. Augé’s ‘non-places’ are a version of what Relph (1976, 1987) has long identified as the placelessness of the modern urban landscape.

Place theory has been regularly written off as a form of nostalgia, rendered irrelevant by information technology, modernization and globalization. Yet what we are seeing are transformations of place: while the experiences may be new, the transformation is not. In the end, the only thing that the different approaches to ‘place’ have in common is their attention to everyday life and the practices of its transformation. The experience of place marks the beginning and the end of every architectural and urban design project—the desire to change the world, and the result as lived. Placemaking is fundamentally about the invention and construction of the future—thus it will always be a practice of power, for better or worse.

ACTION AND REPRESENTATION

Having dealt with theories of spatial program, text and place separately, I shall turn briefly to the question of the relationship between them. This is the great aporia of this work and I shall not pretend to resolve it. In framing places, built form is framing both action and representation simultaneously. While we may need different theoretical tools to understand these framings, in everyday life they are integrated. We do not act within spatial segments on the one hand and read meanings on the other. Consider the following quote from Barthes’ early work:

If I am a woodcutter...The tree is not an image for me, it is simply the meaning of my action. But if I am not a woodcutter...this tree is no longer the meaning of reality as a human action, it is an image-at-one’s-disposal. Compared to the real language of the woodcutter, the language I create is a second-order language...This second-order language is not entirely mythical, but it is the very locus where myth settles...There is
therefore one language which is not mythical, it is the language of man as producer: wherever man speaks in order to transform reality and no longer to preserve it as an image, wherever he links his language to the making of things...myth is impossible.

(Barthes 1973:145—146, original emphasis).

This talk of action as a ‘real language’ and contemplation as ‘second-order’ disappears from Barthes with the deconstructive turn. But the problem does not disappear by reducing action to text. There may be some clues here in Heidegger’s (1962:97—102) distinction between active and contemplative modes of dwelling, which he terms *Zuhandenheit* and *Vorhandenheit*. The former is a mode of engagement with the world, dwelling in action. The latter involves contemplation of the world, a certain distance from which we might ‘read’ it. While Heidegger suggests both are necessary to everyday life, our active engagement with the world has primacy in the construction of meaning. In a parallel with Wittgenstein, meaning is found in the ‘use’. This is not to suggest that behaviour in space is more important than architectural form, only that the meaning of both is based in everyday life, in dwelling. It follows that representations are not simply ‘read’, but are constructed through interaction.

Such an interactionist view of meaning in architecture from a Heideggerian stance is akin to that explored by Lerup (1977) in ‘Building the Unfinished’, an interactionist approach to architecture where meaning, like human action is forever ‘unfinished’. His focus is on the analysis, displacement and recombination of ‘types’, wherein the form/function nexus is critically addressed (Lerup 1977:165). This opens the prospect of a deconstruction of program which aims specifically at a reconstruction of the lifeworld in action. There are links here to Benjamin’s dialectical imagery—taking the familiar and reframing it syntactically and representationally. A similar approach is suggested by Percy (1981:46—62) in the attempt to recover an authenticity of encounter with a world rendered stereotyped through its symbolic packaging. Thus he suggests that if one wants students to learn biology or literature with fresh eyes, one places the ‘sonnet’ on the dissecting board and the ‘creature’ on the seminar table. Such a deconstruction can be applied more broadly to the design and programming of ‘places’ where the ‘shock value’ is lived and geared immediately into human action.7 While the deconstructive turn focuses on keeping meaning in play, ‘play’ is also a form of action.

This question of the connection between action and representation has links to the work of Arendt, who defines power as a communicative agreement on collective action: ‘Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group’ (Arendt 1986:65). Thus power is defined as a collective capacity, asserting the primacy of ‘power to’ and socializing it. The notion of communication about action unites issues of action and representation:

Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not
used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities. (Arendt 1958:200)

Arendt’s work relies upon uncoerced ‘communicative action’ with strong connections to the social theory of Habermas, who posits a fundamental opposition between ‘lifeworld’ and ‘system’. The ‘lifeworld’ as we have seen is the everyday world of place experience, of social integration and of ‘communicative action’. The ‘system’, on the other hand, is the integrated social and economic structures of the state and the market. According to Habermas, modernity heralds a cleaving of ‘system’ from ‘lifeworld’ into a separate domain of instrumental reason, based in the imperatives of efficiency and economy. This is coupled with an invasion and colonization of the ‘lifeworld’ by the ‘system’. Places of everyday life become increasingly subject to the system imperatives of the market and its distorted communications, advertising and constructions of meaning.

Habermas has argued that the reduction of architecture to an autonomous critique of formal style renders it ripe for appropriation by system imperatives (Habermas 1985). He sees the ideological split between form and function, and the privileging of the former, as problematic. Thus it is possible to produce an architecture where the system imperatives are embedded in the program while legitimizing gestures of emancipation are embodied in the formal imagery. Habermas opposes the aestheticizing of knowledge and morality in post-structuralist thought (Habermas 1985). He sees aesthetic production as a form of symbolic communication within the lifeworld, but also subject to colonization by system imperatives. Habermas aims to clear a space for aesthetic production and judgement to occur freed from ideological distortion. Mayo has used such ideas to argue that technical reasoning, distorted communication and the supposed neutrality of aesthetic discourse can all be used as practices of power in architecture (Mayo 1985).

In the attempt to open up new discursive realms, there is a parallel between Habermas and Derrida. Yet while Habermas wants a certain transparency of meaning, Derrida wants to keep meaning in play. Both positions have their dangers and liberating imperatives. There can be no single theory of power and built form. But there is an imperative to articulate the multiple connections of power to built form, both programmatic and discursive. While I make no claim to resolve the question of the connection between built form and human action, this question must be kept alive. I shall conclude this theorizing with a return to where I began in Chapter 1, with the fundamental primacy of power to, in relation to which all forms of power over are parasitic. All questions about power as mediated in built form come back to those of empowerment.
Part II

Centres of Power
Chapter 5: Take your breath away

When one enters the Reich Chancellery, one should have the feeling that one is visiting the master of the world. One will arrive there along wide avenues containing the Triumphal arch, the Pantheon (the domed hall), the Square of the People—things to take your breath away.

Hitler (quoted in Hochmann 1989:260)

The Brandenburg Gate was built in 1791 on the site where the major entry to the old city of Berlin intersects the former city wall. This east-west axis began as a seventeenth century ‘Royal Way’ from the medieval castle to the royal gardens, the Tiergarten. The axis became symbolic of the rise of the Prussian state, lined with military and cultural buildings along the Unter den Linden. The design was modelled on the Grecian Propylea but the urban location sites it as a triumphal arch in the Roman tradition, framing the victorious return of troops from war. It does not face outwards as a city gate would, but inwards. It is not a fortified part of a city wall but a representational ‘frame’ for the victorious ‘return’. The gate is surmounted by a statue of the ‘Goddess of Peace’ driving a four horse chariot into the city. She holds the symbols of Germany and victory: oak leaves, spear, eagle and iron cross. Yet Napoleon stole the statue after his victory in 1806. The denuded gate became symbolic of resistance to France until Napoleon was defeated and the statue was returned in 1814. Ritual marches through the gate were enacted for victories over Denmark in 1864, Austria in 1866, and the French in 1871. The gate is a symbolic punctuation mark on the Berlin-Paris axis.

The Reichstag, housing the German parliament, was built nearby in 1894. Funded from French war reparations, it was sited facing west (towards France) across a military parade ground called the Platz der Republik. The building was modelled on a neo-Renaissance palace and later inscribed Dem Deutschen Volke (To the German People) on its entablature. In the centre of the plaza the Victory Column was erected, a 90 metre shaft with a golden winged ‘Victory’ statue clutching the same symbols of war and German unity as found on the gate. She also faced France, on a plinth incorporating captured and melted cannons. The ensemble of axis, gate, Reichstag, plaza and column was symbolic of both the Reich and its domination over France (Figure 5.1).

In January 1933 Nazi stormtroopers held a torchlight procession through the gate to mark Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor. They marched towards the city, echoing the idea of the ‘return’ and ‘victory’. Within a month the Reichstag
building was largely gutted by fire. Immediately blamed on members of the Communist Party, the fire was used by Hitler as a pretext to suspend constitutional rights on the following day. This and the later Enabling Act, on the same pretext, opened the door to political persecutions which continued all the way to the holocaust. Responsibility for the arson has never been fully resolved.¹ The Reichstag was a repository of substantial popular emotional investment. The razing of the national icon touched a deep nerve in the German people and unleashed a reservoir of power which Hitler harnessed. The emotional investment in architecture was cashed in the form of legitimation for tyranny.

Figure 5.1
Reichstag district: Speer Plan and east-west border superimposed
Drawing by Craig Tan from sources in Krier (1985b) and Helmer (1985)
COMMUNITY ARCHITECTURE

There is ample evidence of Hitler’s fetish for architecture and urban design. He spent large portions of his early life designing and building models for the transformation of Linz and Vienna. Twice rejected for architecture school in his youth, he reportedly told his flatmate: ‘I’ll show those incompetent senile fools that I can go ahead without them’ (quoted in Hochman 1989:183). During the 1930s, while Chancellor, he spent up to a day per week on architectural matters and even during the war he leafed through architecture books before going to bed. Hitler developed coherent theories of architecture and urban form which he saw as an expression of the spiritual and psychological condition of the people. This was more than the representation of culture or Zeitgeist for him. Architecture stimulated community spirit, inspired patriotism and a faith in the future. But it also inspired a belief in leadership. Hitler understood that power is not a zero-sum game, but lay in the capacity to generate a sense of empowerment in his subjects. He believed in what he called ‘community architecture’ as a product of collective effort, to be used by and embody the spirit of the ‘community’ (Taylor 1974). Buildings and cities not only housed but also ‘represented’ this community/nation/race.

Hitler believed that insufficient money was spent on the public realm. He was inspired by and envied Paris in this regard. Disdaining the economic rationalism of the market, he believed that public buildings should be more imposing than those of private capital. He loved the monumental neo-classical for its timeless values of imperial power. It was a plank of Nazi propaganda that Greeks and Aryans were racially linked but Hitler was also much influenced by Rome. He wanted buildings that would outlast the Reich, believing that architecture had inspirational inertia which could carry a national spirit through periods of decline, and retain its meaning in decay. This was what Speer termed the ‘theory of ruin value’ whereby the inspirational power of architecture transcended any utilitarian or instrumental purpose.

Speer built his reputation designing stage sets and choreography for Nazi rallies, initially in Berlin and later in Nuremberg. These culminated in the rally grounds with up to a quarter of a million people in the Zeppelin Field stadium, built in 1936 (Blomeyer 1979; Taylor 1974). The design, modelled on the Greek Pergamon altar, was in the form of a 400 metre square of open space, framed by neo-classical stands on all sides. The main stand to the north had a central rostrum for the Führer and was backed by a massive colonnade. This is where the famed ‘cathedral of light’ effects were achieved with anti-aircraft searchlights shining columns of light 15 kilometres into the sky to create an ethereal glow. These night rallies showed that the monumental Nazi architecture was based on more than classical nostalgia. While Hitler was not impressed by the forms of gothic architecture, he admired the mysterious light, the sense of awe and vertical aspiration evoked in the cathedral interiors (Taylor 1974). The ‘cathedral of light’ effect was an eclectic fusion of the most potent elements of both the classical and the gothic.
The rallies exemplified Hitler’s notion of community architecture. ‘Why always the colossal?’ he once asked rhetorically, ‘Because I want to build self-awareness into every German’ (quoted in Dal Co 1981:105). The Zeppelin Field embodied a sense of enclosure and togetherness within. The rallies were bonding ceremonies between the Führer and the ‘community’; they embodied the paradox of feeling stronger by submerging personal identity into a larger whole (Adorno 1991). At the rallies and marches the blood red banners with their orderly but dynamic swastikas established a congruence with the orderly and disciplined, but emotionally charged and dynamic troops. The flat floor of the arena was a signifier of order in space, 16 hectares of disciplined helmets and weapons. The rallies were multi-dimensional spectacles where ‘People, buildings, flags, insignia, acoustics and light were essential elements of the whole’ (Blomeyer 1979:59).

The swastika is an archaic symbol theorized by Jung (1972) as a particularly potent mandala form. It is a symbol of unity which embodies both the stability of the square and the dynamic wheeling movement of the circle. Jung suggests that mandalas have a therapeutic role for people in chaotic psychic states of disorientation or panic and are pervasive cultural symbols which construct images of unity out of chaos. The anti-clockwise swastika is both a Navaho and Buddhist symbol of unity (Jung 1972:36, 96). The swastika was a particularly astute choice as a Nazi icon—dynamic stability for troubled minds. It evoked the historic German cross but gave it a new ‘turn’. It collapsed the meanings of the architecture and human choreography of jackboots on stone in monumental space. As aestheticized displays of disciplined power in space, these rallies have no equal.

**BLOOD AND SOIL**

Despite the focus on the public realm, Nazi ideology was profoundly anti-urban. Urban life was portrayed as rootless and racially mixed whereas the true Aryan blood was to be found in the purified rural community; the regional völkische ideal was one of deep connection to the German soil—an authentic conflation of ‘soil’ and ‘soul’. Art and architecture were seen as stemming from these deep roots in place attachment, a chthonic ‘spirit of place’. This construction of the Aryan myth resonates with Heidegger’s ontology of dwelling which identifies ‘building’ with ‘Being’ (Heidegger 1971).\(^3\) The significance of the blood and soil component of Nazi ideology was precisely that it managed to appropriate such architecture and gear it to the politics of nationalism. The ‘other’ to these ‘authentic’ modes of dwelling was the rootless urban dweller and particularly the urban Jew. Without an authentic architecture one did not really dwell nor belong.

Hitler’s rural retreat at Obersalzberg in the Bavarian Alps was a cottage in vernacular style, enlarged according to his own design. A 650 hectare fenced enclave for the party elite was established around it with many buildings added during the 1930s, including a mountaintop ‘eagle’s nest’. The entry to this eyrie was literally through the mountain, via a large stone archway, a tunnel and then
an elevator 150 metres to the top (Speer 1970:85; Taylor 1974). Here one literally entered the German ‘soil’ in order to metaphorically become the Germanic eagle with a commanding view of the landscape. The Bavarian retreat helped to construct the myth of the romantic Hitler. In 1938 Britain’s Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was charmed into appeasement at Obersalzberg.

SLIPPERY SURFACES

In 1938 Hitler commissioned Albert Speer to design and construct a new Chancellery in Berlin. This building was a tour de force in terms of both design and Speer’s capacities in organizing the design and construction of the building within a year. Speer designed a 400 metre long building, entered at its end from next door to the old Chancellery in Wilhelmstrasse. The plan (Figure 5.2) was organized along a ‘diplomatic promenade’ from the old to the new, along a carefully orchestrated narrative enfilade that led for 230 metres to Hitler’s Study (Goodsell 1988:4). The Palace at Versailles (Figure 2.2) was a primary source for the planning with a similar enfilade leading from the Royal Court to the Hall of Mirrors before turning and terminating in the King’s bedroom. The diplomatic promenade of Speer’s Chancellery begins adjacent to the old Chancellery with two giant bronze drive-through doors into a Court of Honour (60 by 28 metres), designed for a processional loop in one door and out the other. The dimensions are important here because Hitler memorized and boasted of them (Speer 1970:114–115). The processional path led up some steps to a Doric portal flanked by nude male statues representing the party (legitimacy) and the army (force). This portico led to a marble walled antechamber decorated with flowers. Beyond the antechamber a vestibule led to the Roman inspired Hall of Mosaics. This was a large (37 by 20 metres) windowless but skylit hall, decorated with German symbols of eagles and oak leaves in the marble walls and floor. Beyond the hall some more steps and a vestibule led to a rotunda, skylit from above. Figures of the German cross and swastika were woven together in the floor mosaic. The rotunda was an entry space to the huge Hall of Marble which, at 146 by 12 metres, was designed to dwarf the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles.

While the hall was terminated at its far end by a formal reception hall, a second axis bisected the gallery. Here the diplomatic promenade turned to enter Hitler’s office, framed by motionless guards. This room of 27 by 14 metres overlooked the gardens. It was furnished with a desk in one corner, a circle of easy chairs around the fireplace and a map table. The room was decorated with tapestries, paintings, floor rugs, plants and a globe of the world.

This building needs to be understood as a form of symbolic choreography where the spatial structure operates to control the framing of a series of representational themes. Germany as a one-party state was signified in almost every space through the image of the eagle above the swastika, and naturalized through the oak and eagle icons. The narrative pathway constructed a myth of
Figure 5.2
Berlin Chancellery and Bunker
Drawing by Andrew Simpson from sources in Goodsell (1988) and O'Donnell (1979)

Figure 5.3
Berlin Chancellery: spatial analysis
the progression of history through links to Greece, Rome and Paris, punctuated by a mounting of steps. The use of materials such as bronze, stone and marble evoked a sense of timeless immortality.

The building also served to signify the controlled force of the nation state. The scale of both the vast and useless voids and the formal designs that enclosed them were designed to belittle the human subject. The building signified the force necessary to produce it as the frozen armed guards signified the discipline and order to which this force was subject. The intimidating effects of the gigantic chambers were enhanced by being punctuated with smaller spaces such as the antechamber and the rotunda. These smaller spaces were decorated with flowers, the sublime tempered by the beautiful. This produced an intimidation/seduction dialectic akin to the hard cop/soft cop routine of police interrogation. The subject is made aware of the implied force and yet seduced into admiration, belittled yet charmed.

The spatial analysis (Figure 5.3) shows that the long approach to Hitler’s office was a ten segmented enfilade (including vestibules). The deepest realm of the building incorporated the formal Reception Hall, the Cabinet Room and some assistants’ offices. Yet all formal access to the inner realm was through the controlling segment of the Hall of Marble. Ministers, heads of state, officials and visiting dignitaries were all subject to its intimidating volume. Beyond the Hall of Marble, the inner realm was ringy in structure, and softened with garden views.

Speer’s enfilade delighted Hitler, who especially liked the long march diplomats would have to take: ‘they’ll get a taste of the power and grandeur of the German Reich!’ (Speer 1970:103). He ordered the marble floor left exposed since ‘diplomats should have practice in moving on a slippery surface’ (quoted in Speer 1970:113) (Figure 5.4). There is little evidence of how the Chancellery worked in practice since diplomacy was displaced by the war that quickly followed its completion.4 However, it was the setting for Hitler’s triumphant intimidation of the aging President Hacha of Czechoslovakia in early 1939. With German troops already occupying part of his country and poised to invade the rest, Hacha was formally received late at night by an SS guard in the Court of Honour and escorted along the enfilade to Hitler’s office. He was assured of Hitler’s determination to maintain peace and urged to sign a document agreeing to full German occupation. In an adjacent room he was threatened by aides with the alternative of turning Prague into ruins. Hacha suffered a heart attack, was revived with an injection, and signed the document (Jarman 1956:245; Speer 1970:115–116).

GERMANIA

The constructed Chancellery was but a provisional building, a prelude to the larger transformation of central Berlin, which was to be renamed ‘Germania’ and developed largely in secret by Speer from 1936 to 1942.5 Speer’s planning office was set up as an independent ‘research’ institute, isolated from the Berlin city government, yet within walking distance of the Chancellery. The plan, which
entailed removal of parks and huge sections of the urban fabric, was inconsistent with public planning (Helmer 1985). The old east-west Berlin-Paris axis was to become subsidiary to a new north-south axis signifying the ‘turn’ of history. Hitler visited Paris with Speer in June 1940 and is quoted as saying: ‘In the past I often considered whether we would not have to destroy Paris. But when we are finished in Berlin, Paris will only be a shadow’ (quoted in Speer 1970:172). The Berlin scheme was conceived in global competition with historic centres of power. It was to be capped with a domed hall or Volkhalle, which was to dwarf both St Peter’s basilica and the US Capitol. The ceremonial way was to be wider and longer than the Champs Elysées with an arch higher than the Arc de Triomphe.

The new axis was to be aligned with the historic Platz der Republik in front of
the Reichstag and was to extend for 5 kilometres to the south. The ceremonially
total entries to the city were to be a railway station at the southern end of this axis,
and the nearby Templehof airfield, which was connected via a cross axis. The two
major architectural pieces of the plan had been sketched by Hitler in prison in 1925 –
the triumphal arch and the domed hall. Both were to be visible on exiting the railway
station where, in Speer’s words (1970:134–135), visitors ‘would be overwhelmed, or
rather stunned, by the urban scene and thus the power of the Reich’ (Figure 5.5).

In front of the station was to be a 330 metre wide avenue lined with captured
cannons and enclosed by hotels, opera and municipal buildings. This section extended
for over a kilometre and encompassed the triumphal arch in a 36 hectare expanse.
The arch, a copy of Hitler’s clumsy design from 1925, was to be 115 metres high
with a plaza on top about the size of a football field. The huge Roman inspired arch
was to frame a much smaller gateway of a similar scale and design to the Greek inspired Brandenburg Gate. This designed juxtaposition can be read as both Rome surmounting Greece and the new Reich surmounting the old. The path underneath was to be the path of history and the arch was but the beginning. The central segment of the vista was to be lined with ministries, cultural institutions and industrial corporations. Adjacent to the existing Potsdamer Platz, the busiest intersection in Europe at that time, a grand roundabout was planned. Beyond this, the path penetrated the Tiergarten parkland before entering the forecourt to the Volkhalle. The principle of spatial manipulation here was like that of the Chancellery/Versailles but incorporating ideas that were developed later in the suburban shopping mall. It established a magnet and an extended path of approach to be used for symbolic display. The subject was to be manipulated past displays of German products, military force, culture, nature, history and industrial technology on the way from the entry to the centre of power. This is the spatial principle of the chancellery writ large.

Capping the 5 kilometre axis, the Volkhalle was to be a giant domed hall for 180,000 people modelled on the Roman Pantheon. The idea and initial sketch were Hitler’s but the design was Speer’s and under his hand it was influenced by Boulée’s 1792 project for a National Assembly Hall in Paris, the great rationalist symbol of emancipation. The dome was to be surmounted by a bronze eagle spreading its wings with its claws enclosing a globe of the earth. The Platz der Republic was to become a grand forecourt enclosed by the domed hall, new Chancellery, Führer’s Palace and the existing Reichstag (Figure 5.1). Speer wanted to demolish the old and fire-damaged Reichstag, but Hitler, alert to the powers of juxtaposition, insisted that it be retained and dwarfed under the wing of the new scheme (Figure 5.6). In order to achieve the setback of this hall from the plaza, the Spree River was to be diverted underneath its entry court. The Platz der Republik was to be a paved square of about 20 hectares fully enclosed by buildings. Variously named both the ‘Square of the People’ and ‘King’s Plaza’, it was to be defended against insurrection with large steel gates. The Führer’s palace was to face the plaza with a 240 metre long façade penetrated only by a single arched gateway surmounted by a balcony where the Führer could address over half a million people in safety. This proposed plaza was to be the culmination of the rally ground designs.

The south-western wing of the palace complex was to become the new Chancellery. Buoyed by his success with the provisional Chancellery, Speer simply enlarged the design for this project—the diplomatic promenade was to be half a kilometre long. The Court of Honour was stretched to 180 metres and the Hall of Marble to 216 metres. These giant segments were interspersed with smaller halls and vestibules generating a similar spatial dialectic. Once again Hitler’s office was on a cross axis, overlooking the palace gardens, at the bloated scale of a ‘quarter acre block’.

**BUNKER AND WALL**

Hitler’s use of architecture changed as the war progressed and his needs changed
from visibility, legitimation, seduction and intimidation to protection. The Chancellery was camouflaged against Allied bombers and from early 1945 Hitler retreated to a newly constructed bunker under the Chancellery gardens (Figure 5.2). This was, both literally and syntactically, the deepest in a connected series of bunkers that housed hundreds of guards and officials, plus medical facilities, canteens and garages (O’Donnell 1979). Access to Hitler was subject to three layers of guards. His personal apartment formed a string of cells, coupled with a private exit stair to the Chancellery gardens and a concrete lookout tower which offered a protected view (Figure 5.7). Thus the bunker with its linear string of rooms coupled with the private rear exit and garden view was a structurally congruent but shrunken version of the Chancellery above. Marble was replaced by concrete and the study was one-thirtieth in size. Hitler’s retreat underground was also a retreat into unreality, as he pored over his beloved urban designs while blocking out the destruction of the real Berlin above. Jung has interpreted Hitler’s final days as a retreat into the ‘cellar’ as metaphor of the unconscious (O’Donnell 1979:xii) – a final and literal retreat to ‘blood and soil’.

The marble from the bombed Chancellery was used to construct a rather banal Soviet memorial in a vaguely similar style. The bunker and its watchtower
were soon displaced by the Berlin wall with some new watchtowers nearby. By a coincidence of bureaucracy and imagination, the official boundary between East and West Berlin ran through the centre of where the Volkhalle would have been, had history taken a different turn (Figure 5.1). The Berlin wall, constructed from 1961, severed the Reichstag from the Brandenburg Gate. And the gate, sealed by the graffiti covered wall, became a potent symbol of the Cold War. This dialectical image of a gate without a wall sealed by a wall without a gate was one that Benjamin would have appreciated even if Hitler would not. As a form of power the wall was archaic, a return to the walled city of force rather than seduction and intimidation. Technically it was modern, prefabricated in concrete sections, slotted together and locked with a tubular section on the top. The floodlit ‘death-strip’ on the east was under permanent panoptic gaze from concrete towers. Never designed in representational terms, the wall developed a semantic life of its own, gathering an extraordinary collection of graffiti on its western surface as an endless public billboard. This graffiti was
whitewashed at times by both the eastern and western authorities, in the latter case to erase anti-Reagan graffiti during an official visit.

Ladd (1997) suggests that the wall was a division in time as much as in space, embodying a denial of history on both sides. Maps in East Berlin erased West Berlin and its street patterns, a denial of any place beyond the wall. It was not called a ‘wall’ but an ‘anti-fascist protective rampart’ or simply the ‘border’. Yet in western maps the wall appeared as the minor municipal boundary it once was, a denial of the wall (Ladd 1997:18, 28). The collapse of the wall in 1989 was due in part to its failure to stop the flow of information—the gaze of television defeated that of the watchtower (Wark 1994). The prefabricated wall has now been fragmented and commodified, a metaphor for the shift from the modern to the postmodern. Graffiti coloured chips, with newly inverted meanings, adorn window sills and mantels across the globe, although only the graffiti covered western surface had exchange value. A cottage industry produces graffitied chips of concrete with certificates of authenticity (in English). Larger stretches of wall have been marketed as a way to ‘decorate the entrance hall of your corporate headquarters’ (Ladd 1997:10).

Similar ironies and transformations of meaning have also played out through the ‘Goddess of Peace’ statue surmounting the gate which was destroyed in the war. Anticipating this the Nazis had made a cast, yet with the division of the city in 1945 the cast was in the west and the gate was in the east. A rare example of co-operation in the 1950s saw the west supply a new copy of the statue. Insisting that it should be a symbol of peace, the eastern authorities severed the German cross and eagle before they mounted it. This severing then became symbolic of the East German state and after another debate they were restored in 1991 (Ladd 1997:74–80). Such struggles over meanings are now being played out along the length of the former wall and its blood-stained death-strip; struggles between memory and forgetting, between profit and the public interest (Balfour 1990; Ladd 1997). The collapse of one form of power in space is only and always the beginning of another.

**STYLES OF TYRANNY**

Despite the massive transformations in Berlin since the war, Nazi architecture lives in the imagination and debate has not resolved its lessons. It remains difficult to discuss because we are still dealing with the aftermath of the regime and its forms of representation remain stained—the swastika remains unusable outside neo-Nazi politics. In architectural discourse, debate has raged over Hitler’s allegiance to the neo-classical and vernacular. And his disdain for the modern has been used to boost the idea that modernism is an architecture of liberation.

Leon Krier has been the most articulate defender of Speer’s work. He suggests that architecture is autonomous from politics, that one cannot blame the power of architecture for its misuse by a tyrant.

there is neither authoritarian nor democratic architecture, no more than
there are authoritarian or democratic Wienerschnitzel. It is just as childish to read a particular color or the immanence of a political system into a row of Doric columns as it is to accept kidney shaped tables and tensile structures as the authentic expression of a libertarian and democratic regime. Architecture is not political; it is only an instrument of politics. (Krier 1981:37)

In this view, Nazi architecture was a form of deceit, a civilizing facade for the legitimation of terror. Under Nazism, as Krier (1985a:223) sees it, ‘Classical Architecture was...the civilized and well mannered face of an empire of lies.’ For Krier, Hitler was just a tyrant with taste, and he turns this preference for the neoclassical into an argument for its status as the highest form of architecture. In countering Krier, Ockman (1981:39) argues that there is a ‘well established linkage between...the tradition of classicism and a calculating and cold instrumentality...It is precisely this inherent aspect of order in classicism which renders it so potent as a political instrument’. The classical is an architecture of regularity, symmetry, harmony and hierarchy. It is easy to read such architecture as a metaphor for similar qualities in the political order. The classical language legitimizes authority. But authority is not the same thing as tyranny, and order cannot be simply conflated with any single style. Coaldrake (1995) shows how the same characteristics of regularity, symmetry, harmony and hierarchy are used without the western classical traditions to legitimize authority in Japanese architecture. Those who seek to problematize certain styles of architecture because of their complicity with power may be simply engaging in a new round of such complicity. It is necessary to accept the logic of Krier’s defence while rejecting the claims of autonomy. While we cannot recognize tyranny from the form of its cultural clothes, the production of built form is strongly complicit in such practices.

The claim for the autonomy of architecture rests upon a separation of form from instrumental function. And it also rests implicitly upon a broader Kantian aesthetic of universal judgement. Kant’s transcendental aesthetic is an a priori judgement which is at once both universal and subjective. The uselessness of art coupled with the subject’s disinterest in its function are the conditions for aesthetic judgement (Kant 1979). Yet it is precisely this sense of timeless and permanent aesthetic value, the presumed autonomy of architecture, which makes it so useful to the practices of power. For Eagleton such an aesthetic is a paradigm case of ideology, an ‘experience of pure contentless consensus’ (Eagleton 1990:96) which resonates with Bourdieu’s ‘complicitous silence’ and with Hitler’s well-known quote about the instrumental power of buildings: Their word is more convincing than a spoken one: it is the Word in stone’ (quoted in Taylor 1974:30). The greatest instrumental effects of architecture lie in this silence, the power to convince without debate.

The claims for architectural autonomy are by no means limited to particular styles. The assertions which issue from Speer and Krier echo those from Mies van der Rohe who was a key agent in asserting the autonomy of modernism. In
Berlin in the early 1930s Mies depoliticized the Bauhaus school in his zeal to make modernism palatable to the Nazis (Hochman 1989:222). He publicly declared support for Hitler and of one of his designs he wrote: ‘This clear and striking language corresponds to the essence of German work...This hall of honor... serves to accommodate the national emblems and the representations of the Reich’ (Hochman 1989:226). Mies’s work has a strong sense of order, well suited to colossal scale, and scarcely bereft of roots in the history of empire.

Hughes was writing about Speer, but it could have been Mies, when he argued: ‘Authoritarian architecture must be clear and regular on the outside, and let the passing eye deduce nothing of what goes on inside. It must be poker faced to the point of immobility; the mask must not slip’ (Hughes 1991:105). Mies was a more skilled designer than Speer but lacked political loyalty and had a well-known disdain for clients whom he regarded as ‘children’. Mies left Berlin in 1937, having built very little, his reputation luckily unstained by Nazism.

Modern architecture did not suit Hitler’s theory of ‘ruin value’; steel and glass lacked the sense of permanence. But his disdain for the modern is no argument for its potential; indeed, his dismissal of it as suitable only for ‘functional’ factories was based on an inability to see its potential. It is well to remember that ‘futurism’ was the chosen style of Italian fascism, expressing the dynamic and youthful image of a new order (Etlin 1991). While traditional styles can be enlisted in support of power, it does not follow that formal novelty has any necessary link to liberation, nor that tradition cannot be used against authority. During the Free Speech movement in Berkeley in the 1960s the neo-classical façade of the administration building (Sproul Hall) was mobilized as a setting for demonstrations. It was depicted in murals with the columns as canons trained on demonstrators. All architecture represents some social order and style is its language of expression. All styles mediate practices of power. The attribution of power to a formal style is a dangerous practice since it lures architects into the false hope of a stylistic escape from complicity and a blindness to new styles of seduction.

Having said this, there are two important ways in which contemporary styles are at an ideological disadvantage in practices of power. The first is that they lack semiotic connections to the history of empire. As Hughes (1991:102) puts it, the neo-classical works metaphorically as ‘the past underwriting the present’; it is difficult for the new to establish a linkage with the history of empire. Yet the capacity to construct historical narratives through stylistic revival is not limited to the neo-classical, hence the use of the vernacular to sustain the Aryan myth. Indeed, mediations of power do not rely on style at all; modern versions of archaic types can achieve similar effect. The ‘cathedral of light’ was a form of high-tech ‘gothic’ which tapped a traditional idea of community spirit and connection to a higher order.

The second disadvantage of contemporary styles is that they cannot easily play upon the fear of change. Propaganda is most effective when it reinforces and twists prevailing values and ideologies, rather than displacing and replacing them (Thies 1983). Revival styles can play upon the fear of change. But once again the
corollary does not hold—the refusal to play on such fear does not constitute a liberation from it. Contemporary forms can equally play upon the desire for liberty and progress, and illusions of liberty and progress are easily appropriated to political ends. Hitler’s disdain for the modern was a gap in his understanding of its potential.

It was not the fact of Nazi use of tradition but the manner and scale of such use that set it apart. The historic urban axis was to be turned into a minor axis as a signifier of the turn of history. The Brandenburg Gate, the Reichstag and the old Chancellery were to be belittled in the same manner. These were not matters of style but of scale and urban form. Hitler understood the power of the dialectical image in the construction of narrative. The aesthetic lure of the major Nazi projects had more to do with scale than with style—the sublime rather than the beautiful. While beauty is a pleasure into which we enter willingly, the sublime is ‘aestheticized danger’. This is the awe-full pleasure of submission to that which overwhelms us—a mix of reverence, fear and an almost phallic pleasure inspired by grandeur (Eagleton 1990). The sublime is an aesthetic of quantity—it is that which makes everything else seem small, as when confronted with the immensity of nature (Kant 1979).

Krier (1985a:49) recognizes that more than design skill was evident in the Berlin scheme: The very inmoderate size of the buildings and monuments would have given this avenue an air of grandiose intimacy which can be found in nature’. The monumental architecture was designed, as Hitler affirmed, ‘to take your breath away’. The experience of the sublime forms a thread connecting the mountain eyrie to the Chancellery, and the gothic-inspired ‘cathedrals of light’ to the neo-classical pantheon. The theory of ruins and the use of stone was a means to sustain this immensity across time.

However, there is no singular explanation of the Nazi use of architecture and it is becoming clear that Speer’s use of stone was strongly influenced by modes of production and regimes of forced labour in the quarries.7 Certainly Speer’s career was based in much more than design skill, particularly his personal rapport with Hitler and a technical and managerial capacity to organize production (Sereny 1995). Recall that the Chancellery was completed at an extraordinary speed. Hence his promotion to Armaments Minister during the war—from architecture to weaponry, stone to steel. And according to Sereny (1995:551), Speer was torn by an inner conviction that he was not the great architect that Hitler believed him to be.

There were many strands to the Nazi uses of architecture—gigantism, timelessness, history and authenticity—deploying neo-classical, gothic and vernacular styles. These were often coupled with ritual displays of force, discipline and community; using the spatial structure of the enfilade as a temporal and spatial narrative. And while projects were undertaken in the name of the ‘people’, the design/construct process was often secret and geared into oppressive modes of production. The lesson in the Nazi use of architecture and urban design is that such practices are multi-dimensional and promiscuous with regard to style. All dimensions of built form are available to appropriation in service of tyranny.
Chapter 6: Hidden power

The Way of the ruler lies in what cannot be seen...
See but do not appear to see

Han Fei Tzu (quoted in Wu 1991:88)

For much of Chinese imperial history the emperor ruled from within the nested walls of the Forbidden City in Beijing. Named ‘forbidden’ after its strict exclusion of the Chinese people, this was one of the most enclosed and segmented centres of power in urban history. The revolution of 1948 brought the construction of Tiananmen Square outside its entrance. Conceived as the antithesis of forbidden space, the square was a representation of the ‘people’, designed to contain over a million of them on its 40 hectare unwalled expanse. From April to June 1989 several thousand students camped out on Tiananmen Square, periodically joined by up to a million supporters. Under the gaze of global television the largest urban plaza in the world also became the most visible, the least hidden. So symbolically charged has this place become that the presence of the people in the people’s plaza undermined the legitimacy of an empire. Forbidden space has been reimposed.

The relations of place to power in this context are steeped in Confucian and Taoist philosophy which operates within Chinese civil and political culture as a form of ideology. From this view, for power to be effective it should remain hidden, as the canonical texts make clear: The best of all rulers is but a shadowy presence to his subjects,’ says Lao Tzu (1963:73), ‘The instruments of power in a state must not be revealed to anyone’ (Lao Tzu 1963:95). The art of warfare is the art of deception, of feigning submission and disorder to entice the enemy out of hiding. This is an art of turning the enemy’s anger and strength against them and one’s weakness to advantage. Taoism is a philosophy of opposites subject to persistent inversion, where ‘The most submissive thing in the world can ride roughshod over the hardest in the world—that which is without substance entering that which has no crevices’ (Lao Tzu 1963:104). This embodies a deep commitment to paradox, the effective action is non-action, the effective word is unspoken. The use of violence against subjects is the mark of a poor ruler; the successful leader rules without contention: ‘it is because (the ruler) does not contend that no one in the empire is in a position to contend with him’ (Lao Tzu 1963:128).
The philosophy of concealment is reflected spatially in the symbolic importance of the wall and the gate which penetrates it. And it is reflected in the enclosed places from the traditional Chinese walled courtyard house to the walled city (Kahn-Ackermann 1980). Walls reflect the Chinese passion for clarity of human relationships and of status. Walls divide the civilized from the barbaric (as the Great Wall did), sacred from profane, safety from danger. In this, Chinese culture reflects a broad cross-cultural attention to the rituals of entrance (Douglas 1966). The gate or threshold finds its meaning in the conjunction of opposing realms.

**FORBIDDEN SPACE**

Imperial Beijing was a city defined by its walls and gates, structured as four successively nested walled cities—the Outer, Inner, Imperial and Forbidden Cities respectively. The ceremonial approach to power was from the south to the north along an imperial axis which successively penetrates the city walls through a series of ceremonial gates. The gates to the Inner and Imperial cities frame the space that is now Tiananmen Square (Figure 6.1). The Gate of Heavenly Peace (Tiananmen) was the entrance to the Imperial City. It is in the form of a monolithic platform (part of the city wall) perforated by five tunnelled entries at ground level and surmounted by a hall. While the emperor passed through the central tunnel in procession, he seldom appeared on this gate which was used for passing down imperial edicts to the ministers and officials whose offices lined the intersection outside. About 400 metres and two segments beyond Tiananmen is the Meridian Gate, where the imperial axis enters the Forbidden City.

The Forbidden City is a rectangular compound of about 950 by 750 metres, enclosing about 72 hectares within its 8 metre walls and 50 metre moat. The city is strictly oriented to the cardinal directions with a gate at each point. It is a Celestial City, an ideogrammatic connection of heaven to earth. The emperor’s rule was legitimized by his role as a link between heaven and earth; the relation of the people to the emperor was congruent with that of the emperor to the deity. One approached the emperor as one approached a deity, from the south moving upwards. And the path to power crossed multiple thresholds—gates, steps and bridges into the hidden depths of the city.

The main southern gate, the Meridian Gate, formed a U-shaped entry court across the broad moat, surmounted by a hall. The emperor would sometimes appear on this gate to accept captives after a successful war. The gate is penetrated by another five tunnels to a courtyard where five bridges cross the Inner Golden River. Beyond this courtyard is the Gate of Supreme Harmony, which is the main entrance to the Outer Court, the primary ceremonial precinct of the Forbidden City.

The Gate of Supreme Harmony gives access to the primary ceremonial site and the termination of the ceremonial axis. It consists of an ensemble of gate and hall (sharing the same name) together with the (unnamed) courtyard they enclose.
This ensemble is structurally congruent with the Chinese courtyard house but at a much larger scale. The courtyard of about 200 metres square is the forecourt to the Hall of Supreme Harmony, which is set upon a raised terrace and which houses the throne. To reach the hall one mounts several flights of steps to a large terrace, then up again to the hall, and up again to the throne on a 2 metre platform.

The ensemble of throne/hall/terrace/court/gate was the primary site where the emperor’s presence was made visible on ceremonial occasions. At about 4 hectares, this courtyard could hold very large numbers of people, for strictly choreographed rituals. The pavement was marked out with rank markers. On the east were the ministers and civil officials, ranked above the military officers to the west. Each of these groups was in turn ranked from north to south in diminishing status.
The ensemble was an ideogram of the world, of heaven and earth, reflecting the Chinese saying that ‘heaven is high and the earth is broad’. The floor of the court represented the earth with the terraced hall in the heavens. Paintings of ceremonial occasions on this site often depicted the hall enshrouded in clouds with the emperor hidden. This practice of hiding the emperor on occasions of highest visibility is evident in the spatial structure and ritual. The terrace is about 8 metres higher than the courtyard and the throne is about 50 metres back from the edge of the terrace. No one was permitted in the hall when the emperor was present and the ‘kow tow’ was a practice of averting one’s eyes as he passed. The place of power was where one could see without being seen.

The Outer Court as a whole is a 200 by 400 metre rectangular compound which encloses four courtyards and three major halls. The halls of Supreme

Figure 6.2
The Forbidden City: spatial analysis (Qing Period)
Based on plans in Weng (1982) and Yu (1984)
Harmony, Complete Harmony and Preserving Harmony are all on axis and share the raised terrace (symbolic heaven) surrounded by lower courtyards. While the ceremonial ritual terminates at the throne, the flanking gates and courtyards give access to a rear courtyard beyond the Hall of Preserving Harmony. This hall was used for banquets and examinations and its rear courtyard was also used for ceremonial occasions. This court (which I shall call the ‘rear outer court’) also has a strong political significance since it was the point of access to the everyday practices of power in the Inner Court of the Forbidden City.

The Inner Court was the inner sanctum of the emperor and empress, although not always used for living quarters. The spatial structure is essentially a half-scale replica of the Outer Court, a 100 by 200 metre enclosure, with another cluster of three buildings on axis. First among them is the Palace of Heavenly Purity, where the emperor received officials and emissaries; its square forecourt, with terrace and steps, replicates the ensemble at the Hall of Supreme Harmony at half scale. This palace forms a couple with the Palace of Earthly Tranquillity, symbolically the place of the empress with its bridal room. The small central building is called the Hall of Union, where sacred objects were stored. The three buildings together, also mounted on a single plinth, signify the union of heaven and earth, of male and female. Beyond the Palace of Earthly Tranquillity the axis continues through the Imperial Garden and the northern city gate to a small hill constructed from the excavated moat. Coupled with the river running through the outer courtyard, this establishes the geomantically propitious location of a dwelling with a hill to the north and water to the south.

Zhu (1994) has undertaken a spatial syntax analysis of the Forbidden City upon which Figure 6.2 is partially based. Such analysis identifies the structure of the Forbidden City as four distinct spatial zones. The two major zones are the ceremonial approach through the Outer Court and then the Inner Court coupled with its flanking palaces. These two zones are augmented by the south-western zone of military access near the west (military) gate and the south-eastern zone of civil/ministerial access near the east (civil) gate. The city has one key space of control linking all four zones—the rear outer court behind the Hall of Preserving Harmony.

Although ceremonies along the axis were important, they were also quite rare. They were forms of legitimation of authority; the everyday exercise of power followed quite different spatial circuits (Zhu 1994). The normal access to the emperor for ministers and officials was an indirect path of about 3 kilometres from their offices outside Tiananmen Gate. This approach skirted the eastern edge of the Imperial City and entered the Forbidden City through the East (Civil) Gate. From there they traversed a large irregular open space of the civil zone along the margins of the Outer Court to enter the rear outer courtyard in front of the Gate of Heavenly Purity. This path to power was about twice as long as the direct route up the axis and relatively unpunctuated with thresholds until it reaches the rear outer courtyard. Here an office and waiting area was built for ministers waiting to be received within the Inner Court.

The Inner Court is flanked by clusters of six palaces on each side, housing
a huge imperial household of concubines and eunuchs. Yet the lateral enclosing walls of the Inner Court are highly permeable, ensuring that the concubines and eunuchs were spatially integrated with the Inner Court (Zhu 1994). The patrol route which guarded and secured the inner sanctum encircled both the Inner Court and its adjacent palaces. Spatial control over this inner zone fell largely to the eunuchs. The eunuchs were the ‘keepers of the bed’, recruited because they were seen as neither a threat to, nor a subject of, the desires of the emperor. Regarded as basically yin (female) in nature, eunuchs could not bear a son to carry on wealth and power; they were therefore believed to be excluded from the struggle for power (Anderson 1990).2

Thus at its deepest realms the city was a relatively permeable and ringy structure for the circulation and interaction of the emperor, eunuchs and concubines. Yet the path into and out of this realm for ministers and officials was strongly controlled through the rear outer courtyard. So long as the eunuchs controlled this passage they controlled imperial access. Zhu (1994) argues that this spatialization of power was linked to competing struggles for the emperor’s body (by the concubines) and the emperor’s mind (by the ministers and officials). The extraordinary power of the eunuchs was based on their role as mediators in these struggles—feeding the emperor’s sexual appetite with concubines and his fears with stories of enemies beyond the walls. This power was reproduced across many dynasties through its embodiment in the spatial structure of the Forbidden City.

Zhu (1994) also theorizes that in addition to the everyday struggles for power between ministers and eunuchs, the city structure also served to mediate violent struggles, utilizing the enclosure of the walls and gates, enforced by the army who were otherwise confined to the military zone. The east-west opposition between the military and civil zones reflected these dual struggles for power—the violent and the legitimate.

The power of the eunuchs, based in spatial control, was at the expense of both ministers and the emperor who became starved of information and advice. The eunuchs are widely credited with the demise of the Ming dynasty when emperor Wan-Li lost control of the bureaucracy and retreated behind the inner walls for 25 years from 1595 to 1620 (Spence 1990:16). Determined to gain closer control of his administration, Qing emperor Yong Zheng (1723–35) renovated the Hall of Mental Cultivation as a new centre of power just beyond the north-west corner of the Outer Court. Here he set up a new and secret administrative council located next door in the rear outer courtyard where his advisers were given direct access to him through the side gateway, bypassing the Hall of Heavenly Purity. This secret council became institutionalized as the Grand Council under the reign of his son Qianlong.

While located next door to the new secret council, the Hall of Mental Cultivation remained several segments deep from the rear outer courtyard, entered via a street and two courtyards. The main hall within the compound has two wings in an H-shaped plan, with offices at the front and a bedchamber at the rear. The bedchamber is flanked by the Hall of Manifest Compliance (for the
empress) and the Hall of Festive Joy (for the concubines). Here the struggle for the emperor’s body and mind is evident in the plan and in the names of the halls. While the centre of power was moved off axis and informalized, a similar gendered spatial structure was established.

When Tongzhi became emperor at the age of 5 in 1861, his mother, the empress dowager Cixi, ruled through him. She moved south from the Hall of Manifest Compliance into the east room of the Hall of Mental Cultivation and placed the child/emperor on a throne in front of a curtain. She received ministers and spoke through the emperor, from behind the curtain (Figure 6.3). The practice of power became quite literally hidden, even at its ostensible centre. The symbols of power in decline became mere propriety. Both Tongzhi and his pregnant wife died mysteriously when he was 18 years old. Traditional rules of succession were broken when Cixi installed her 3 year old nephew, Guangxu, as emperor, and continued to rule through the curtain. When Guangxu became a reformist in his twenties, he was placed under palace arrest for a decade. The meaning of the city inverted—the emperor was forbidden to leave. He died in 1908, followed within a day by Cixi, effectively ending imperial rule in China.

Despite its successive layerings and its spatial celebration as a centre of power, there was no ultimate place of power in the Forbidden City. Indeed this was part of its effectiveness, as Meyer (1991:61) argues: ‘Instead of overwhelming the viewer with vertical monuments the Forbidden City hides in order to impress. One can never forget the power of the emptiness at the center because one is
forever forbidden to see it.’ Paradoxically, but consistent with the Chinese philosophies outlined earlier, in this empty centre of the empire power is both marked and concealed. And the practices of power were subject to slippage, behind walls and curtains, off the imperial axis. These are traits that were to persist beyond the imperial era.

With the end of imperial power in 1911 the centre of power moved out of the Forbidden City and eventually moved in next door. Zhongnanhai, which means ‘central and southern lakes’, was a pleasure park for the emperor, developed outside the western walls of the Forbidden City from the tenth century (Figure 6.4). From the fourteenth century it was enclosed in the regal vermilion walls as an adjunct to the palace and a number of imperial halls and compounds were built within it. It was turned into a park for a short time after 1911 but was a government enclave by 1915 (Zhou 1984).

After 1948 the compound became a residential and administrative enclave for party leaders. In the tradition of keeping power hidden, accurate maps of Zhongnanhai are difficult to find. Mao chose as his residence a traditional
compound of several interconnected courtyards, built for the emperor in 1795 within what was then the walled park (Li 1994). One entered this compound through a gate from the south into a courtyard called the Garden of Benevolence, the forecourt to the Hall of Longevity, which was used for banquets and receptions. Beyond this was another forecourt leading to Mao’s library. His living quarters, called the Chrysanthemum Fragrance Study, were adjacent and to the east.

While the interior of the larger Zhongnanhai compound is unsegmented, Mao was very tightly guarded within it. His doctor (Li 1994) documents a climate of paranoia and mistrust within Mao’s compound. Widely read in Chinese history, Mao identified with many former emperors and their traditional strategies of power, keeping his views hidden from colleagues. When under stress he retreated to his bed and feigned sickness, encouraging his enemies into the open. Isolated from senior colleagues and heavily dependent on guards, secretaries and attendants to keep him informed, he was told largely what he wanted to hear. Guards and secretaries also filled the roles of the former eunuchs, ensuring a good supply of young peasant women as modern concubines (Li 1994). His promiscuous sex life, which violated the Party line, required high levels of secrecy and spatial control over access, which in turn gave further power to his guards and minders.

In 1966, at the height of the cultural revolution, Mao discovered that the Chrysanthemum Fragrance Study had been bugged and he became paranoid. He abandoned Zhongnanhai and lived in four different places throughout Beijing in one year until he had some new quarters built adjacent to an indoor swimming pool at Zhongnanhai. Here he lived for the last decade of his life, conducting business primarily from his bed or the poolsid. The spatial isolation necessitated by security and sexual promiscuity persisted and information flows were convoluted. While spatial syntax did not play the prominent role in Zhongnanhai that it did in the Forbidden City, the parallels are uncanny. The power remains hidden, the aim of the ruler is to see but not be seen. Mao slipped neatly into the emperor’s role, where he was badly informed and isolated at the apex of an empire of lies that produced the appalling famine of 1959–62 and the cultural revolution soon after that.

**LIBERATED SPACE**

The great square has no corners.
The great vessel takes long to complete.

(Lao Tzu 1963:102)

On October 1, 1949 Mao Zedong mounted the Tiananmen Gate and proclaimed the birth of the People’s Republic of China to a vast crowd gathered below in the T-shaped open space to the south. The choice of Tiananmen for a new centre was by no means arbitrary. Although the emperor rarely appeared here, imperial edicts
were issued from above the gate and received by officials below. The space in front of the gate was first identified as a site of resistance on May 4, 1919 when a spontaneous demonstration of 3,000 students gathered here in a protest. The ‘May Fourth’ students’ movement was reinforced by protests on the same site in 1926 and 1935 and became an inspiration to the later revolution (Steinhardt 1990: 179).

Mao’s appearance on the gate carried two significant yet contradictory meanings. First, this was ‘hidden power’ revealing and submitting itself to the people. Yet, simultaneously, the new leader appeared in an imperial relationship to the people—on a raised podium facing south on the imperial axis. There is a strong congruence between the orchestrated displays of obedience in front of the Hall of Supreme Harmony and those in front of the Gate of Heavenly Peace. The tradition of imperial rule was at once denied and affirmed. A similar contradiction was evident in much of the urban design which followed.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the traditional enclosing walls and gates of the Imperial, Inner and Outer cities were progressively demolished and replaced with ring roads. The walls, seen by the Party as archaic signifiers of the imperial order, also had a deeper ideological significance in sanctifying and protecting the city. Popular resistance ensured that much of the demolition was done under cover of darkness.

No longer a gate, Tiananmen soon began to appear on coins and banknotes as a monument and an emblem of the new state. The central tunnel through it, formerly reserved for the emperor, became a mere pedestrian path with Mao’s portrait hung on axis above. Initially the portrait was the revolutionary Mao of the Long March, gazing on and upwards. It was soon replaced with an image staring down, meeting the gaze of all who passed before. Hidden power became permanently visible.

Changan Boulevard (Avenue of Heavenly Peace), which runs east-west across the entry to the gate, was enlarged and extended, a move which added a new primary axis to the city at right angles to the imperial axis. This fundamental twist of orientation operates as a metaphor for the revolutionary ‘turn’ of history. Yet this too evokes the ideal of the cosmic city which is centred on the intersection of the east-west and north-south axes. As Meyer (1991:39) argues: “This is the center, the fixed point in the turning of the world, the locus of the imperial throne. Power is concentrated at this point and, as one moves from center to periphery, the power “thins””. Thus the denial of the Imperial City also became an affirmation of it at another level.

Tiananmen Square was Mao’s vision for a fundamental recentring of the city and empire. The forbidden depths of imperial power were replaced by the ‘democratic’ expanse of the world’s largest open plaza. Modelled in part on Moscow’s Red Square, it was also much more than a parade ground. This was to be the antithesis of forbidden space—a square of the people, without walls, corners or rank markers. Here the people’s power was to be dis-closed, its signifiers those of open access and visibility; open space as a metaphor of freedom. The
dream was of infinite space, Mao spoke of it holding a billion people. Here the identity of ‘the people’ was constructed and displayed.

The development of the square over thirty years involved the demolition of former government ministries and the construction of new monuments and flanking buildings. The Great Hall of the People which lines the western edge is in the monumental neo-classical tradition fronting the open space with a colonnade and expanse of steps. Built in 1959, this massive building has 17 hectares of floorspace, a 10,000 seat auditorium, a banqueting hall for 5,000 and a 3,000 seat parliament. The Great Hall is balanced on the eastern edge of the square with similarly scaled museums devoted to Chinese history and the revolution. Not all of the constructions were so visible and public. The Great Hall sat on top of a secret underground complex connecting to command posts, party leadership at Zhongnanhai and the military headquarters to the west of the city (Brook 1992; Li 1994).

The centre of the square is dominated by the Monument to the People’s Heroes, also known as the Martyr’s Monument. This 37 metre granite obelisk, completed in 1958, is set on a series of layered plinths with steps up from each of the cardinal directions. The central location of the monument deliberately blocks the imperial way and it faces north towards the gate, denying the idea of a southern entrance. Thus it established the square as the centre of power and not a pathway to it. The podium is lined with bas reliefs including one depicting the May Fourth students demonstrating in the square. The inscription reads: ‘Eternal glory to the people’s heroes who from 1840 laid down their lives in the many struggles against internal and external enemies, for national independence and the freedom and well-being of the people’ (Wu 1991). This generic dedication to the ‘people’s heroes’ would later prove very useful.

By 1960 the square had been formed as a single square of open space about 500 metres square formed by the gate, the hall and the museums on three sides. This site held about 600,000 people for ceremonial occasions. However, the gate and buildings are each fronted by broad streets and forecourts, limiting the central open space for everyday use to about 300 by 400 metres. During the 1960s and 1970s further demolition to the south extended the open space to the Qianmen Gate, to cover about 40 hectares.

The ceremonial use of the square was limited largely to parades on Labour Day and National Day, when Mao and the leaders appeared on the gate to review military and cultural displays along the boulevard. However, the square became a key site during the cultural revolution, when large parades of Red Guards were choreographed to generate support. These parades began to approach a festive version of the Nuremburg Nazi rallies; indeed the central section of the square is a similar shape and size to the Zeppelinfield. However, the meanings of Tiananmen are not so univalent; this is a genuine public place, legitimized on higher ideals, marked with monuments and memories.

In the aftermath of the cultural revolution any Party leader urging moderation became a ‘people’s hero’. Zhou Enlai qualified on these grounds and when he
died in January 1976, wreaths appeared on the Monument to the People’s Heroes. Their removal by authorities stimulated continuing resistance and by April large parts of the square were covered with flowers and banners together with up to 100,000 people (Cheater 1991; Spence 1990; Wu 1991). Zhou’s portrait was hung on the north of the monument, facing Mao across the square.

To appropriate the monument and honour the dead as a form of protest was astute politics. It utilized the gap between the rhetoric of glorious revolution and the realities of the cultural revolution to resurrect revolutionary memory. The government, with Mao isolated and incapacitated, was directed through him by his wife Jiang Qing, who secretly watched the protests from the Great Hall. And the resistance, like the regime itself, was hidden. Paradoxically, in the most open place in Beijing, the resistance operated under the cover of grief and revolutionary loyalty. The regime faced the dilemma that forcible suppression in such visible space must undermine its own legitimacy. Nevertheless, troops were ordered to remove the demonstrators by force and blood was shed on the monument for the first time in April 1976. But the role of the monument as a site of resistance was established, as Wu (1991:105) argues: ‘The meaning of the monument was never the same. This historical fabrication had come to life, and its empty inscription— “Eternal glory to the people’s heroes” –had gained real meaning...Surrounding it a new public emerged.’ Within two years these demonstrators were redeemed as patriots.

Mao also died in 1976 and his mausoleum, built a year later, became the final major addition to the square, on axis, south of the monument. The mausoleum is a square building of 105 metre sides facing north, set within a 5 hectare rectangular landscaped frame. Both Mao’s body and a 3 metre marble statue of him are located on the imperial axis. Against the avowed beliefs of the Party, the mausoleum incorporates geomantic principles (Cheater 1991). Trees and plants surround both the casket and the building to absorb the pollution of death. The permanent display of the chairman’s body signifies power as both immortal and exposed. More people have seen him dead than ever saw him alive. But this too may be a deceit since there are suspicions that the body has been replaced with a wax replica.6

FORBIDDEN SPACE II

During the 1980s the square became a highly charged political space. Its role as a representation of the ‘people’ became tightly controlled. On New Year’s Day in 1987, 2,000 students demonstrated in the square as part of the growing democracy movement. On that occasion police sprayed water on the freezing flagstones, rendering the square uninhabitable. By 1989, there were signs at the margins of the square saying: ‘Without the approval of the People’s government it is prohibited to parade, to hold rallies, to make speeches, to write, to distribute,
or to put up any kind of propaganda’ (quoted in Terzani 1986). The huge open expanse was framed with a grid of poles carrying lights, speakers and surveillance cameras. The people’s space became forbidden space.

The student protest of 1989 began, like that of 1976, when the disgraced Hu Yaobang died on April 15.7 Hu had never supported democracy; he merely opposed corruption, but he had been demoted for allowing the 1987 movement to spread, and he qualified as a hero. Upon his death many wreaths and mourners appeared in the square, and his portrait was hung on the monument, like Zhou’s, facing Mao. Like history repeating itself, the government order to clear the square stimulated a demonstration of 200,000 including about 10,000 students, who set up camp around the monument, the base of which they used as a speaking podium. The camp, which occupied about a quarter of the square, was well organized by students, who cordoned off sections of it to prevent infiltration.

The students were a well-educated elite and many of their parents held high positions. Their primary policy was one of support for reformist elements within the current regime and an end to corruption at the top. It had little to do with universal voting rights. Their political tactics reflected the traditional approaches of non-contention and submission. Combining submission with irony, students ‘kow towed’ on the steps of the Great Hall, begging for an audience with Premier Li Peng. When Mao’s portrait on the gate was defaced in open defiance, the action was swiftly blamed on provocateurs. On May 13 about 3,000 people began a hunger strike. This tactic of strength through non-action (not-eating), with its echoes of the 1959–62 famine, struck a deep popular chord and further legitimized the resistance. Within a few days the spectacle of ambulances and medical staff caring for weakened students would dominate global news.

The demonstration and Hu’s death were remarkably timed in the lead-up to the much heralded summit meeting between Deng and Gorbachev, scheduled for May 15–17, 1989. The number of foreign correspondents in the city increased about tenfold, offering unheralded access to the global telecommunications network. Placards appeared in English and the reports that went out to the global media looped back on radio to all regions of China via the Voice of America, Radio Australia and the BBC—this is how the demonstrations spread throughout China. The local Chinese media also covered the demonstrations in order to maintain their own credibility. As Wark (1994) points out, the occupation of space in Tiananmen Square became increasingly geared to the occupation of time on television. The government opened up a gateway onto the global stage and the students appropriated the spectacle. The media exposure of the site made any hidden repression impossible. On May 17 numbers in the square reached 1 million people and another 2 million filled the streets. A proposal for Gorbachev to lay a wreath at the monument was abandoned as he was hustled into the Great Hall through a rear entry. ‘I could not figure out who was in charge,’ he said later (quoted in Salisbury 1989). It was an unprecedented loss of face for Chinese leadership.

On May 20, with Gorbachev gone, martial law was declared, the press was banned from the square and all satellite links were severed. Electronic walls were
constructed, but the telephones and tourists with videotapes went around them. Seven military divisions were sent into the city towards the square, but they were blocked by an extraordinary display of do-it-yourself urban design as residents spontaneously rebuilt Beijing as a walled city (Brook 1992). They erected barricades at all major access points using sewer pipes, loads of soil, existing traffic barriers, articulated buses and human shields. Within three days the paralyzed troops were withdrawn to the margins of the city.

Buoyed by success some art students produced the Goddess of Democracy statue, which was installed in the square on May 29 (Figure 6.5). Often claimed to be modelled on the Statue of Liberty, it was adapted from an existing statue of a man leaning upon a pole. The pole was replaced with the torch of enlightenment as the gender and gesture were reversed. She had neither the crown nor the chains of the US model. Young and fresh faced, her short hair was flying free as she held the torch aloft. If there is a model, it is the French revolutionary icon rather than its regal American appropriation.

The statue was placed on axis between the monument and the gate, facing north. While photos often show the statue as immediately under Mao’s photo, it was located about 200 metres away across the broad boulevard. However, it was a gesture of open defiance which enabled the government to legitimize its position through the People’s Daily. ‘The Square is sacred,’ they claimed indignantly, ‘No one has the power to add any permanent memorial or to remove anything from the Square. Such things must not be allowed to happen in China’ (quoted in Wu 1991: 112). The statue was also accused of being a sign of western imperialism.

The statue represented a change in tactics by the students, designed to appear and be destroyed on global television. Hu Yaobang’s portrait was hung on its base which became a speaking podium. The focus of the demonstration

Figure 6.5
Goddess of Democracy and Tiananmen Gate, June 1989
moved half way across the space separating the monument and the gate, occupying the open centre. Some students occupied the south-facing rostrum at Tiananmen Gate, the preserve of top party leaders, as a speaking platform. Some began to call for the overthrow of the Party. Submissive tactics began to give way to the openly provocative.

In retrospect it is easy to judge these as tactical errors, but it is also clear that the state had also changed position. From May 26 the barricaded city was infiltrated by thousands of troops disguised as students and workers, who made their way by jogging, walking, riding and in single vehicles (Brook 1992). These troops were massed in the Great Hall and behind Tiananmen Gate. The final assault came late on June 3, under the darkness of the new moon, when armoured vehicles with orders to shoot entered the city along the major boulevards. Most casualties occurred along these routes as residents flooded the streets to enforce the barricades which had protected the city for two weeks. At best estimate about 2,700 people were killed that night and over the next few days. Only a small percentage of those killed were students and few if any were within Tiananmen Square.

Those planning the assault went to great trouble to avoid violence in the square. Despite the massive infiltration of troops surrounding the square before the assault, armoured vehicles were sent in first to capture the city and seal off the square. Most casualties occurred before 4 a.m. on June 4, at which time student leaders negotiated the safe evacuation of the 3,000 remaining students camped in the square. All left peacefully via the south-east corner. While there was a good deal of slaughter on the fringes of the square, the open centre and the monument became a relative sanctuary during the bloodbath.

Whatever combination of incompetence and state terrorism produced the massacre, it did not extend to the sacred space of Tiananmen Square. The problem for the leadership was not simply the student appropriation of the square, but the ‘hope’ these events had awakened in the ‘people’. While focus was on the square as a signifier of this hope, it could not be destroyed by turning the square into a bloodbath. The current regime has legitimized its actions on the largely defensible claim that people were not killed in Tiananmen Square. A new statue has been erected on the site of the former Goddess of Democracy, portraying a steel worker, farmer, soldier and intellectual in a figure of unity (Wu 1991:114). It fills the semantic vacuum created by the tanks, but its future is surely fragile.

This story raises some general issues in our understanding of the spatialization of power. Urban form generally tends to legitimize the regime which produces it. Yet monuments and urban spaces express ideals of liberty, equality and democracy which are thereby lent a certain reproductive inertia. When authentic, popular and generic ideals are inscribed and represented in urban form and public space, such sites may become potent places of resistance. Legitimizing gestures have a potency which is available for appropriation, a potential linked to both what they signify and the gap between rhetoric and reality.
Despite a rather banal design, the Monument to the People’s Heroes resonated with the early hopes of the revolution as it remembered its martyrs. The semantic breadth of its name, inscription and image, contributed to its capacity for appropriation. But it was the semantic gap between representation and reality that generated the key opportunity for resistance. The site which served to legitimize the authority of the regime was appropriated for the legitimation of resistance. The new meanings of the monument and the open space around it were constructed out of a dynamic social dialectic. Each move in the struggle, the laying of wreaths and their removal, the demonstrations and repressions, raised the stakes and added a new layer of meaning.

This tale is also one of the tension between this site and its various media representations, between place and text. Issues of power in public space are now thoroughly geared into control over the visual media. As Wark (1993:141) rather optimistically puts it: ‘New possibilities for constructing politics in the information landscape have momentarily been glimpsed’. Yet as he also points out, the same video footage which was beamed to a global audience was later edited and used on Chinese television as a means to identify student leaders. The information channels that incited resistance were available for the later repression.

Finally, there are questions raised by the inversion of the traditional enclosed spatial structure of the Forbidden City in the vast unsegmented expanse of Tiananmen Square. The Forbidden City largely reproduced its practices of power through a deeply segmented spatial syntax. An enclosed square such as the forecourt of the Hall of Supreme Harmony could never have permitted the 1989 scenario. Yet while the media focused on the bravery of the students in the sanctified open space of the square, the real bravery came from the spontaneous urban designers in the suburbs who enclosed the city against military invasion and ‘forbade’ access for two weeks. Forbidden space takes many forms. It is all too easy to identify the open/closed as congruent with liberty/constraint, or transparent/hidden. At the time of writing, Tiananmen Square, under permanent guard, is forbidden space in a new set of clothes. Any form which becomes a signifier of freedom and democracy becomes available for appropriation, for legitimation of new forms of power. It is people who oppress people, not forms or places. But because buildings and places frame life, they become available at certain moments as the tools and media of oppression, and of emancipation.
Chapter 7: Traces of democracy

No matter how democratically the members of the elite are chosen...they justify their existence and order their actions in terms of a collection of stories, ceremonies, insignia, formalities and appurtenances...that mark the center as center and give what goes on there its aura of being not merely important but in some odd fashion connected with the way the world is built.

Geertz (1985:15)

CHOIR BOYS

British parliamentary democracy was born in a chapel of the medieval palace at Westminster where the first House of Commons was formed in 1547 (Hastings 1950; Port 1976). The thirteenth-century St Stephen’s chapel was a chamber of about 20 by 11 metres, located adjacent to the Great Hall of the palace. There was a raised altar at one end, tiered choir stalls lining both sides and a lectern in the centre. A choir-screen divided the chapel proper from an ante-chapel. The two banks of choir stalls faced each other, with a few return stalls facing the altar.

When this chamber became the House of Commons the Speaker’s chair was placed on the raised steps in front of the altar and members filled the stalls. The lectern was removed and the ante-chapel became the lobby. This spatial pattern became the template on which a range of succeeding chambers are modelled. The spatial structure was based upon an initial division which presupposed two opposed parties, facing each other as the two sides of the choir did, with no middle ground. This division was accentuated by the fact that the few return stalls were initially regarded as beyond the ‘Bar of the House’, a literal barrier which separated those on the return benches to cast them technically outside the house and its debates (Hastings 1950). The house was remodelled by Wren in 1707, adding galleries and transforming the style. A central table was added yet the spatial structure remained identical.

In 1833 a series of designs was commissioned for a new House of Commons to replace the chapel, which was by then quite uncomfortable. These designs produced by prominent architects such as Soane, Burton, Croker, Savage and Goodwin all proposed circular, semi-circular or horseshoe-shaped seating and none saw the need to balance the Commons in size, location or shape with the non-democratic House of Lords (Port 1976:8–19).
The building was thoroughly razed by fire in 1834 and a design competition for the new building was held. Each of the four prizewinning plans in the competition embodied an equal balance of the two houses on the poles of an axis and replicated the choir-stalls seating in the House of Commons (Port 1976:45–49). The contrast with the innovative plans and chamber seating of two years earlier is remarkable. The competition was won by Barry and the building was completed in 1852 (Figure 7.1). The main entry to the new building leads through the rebuilt chapel (now St Stephen’s Hall) to a central hall and then in opposite directions, via corridors and lobbies, to the two houses. The poles of this axis divided the building along class lines. Committee rooms, courts and corridors were devoted to either Lords or Commons. The spatial program ensured that paths do not cross except at the central hall. There is a private royal entrance to the House of Lords. The spatial structure is one of branching lineal sequences in a tree formation leading to debating chambers located six to seven segments deep and with the route to and from them tightly controlled (Figure 7.2).

This building was the centre of an extraordinary amount of debate over issues of style. It was the key building of the nineteenth-century ‘battles of the styles’, the struggle for priority between gothic and classical revival for prominence in public architecture. Yet this dispute was resolved before the competition, which explicitly required designs in gothic or Elizabethan style. Barry’s final design for the Commons chamber was for a 21 by 13 metres chamber, a marginal enlargement of the former chapel in similar proportion (Figure 7.3). The practice of oppositional debate in this chamber remained inscribed in the furniture arrangement and even on the floor of the house. ‘Sword lines’ about 3 metres apart were later woven into the carpet, beyond which debaters were not permitted to step. The distance was said to ensure a crossing of swords without bloodletting (Goodsell 1988). A central table with despatch boxes and a row of books further accentuated the division.

While the debates over the style of the building are not my concern here, they are revealing of the focus within architectural critique on formal image and artistic attribution, to the exclusion of issues of spatial structure. The debate over style obscured the non-debate over program, which was largely removed from the

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Figure 7.1
Houses of Parliament, Westminster
Based on plan in Parliament House Authority (1979)
architects’ domain. Programmatic issues were resolved in committee and judging panel—both dominated by conservatives and non-architects (Port 1976).

However, the debate over the design of the Commons chamber did erupt a century later when the chamber was bombed in 1941. This was the occasion when Churchill, in a speech arguing for its replication, made his famous claim which has become a catchcry of architectural determinism: ‘We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us’. His arguments won the day and the house was rebuilt to a congruent design. But this was not the first time that the Westminster plan had been reproduced.

LOBBYING

Australia achieved independence in 1901 with a parliamentary democracy in the Westminster tradition. The nation was highly democratic for that time with broad
suffrage and a strongly egalitarian culture. The parliamentary model was adapted from the British with a Prime Minister at the head and a Senate replacing the House of Lords. Yet while the Senate is elected it is not democratic. It is rather a product of federation whereby states with lesser populations have equal representation to those up to five times larger.

The Australian Parliament occupied a colonial parliament in Melbourne until 1927 when it moved to Canberra and a purpose built but provisional building as part of the city plan by American architect/planner Burley Griffin. The temporary parliament building, formally nondescript in stripped neo-classical
style, was designed by the chief government architect, Murdoch (Commonwealth of Australia 1923). While the building was always regarded as formally and functionally inadequate for the long term, the plan was both innovative and successful. It was structured with the two houses flanking a central Reception Hall on a main axis as at Westminster (Figures 7.4 and 7.5). Yet this was no longer a class division and each house was located only three segments deep, entirely encircled by lobby spaces and accessible from all directions. Ministerial offices and committee rooms lined the external edge of the building. This delivered a comparatively ringy syntactic structure. Unlike its British predecessor, this building also housed the Prime Minister and Cabinet in a corner of the building.
five segments deep. With no executive enclave, access to press galleries was via the same corridors and staircases used by members and ministers.

A tradition of strong press access to politicians grew in this building, as a prominent member of the press gallery wrote: ‘the old building is an intimate place. If something is going on it literally buzzes around the corridors. Ministers, back benchers, staff and media cannot escape one another’ (Grattan 1988:13).

In this circumstance, informal rules emerged to regulate such contact. One of these was that members would make themselves available for ‘doorstop interviews’ on entering and leaving the building, provided that they were not to be asked for public comment in the corridors. The front steps of the Parliament building became the scene of many such interviews. It was also a ceremonial site for making proclamations and receiving dignitaries. The steps, Reception Hall and Galleries of the two houses were all open to the public. Since the steps were used as the main entrance and the Reception Hall had to be crossed by members and ministers on a very regular basis, the building enforced a social mix within the Reception Hall where citizens visiting to see Parliament in action would mingle with lobbying politicians.

The design of the chamber of the House of Representatives was not a direct copy of Westminster but was extended in the cross axis direction, with the seating returning in a horseshoe formation. The structure of oppositional debate at swordfighting distance between front benches was maintained. Yet the chamber as whole became wider than it was long and constituted a clear step in the direction of a semi-circle.

The provisional parliament was a very poor edifice in terms of formal expression, and it outlived its functions as additions were added over the next sixty years. The paradox of the building was that its dysfunctionality had a democratic function. Lamenting its passing, another journalist described it as a cheek by jowl jumble of corridors, rooms, cubicles and annexes so hated by those who worked there and yet so vital to our intimate political style in which a chance remark in Cabinet in the morning could become a pointed parliamentary question to the Prime Minister in the afternoon, the lead item to the evening television news and the subject of a scathing political commentary in the following morning’s press.

(Haupt 1988a:3)

The corridors and lobby spaces were important to such communication since it is where the deals are often done, away from the formal debates and meetings. The corridor and lobby is no one’s place and therefore everyone’s. It is a place framed in such a manner that any conversation can be started or terminated at any time. It is ‘liminal’ space in the best sense of that term—a space ‘between’ functions where the flows of information are as unpredictable as the flows of people. It is a situation where certain things may be said that may remain unsaid in other contexts, and where certain people may speak who may not otherwise be heard. This conception of liminal space contrasts with that of Zukin (1991) who critiques the negative
effects of spaces of liminality where private masquerades as public and commerce as culture. While these lobbies embody no such confusion this is not a contradiction. The ‘limen’ is the threshold, a place between places linked to the inside/outside dialectic. Liminal space is a space of possibility, of indeterminacy, and in the mediations of power its potency can be used and abused.2

This was a building which embodied emerging practices of democracy within its spatial structure. It reflected an optimistic and open democracy which largely escaped both the cult of leadership and the architectural tactics of segregation, domination and intimidation. The Prime Minister and Cabinet had only a marginal position of spatial privilege within it. It did not distance representatives from the press nor from those they represented. In terms of the social theories of Bourdieu and Giddens it constructed a *habitus* of political practice with an egalitarian ethos. Its shared and ringy spatial structure enabled a certain solidarity between parties, and between the press, politicians and public. It enabled the flow of information necessary to the public interest as it constrained the factionalism and secrecy necessary to autocracy. Cells of privacy were mediated by the liminal lobbies. Tensions between autocracy and democracy, between secrecy and transparency, were always present in the building which in this sense did not ‘work’ for politicians. As new wings were added to the building from the 1950s so were increasing levels of segregation. Yet the mix of citizen with politician in the Reception Hall was maintained.

**A HOUSE DIVIDED**

In 1975 a progressive Labor government was dismissed by the Governor-General, using reserve powers which are relics of the monarchy. The proclamation dissolving Parliament and installing the conservative opposition was read to a hostile crowd on the steps of the old building. Although new elections were called, the ‘dismissal’ (as it became known) caused a constitutional instability in Australian society, a loss of authority and legitimacy for the federal parliamentary system.3 The proposal for a new parliament building, long stalled for lack of funding, was swiftly elevated to a top priority at this time (Weirrick 1989). This followed the rule outlined earlier that symbolic expressions of authority in architecture can often be linked to a decline of legitimacy (Milne 1981). A design competition was held and won in 1979 by the firm of Mitchell Guirgola Thorpe—primarily the work of Italian-American architect Romaldo Guirgola.

The new Parliament House, completed in 1988, is one of the most interesting and sophisticated centres of state power to emerge in recent years. The building meets the program in a design of considerable skill in terms of craft and formal expression. It is at once a grandiose celebration of democracy and a profoundly autocratic building. With 4,500 rooms on a site of about 11 hectares, it is also an exceedingly large building for the governance of 18 million people. The account that follows relies heavily on Weirrick’s (1989) account of both the semiotics and programming of this building.
The Parliament House Construction Authority (1979) embodied a profoundly deterministic program in two volumes of competition conditions. As if Westminster history were being repeated, the architects were to have no say in spatial programming. And many of the practices which had developed in the temporary building were completely abandoned. The most pronounced changes involved the segregation of people within the building. The conditions stipulated that there must be four separate entrances to the building for the Executive (ministers), the Senate, House of Representatives and the public. These divisions flowed through into internal divisions between discrete circulation systems. As the conditions stated: ‘All areas of interest to visitors shall be grouped and linked by a circulation system, discrete from that used by people working in the building’ (Parliament House 1979:9). Elsewhere citizens were termed ‘tourists’ to be kept at a distance: ‘Circulation space around and between chambers at chamber floor level should not be accessible to tourists’ (Parliament House 1979:35). Security is the reason given for such segregation, yet Australia has a negligible record of political violence and these new forms of segregation were extended to divisions between ministers and backbenchers: ‘Ministers and staff going from the Executive Government element to the refreshment rooms should not have to use a circulation system flanked by Senators’ suites’ (Parliament House 1979:12).

The program largely determined the plan since it diagrammed the various parts of the building with the two houses as wings of a cruciform with the new Executive on axis at the top. Any competition entry which did not reproduce some version of this diagram with its four distinct entries did not meet the brief which made the relationship clear: ‘Whilst the diagram should not be construed as a plan there is some logic to the disposition of the elements’ (Parliament House 1979:22). The winning plan (Figure 7.6) was essentially four separate buildings in a cruciform with four entries for four classes of people whose paths and gazes cross only in the two debating chambers.

The program generates a separate executive wing, a new enclave of executive power, on axis at the top end of the building, where it establishes the axis of ministerial and diplomatic entry opposite to that for public entry. The executive is a three-storey building surrounding a courtyard, entered via a public plaza above an underground parking garage. The Prime Minister’s suite and the Cabinet Room are located on axis at the deep end of the courtyard with ministers’ offices in the wings. The courtyard is essentially a ceremonial looped driveway to the door of the Prime Minister’s suite. With its dual carriage entry this courtyard has resemblances in scale and function to Speer’s Court of Honour in Berlin with a major difference that the Prime Minister’s office here is syntactically shallow—the enfilade has been removed to the opposite end of the building.

A key aspect of the Executive entrance is that it grants all Cabinet ministers a new form of control over press contact. If they are in demand for press comment and they judge that the publicity will be bad then they can enter via the underground car park without any aspersion that they are trying to avoid the press. Even a short visual clip of a ‘no comment’ or its silent equivalent can be damaging on television. If they wish to make a comment they can enter via the plaza above where the traditional ‘doorstop
"doorstop interview" remains available. Thus the building renders such interviews voluntary, but only for ministers. The opposition "shadow ministers" have to enter through the public side entries to the Senate or House office buildings where the "doorstop interview" is frequently applied. In a press market where a story without imagery lacks power, this building makes it less likely that government failings will receive press coverage. The doorstop interview cuts two ways and is often used to political advantage by those who want to deliver a quotable quote while remaining too busy for an interview (Grattan 1988:13). By rendering the doorstop voluntary for ministers it grants them media access on their own terms.
The building also operates to distance ministers from the bureaucratic departments which administer policy. Weirrick (1989) suggests that the program was largely devised by bureaucrats with the aim to feather-bed ministers so well at Parliament House, that they will leave departmental officials to get on with running the country. Each minister is provided with a suite of about nine rooms and while individual suites show variation, the spatial structure of all of these suites was completely determined and diagrammed in the program (Figure 7.7). Such diagrams flag the importance of the syntactic genotype to practices of power and the extent to which it has been removed from architectural control. In this genotype the minister’s office is several segments deep from the access corridor and is structured to enable a ‘backdoor’ entry and exit. Thus just as the minister can regulate contact with the press as she or he enters the building, the same is possible with anyone entering or exiting the office. The back entry often lies along the outer wall, ensuring that about half the rooms in each suite receive no natural light or view. This structure of a formal entry string, with power sited at the end of the string and coupled with a ringy back entry/exit was identified earlier as a primary genotype mediating the approach to centres of power.

The segregated zones of the new building have restructured political practices in the various interests of ministers, members and bureaucrats, counter to those of the press and the public. There is considerable evidence of changes to the political life of the building, coupled with complaints about this transformation. Both the segregation and the scale of the building has led to a distancing effect. The quorum size for debate in the house has been reduced as proceedings are now televised and members watch from the privacy of their offices (Fewtrell 1993). A minister in the new building suggests that ‘the huge scale of the building, the long distances between members’ offices and the chambers, or the dining room, or the library is a disincentive against venturing out’. The House of Representatives has become ‘a place that members like to stay away from…full only for question time’ (Jones 1988:11). The time required for division bells has increased due to the distances to be walked. This is a building with ‘gossip and rumor mills replaced by secure and sanitized digital communications’ (Fewtrell 1993:292). A survey of the press found that a majority felt the building had caused an increase in

![Figure 7.7](image)

Ministerial offices: required spatial program
Based on diagram in Parliament House Authority (1979)
the power of the Executive (McIntosh 1990:20). Shortly after occupation there was a
leadership coup in the opposition party and it was claimed that the spatial dispersion of
the building enabled the scheming to be carried out in secret. The press and the incumbent
leader did not discover the plot until it was too late to mount a defence.

The profound changes to the practices of power in this building need to be seen
in contrast to the provisional parliament building. This intimate ‘cheek by jowl jumble of
corridors’ where gossip ‘literally buzzes around the corridors’ was systematically
eradiated through a combination of security considerations, political vanity and
bureaucratic segregationism. But the spatial program was not the only transformation
effected in this building which also heralded a new representational regime.

HOUSE AS HILL

The site of the new Parliament House was once the crown of a low hill within a valley.
Burley Griffin’s urban design for Canberra was to leave this site, Capital Hill, primarily
a natural landscape and symbolic centre of the nation. The major axis of the city was
established from this hill to the much higher Mount Ainslie several kilometres away.
This ‘land axis’ was then crossed at right angles by a new artificial lake along a ‘water
axis’. Capital Hill was intended to be a site of public access from which to look down
on the parliament at the head of a cluster of public institutions leading to the water.4
The decision to locate Parliament House on the hill stands in a long series of violations
of the Burley Griffin plan driven by a variety of bureaucratic and political imperatives
(Weirrick 1989). The new site was established and locked in prior to the competition.

One of the winning attractions of Guirgola’s design was that it resisted the
impulse for an imposing edifice. Instead the building excavates several storeys off
the natural landscape which it then reconstructs as a built profile, largely covered

Figure 7.8
Parliament House, Canberra:
provisional house in foreground
in grass (Figure 7.8). This tactic enables a very large building to blend into the landscape. One enters the building as if into the earth. And it enables the visitor to walk on top of the building, as if climbing the ‘hill’ as Burley Griffin intended. Thus the parliament is expressed as in and of the land itself. Yet as Weirrick (1989) suggests, the construction of a myth of the naturalization of power here is quite profound. In a mythic and metaphoric sense the building becomes the Australian landscape; as a representation of authority it is depoliticized.

The building manages to overwhelm without intimidation; it claims legitimacy through a formal inversion of the ‘house on the hill’. Its overwhelming scale is rendered legitimate through its association with the scale of the Australian landscape. The irony of this excavation was not lost on the critics, as Weirrick (1989) puts it: ‘Concern for the “honest natural landscape” has been stressed throughout the New Parliament in inverse proportion to the destruction of the very site on which the building stands’. One of the losing architects was even more cutting: ‘the Vietnam War had prepared us for this brand of logic: there, thatched villages had to be destroyed to be saved’ (Corrigan 1988:53).

Figure 7.9
Parliament House, Canberra: spatial analysis of public areas
The public entry begins a grand narrative enfilade in the tradition of Versailles and Berlin (Figure 7.9) with a set of semiotic references which weave themes of nature, culture and authority throughout the building (Indyck 1988). This narrative begins on the vast red gravel entry plaza (signifying the ‘desert’) looking down the axis towards the mountain and war memorial (ancestors). A large Aboriginal painting in mosaic forms an island in a large pool (Aboriginal Australia). The walls and building entrance containing the forecourt signify Greek and Egyptian architecture as they accentuate the sense of entering the earth and the rise of European
civilization. The main entry space also signifies the ‘colonial verandah’ which reconstitutes and frames the colonial gaze back over the (Aboriginalized) landscape (Figure 7.10). The deliberate use of a semiotic approach to architecture here results
in guides and guide-books decoding the building for ‘tourists’ (Beck 1988).

Beyond the verandah is a grand foyer of marble columns, the ‘hypostyle hall’ bringing the temporal narrative to the Renaissance as it naturalizes the place as a ‘forest’ of green marble and timber lined walls. This hall of columns is meant as a reminder of the Reception Hall of the temporary parliament house, but the politicians are far away and one meets only tourists. At this point the public promenade leads upstairs (via ‘Renaissance’ stairs) to gallery spaces which overlook the Great Hall, a vast banqueting hall for 1,500 people.

Beyond the Great Hall one reaches the Members’ Hall—centre of the building and symbolic heart of the nation (Figure 7.11). This is a square volume lined in marble with a pyramidal skylight roof. In the architect’s drawings this was the key node point of the building, filled with members chatting and lobbying, watched by the people from the upper floor galleries which line it (Beck 1988). Yet because the program was so fundamentally mismanaged, members have no reason to be there and it is consistently empty. The Members’ Hall is a remnant of the central hall of Westminster and of the Reception Hall of the temporary building. But these were places of great vitality, here reduced to empty forms for public consumption. The split between program and representation results in a semantic inversion—the Members’ Hall symbolizes an empty democracy and a growing distance between people and power. The architect’s intentions, which I shall assume were democratic, have been inverted through a profound failure of the program.

A large square slab of black granite dominates the floor. Covered with water it becomes a ‘mirror’ designed to promote a contemplative mood and to reflect both the Australian sky (nature) and the flagpole (nation) above. In symbolic terms, here is revealed the essence of the narrative myth—stone (permanence) and water (purity, clarity). The platonic forms of the square chamber and stone, are capped by the pyramidal roof and flagpole. Yet from the gallery visitors cannot see the reflected flag and sky. Instead the mirrored stone offers an inverted view of the ‘tourists’ on the opposite gallery. The stark effect is interrupted only by signs instructing citizens not to throw coins. There is good evidence that Australians wish for something more as attendants clamber across the wet stone to erase the dreams from the ‘mirror’.

This resistant throwing of coins is a refreshing spectacle since nowhere on the site does the building provide any genuine public space for political speech. All political activity is officially proscribed on the forecourt (although it has often occurred) and on the reconstituted grass roof. One cannot legally enter the forecourt or gather there with even the ‘intention’ of protesting. Legal protest occurs across the road and down the hill, near the site Burley Griffin had intended for Parliament House.

Crowning Parliament House above the empty Members’ Hall is a giant flagpole which sits on a steel pyramidal frame. It represents a symbolic joining of the four disparate buildings—the two houses, the executive and the public entry promenade. Many critics have argued that this is formally the weakest part of the design, yielding as it does rather directly to heroic patriotism. It has also been pointed out that there is a congruence between the design of the top of the flagpole and the icon of the Italian Fascists—the bunch of ‘fasces’ lashed together with an axe (Haupt 1988b).
The ‘fasces’ link is surely accidental—but a reminder that playing with images of unity and aspiration is a somewhat dangerous game which can accidentally excavate old meanings. The use of the pyramid—the potent image of hierarchy, permanence and the sacred mountain—also echoes a history of empire. Yet in unifying a fragmented group of structures and providing an iconic centre to the nation, the structure is necessary to the building’s representational effects. This is the iconic image which appears on the news, on car registration plates and on the money (where it establishes a distant echo of the pyramid on the US dollar bill). The flagpole is also a variant on the jewel-like glass pyramid designed by Pei at the centre of the French cultural empire in the Louvre. The connection with Pei is more than symbolic since he was also one of the judges for this competition.

At a larger scale the entire building can be construed as a giant pyramid, a ‘mountain’ of a building, which is also a citadel. The building is distanced from the city with a broad ring-road which renders it nearly impossible to approach on foot. It is consistent with Vale’s (1992) observation that such a citadel strategy pervades nearly all centres of power regardless of levels of democracy. The rhetoric is of a building with unprecedented access, ‘a building through which thousands of visitors can move freely’ (Sharp 1988:16), where ‘the public has been given a generous run’ (Corrigan 1988:15). But what the public has paid for is a grand enfilade as a tourist attraction, behind which Parliament can and does proceed largely in private. The practices and representations of democracy have been segregated in a contradictory building which is at once ‘for the people’ and also a systematic exclusion of them. It turns citizens into tourists and builds them a semiotic theme park where they consume landscape, Aboriginality, European civilization and democracy in narrative sequence. This construction of the path of progress from Aboriginality to civilization has not escaped attention. In a resistant gesture, the Aboriginal artist of the forecourt mosaic has removed a central stone to de-authorize the work. The forecourt and entry has become an iconic centre of power, featured on television news. And in echoes of the Bastille, the entry has been rammed by a four-wheel drive vehicle and smashed by protesting unionists, yet there are only tourists inside.

This is a house of contradictions, at once archaic and postmodern, a ‘grounding’ of power in landscape. The enfilade of vast and empty spaces etched with the emblems of landscape and nation has an uncanny congruence with antecedents in Versailles and Berlin. It blends into the landscape yet violates it—both ‘house on hill’ and ‘house as hill’. It inverts some traditional images of autocracy and yet achieves the effects at the same time—it is self-effacing yet heroic; the edifice you have when you are not having an edifice. It is highly revealing of an era when the representations of democracy are overwhelming its practices.

CODA: CHOIR BOYS II

The two worlds of politics and tourism which have been segregated in this building finally intersect where the public promenade terminates in the galleries of the two Houses of Parliament and here at least there is plenty of action. These chambers
were given a full spatial layout before the competition. No architect was to be permitted to redesign the seating. The spatial structure of the House of Representatives is maintained although somewhat dispersed in a larger chamber. The Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition face off at swordfighting distance, a performance now necessary for television imagery. They have their backs turned to party colleagues who are lined up hierarchically in stalls from ‘front bench’ to ‘back bench’. The despatch box serves as a lectern from where speech is directed as a weapon at the opposition. The situation is spatially polarized and the realities of ambiguity, compromise and consensus are effaced. Parliamentary debate is a public spectacle of political breast-beating with arguments frequently lost in a chaotic flurry of interjections and insults. The ‘Speaker’ on the raised remnant of the altar calls for ‘order’ as politicians are reduced to shouting and repetition in order to be heard.

This is thoroughly masculine behaviour. While Australian women gained the vote very early by world standards, female representation in politics remains low. Debating skill on the floor of the house is necessary for becoming a minister, and especially Prime Minister. Within this spatial framework, vigorous debate from a standing position is a prerequisite to power. Being naturally less dominant in height and voice, women are disadvantaged even if they are prepared to adopt highly aggressive behaviour. Rodgers (1981) compares the British House of Commons to a ‘men’s house’ and is no accident that such gendered practices of highly vigorous verbal exchange have persisted both at Westminster and in its Australian offspring.

The behaviour we see in the house does not occur in other forums, it is spatially and institutionally reproduced. Debates on television and in the governing boards of corporations and public institutions are not conducted like this no matter how serious the issues. Anecdotal evidence is that many of the members who lacerate each other in the house are likely to enjoy a drink together later in the evening. Why do mature people seem to undergo thirty years of regression when they walk into the House? Consider again Churchill’s famous determinist dictum about buildings ‘shaping’ behaviour. While I do not believe that spatial design causes this behaviour, it can sustain it and therefore aid its reproduction. The built environment has great inertia and since it becomes the framework to social action, we relegate it to the taken for granted. Because it is unquestioned it may have more influence than at first appears. Spatial design structures interaction in certain ways as it precludes other ways. So long as the house remains the venue and not the subject for debate, its powers of reproduction remain.

One does not need to be determinist to concede that a reciprocal ‘shaping’ occurs through spatial design. Indeed it may be more potent precisely because it does not ‘determine’ anything directly. This divided house is the habitus of political debate. As Bourdieu (1990a:210) would put it, its ‘divisions’ shape its ‘visions’, its ‘positions’ shape its ‘dispositions’. Not everything about this division has been unproductive for democracy and stable government; the two-party system has advantages. But it is treated as a neutral frame which constructs the illusion that members are ‘free’ to engage in consensus building. The reality is that winning a standing debate at swordfighting distance is a prerequisite to political power.
Part III

Global Types
Chapter 8: Tall storeys

It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances.
Oscar Wilde (quoted in office tower advertisement)

The corporate office tower dominates the skyline of nearly all major cities—a global building type for the command functions of increasingly global corporations. Expressing the Zeitgeist of the twentieth century, such buildings have long captured a certain element of the public imagination. Early skyscrapers, such as the Woolworth and Chrysler buildings in New York, were full of the romance of reaching for the sky. They were also urbane buildings which sat easily within the city and its vital street life, and not tall by today’s standards. We no longer use the term ‘skyscraper’ so much—the romance of distance has faded. They are now the common buildings of corporate culture, a kind of corporate vernacular, and the allure has faded for a range of reasons.

Tall buildings are a response to market pressure for more rentable space on a given site area, yet there are physical limits to this increase in site efficiency. As a long thin building serviced entirely from one tip, the tower as a type also loses efficiency with height. The necessary service core expands exponentially in relation to the floor area since every additional floor requires an increment of service core to every floor beneath. Banks of elevators progressively consume the building volume until every new floor at the top consumes more service core than it adds in usable space. When this effect is coupled with parking requirements at the base, the tower reaches a point where the cost of increased height exceeds the gains in rental area.

Despite these functional inefficiencies, the corporate tower proliferates. It does so primarily because of its role in the symbolic discourse of corporate culture and it is this culture that I want to explore here. As the towers exceed the limits of functional efficiency, perhaps 10–20 storeys, their market becomes increasingly based in symbolic capital—the capital value attributable to a symbolic, aesthetic or mythological ‘aura’ (Bourdieu 1977). The building image takes on renewed economic importance as a primary generator of symbolic capital. As capital has become increasingly concerned with the production of signs and images rather than use value (Baudrillard 1981; Ewen 1988) so the tower grows taller based on this new political economy of the sign. To the extent that serviced floor
space is a standardized product, symbolic capital and locational advantage (also largely symbolic) are what gives one office building a market advantage over another. In the boom of the late 1980s this quest for symbolic capital reached new heights, transforming our cities in a quest for domination, both symbolic and literal (Barna 1992). This process was multinational, based in a global economy, a new flexibility of capital investment, and a struggle between cities both for this investment and for position in the emerging hierarchy of world cities (King 1990).

My particular window into corporate culture is the advertising of corporate towers in Melbourne during the boom of 1989–91.¹ This advertising is the field of discourse which frames the decision to lease, on which profit is based. It is expensive, market sensitive and therefore likely to reflect the primary values of those at whom it is directed—the corporate elite. The advertising is a primary circuit of symbolic capital. The aim of the discourse analysis is a decoding of the myths of advertising as ideology, to articulate the experience into which the corporate executive is induced.² The advertising portrays an ideal rather than a reality; it distorts as it mythologizes. Distortions are also indications of the ideals and values that may be driving the image-making process. I shall not discuss the intentions of the architects, nor the experiences of the users. This is not because these intentions and experiences are less important, but in order to focus on the source of profit—the decision to lease. I shall also bypass the issue of the extent to which this is a local or global discourse, although clearly I have assumed some powerful global forces.

DISTINCTION

The successful corporate tower offers a distinctive image to which lessees are invited to link their corporate image. This quest is for an image of the building as figure against a background which may be achieved in a variety of ways. One of these is the distinction of the work of art, authentically created by the individual genius. One series of advertisements presents the building as a ‘masterpiece’ created in turn by Van Gogh, Seurat, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Toulouse-Lautrec and Leonardo da Vinci. In a series of mock interviews these artists extol the virtues of the building as they pose with it represented in their particular style (Figure 8.1). The building mostly stands alone, phallus-like against the sky. The artist is shown engaged in the creative act. Michelangelo is immersed in a pile of marble rubble as he chisels out the final window details:

very occasionally a work of art achieves a level of excellence that earns it the title of masterpiece. A sculpture by Michelangelo for instance that by its form and balance surpasses all others. A new sculptural masterpiece is now taking shape.

Leonardo is shown at the drawing board with a feather quill in hand counterposed against a modern drafting machine. The conditions of the real drawing office and
building site do not appear. The aesthetic ‘aura’ masks the facts of social, political and economic process as it constructs an authenticity linked to notions of genius and authority. This is a surface that signifies a false depth while effacing its own spatial and temporal depth. Of course, no one believes that the building was actually produced in this manner, but the production of the aura does not rely on such a literal belief.

Distinction is also achieved through a quest for uniqueness of form whether viewed in the city skyline or in relation to neighbouring buildings. The ideal tower is a landmark in the literal sense of leaving a mark on the land. The buildings are variously described as: ‘One of the most significant landmarks in this city’ and a ‘unique identity when viewed in the city skyline’. The common metaphor is to ‘strike’: ‘a striking new profile on the cityscape’, says one, and another ‘has a striking sculptural roof, it stamps authority’. Views of the building on the skyline often erase the neighbouring high-rise buildings, reduce them in size or show them in a ghost-like outline to diminish their presence (Figure 8.2).

The quest for visual distinction is also pursued through materials. High-tech images of reflective glass where buildings ‘Reflect your corporate image’, gave way during the 1980s to polished facades of granite and reconstructed stone. One building, it is argued, will ‘dominate with its superb detailed stone exterior’ and another ‘stands out in a forest of concrete’.

The discourse of distinction is inseparable from that of power; it embodies metaphors of strength, stature and strategy. One building ‘has been given visual strength by the curved northern face’. Others draw on what Tafuri (1979) calls the ‘metaphysics of quantity’, the metonym of physical prominence translating into financial domination (Figure 8.3). One building ‘towers over the competition’, while another is ‘designed to dominate’. The tower as a building type is necessary to this symbolism. The terms ‘stature’, ‘status’, ‘stability’, ‘establishment’ and ‘estate’ all share the root sta (to stand). Lefebvre theorizes the monumental vertical built form as phallic: ‘Metaphorically it symbolizes force, male fertility, masculine violence…Phallic erectility bestows a special status on the perpendicular’ (Lefebvre 1991:287). This patriarchal
character is also indicated by a counter example where a low-rise office development using a courtyard typology was advertised with a female image and the promise that the building ‘will seduce you’.
This discourse reveals a corporate community wherein architectural image is of fundamental importance. Collectively these meanings lead to a city where every building wants to be different, to claim identity, authenticity and power. These forces are likely to lead to an increasingly diverse skyline of new images forever seeking distinction. And they are also likely to lead to a taller skyline where today’s landmarks are lost in the crowd or to whatever new range of images claims their meanings.

A further theme in the aura of the ideal corporate tower is a sense of timelessness. One building incorporates a “timeless facade of richly ornamented...
granite’. Stone is an important signifier of permanence and nature, for authentic values that do not change. Small matter that the stone has been crushed and reconstituted to achieve consistent quality across its very thin sheets. The brochures show jewel-like samples in rustic, quasi-natural form. This naturalization of the meaning is an important component of the myth-making. The ‘theme’ of one tower is described as crystal cut, a metaphor attributed to the architect (Kurokawa).

The ideal image refers both back and forward in time, it is ‘designed for the future, but with echoes of an elegant past’. One building is ‘designed to span three centuries’; the developers are shown posing with photographs of the Taj Mahal and St Peter’s basilica. Toulouse-Lautrec’s ‘masterpiece’ is labelled Qualité éternelle d’une œuvre. The language is targeted at an educated executive taste, portraying an architecture that escapes fashion by achieving standards of eternal quality. Thus, an investment in the symbolic capital that the building embodies will not become devalued.

**PLACE**

Location within the city also generates symbolic capital: places embody power. The centre of the older financial district is sold as

Australia’s most powerful business address:...In every country there is a street which is home to the most powerful and successful businesses. Wall Street in New York, Threadneedle Street in London. And Collins Street in Melbourne...That 300 metre corridor of power...the address has a long history of power and success dating back to the 1890s.

Developments in another district use its history and the military metaphor of the ‘high ground’ to weave a myth of art, science and politics that will enhance the symbolic capital of the place:

Over the decades great artists, great doctors, great political figures have all resided on the High Ground...This is the High Ground...There are other parts of Collins Street, but naturally the High Ground dominates them all.

The use of capitals in the text is a common tactic in the weaving of myth, signifying that the language connotes far more than it denotes. One building ‘has all the credentials you would expect of The Finest Address’.

Neighbours are important to the location. Maps proliferate in the brochures showing nearby corporate headquarters, hotels and centres of power. The ideal tower is in ‘the very best of company’, with spreads of photos showing fragments of the neighbourhood and its amenities. These include street life, restaurants, cafés, shops, historic streetscapes, luxury cars, elegant women and nightlife. The
Figure 8.4
333 Collins Street: harmony and history
ideal office tower is conceived as in harmony with this context; it contributes to
the urban character and preserves the qualities of the past. One building is
‘distinctly Melbourne with details of the facade, tower and lobby related to the
traditional forms’ while another is ‘inspired by the classic features typical of Collins
Street’. These connotations of harmony are sustained by streetscape illustrations
which are massively distorted to produce views from across the street which
would be quite impossible with the human eye (Figure 8.4). A project that was
forced to conserve an historic tree claims the design shows ‘respect for those
things that may not have monetary value but are priceless because of their beauty
and historical significance...working in harmony with nature’. This naturalization
of the image, the myth of the enhancement of the city and the connections with
context, both temporal and spatial, sustains an ideology of the inevitability of
these buildings, of the continued progress of the city skyline ever onwards and
upwards. The city is being rebuilt in the name of a ‘sense of place’, nature and
respect for the past. I shall return to these contradictions later.

PROMENADE

The first impression your clients, business associates and suppliers get of
your company occurs when they enter the foyer of your building.

The symbolic importance of the foyer is evident in the ubiquity with which it is
illustrated and described. In contrast to the static images of the exterior here the
text adopts a narrative form describing the experience of entry:

Figure 8.5
Whitehall building: slippery
surfaces
through a high stone portico into a soaring atrium foyer rising three levels above the floor. In this spacious and airy environment, you’ll glance up to dramatic structural ribbing defining the edge of the space.

The foyer is a major site for architectural innovation in spatial grandeur. The aim is quite literally to ‘entrance’ through impression management. ‘Van Gogh’ is quoted: ‘the foyer and forecourt area are an architectural achievement in sheer grandeur’. Elsewhere we are offered ‘the impression of a grand hall and the ultimate experience of space’. The foyer is a stage set for the drama of ‘entering’. Illustrations commonly show overhead spotlights and the play of light on the stone surfaces creates an evanescent effect. One foyer is flanked by ‘Juliet balconies’.

The prevailing materials in the foyer are marble and smooth stone. As in Speer’s Berlin it is the sheer scale and volume of space that constitutes the foyer’s contribution to the discourse of power. The vertical dimension lends the building symbolic value as it lays claim to that awe-filled crick in the neck of the grand public and religious buildings of the past. ‘One will be immediately uplifted by its size, yet welcomed by the warmth of its colours and textures. A true work of art.’ The use of the qualifier ‘yet’ in this text reveals that the ‘uplift’ is not entirely commensurate with the ‘welcome’. The foyer is both a welcome celebrated with art and architectural display and also a kind of intimidation. The lavish graphics share a shiny coldness and a severe order (Figure 8.5). There are echoes here of the marble halls and slippery surfaces of Versailles and Berlin. The foyers are populated by people in business dress, walking through or doing business. This is not a place to linger, nor for the casually dressed. The foyers are a showcase in techniques of place celebration, but it is ‘place’ reduced to image of both behaviour and architecture. In the foyer, the triumph of the surface reaches its peak as a spectacle of art, space and light, and the symbolic choreography of corporate discipline.

**PROSPECT/REFUGE**

The view available from the corporate tower is a primary selling point and the valued views are of two types. First are the long views of nature and landscape, the parks, gardens, lakes, river, bay, beaches and mountains. Second are the panoramic views of the city and its dominant institutions. The view, as advertised, is never onto a streetscape with people and city life. It is the city in the abstract, from above and at a distance—the surface, not the life. The almost inevitable view directly into nearby office buildings never intrudes on the advertising. The implication is that one is always looking out from the tallest building in the neighbourhood and never at other tall buildings. Thus there is a premium on edge positions with views that cannot be built out: ‘the views you lease now will be there forever’. The demand for a long view means that the symbolic capital of a building is linked not only to its site but also to the tower as a building type with a service core surrounded by a rim of rentable space.
The meaning of the view has several components. One is simply aesthetic sustenance, linked to both pleasure and health. One city panorama is captioned ‘Consider this as part of your corporate health plan’. The view is an important part of the behaviour setting for corporate decision-making; executives are often shown gazing out while talking or thinking. And the view is a status symbol that is believed to impress visitors, a component in the discourse of corporate negotiation: ‘Impress people with your point of view’. To have a view is to be seen to have a vision, and the views are widely described as ‘commanding’. The ‘interview’ with ‘Toulouse-Lautrec’ uses a cruel humour (for those in the know) to spell out what most of the advertising hints at: ‘Drink in that sort of view and you understand what it is to feel stature. Makes you feel ten foot tall’. A literal connection is established between the tall building, tall people and the feeling of power. The use of humour in such advertising establishes a distancing effect from such desires; it enables such literal but potent meanings to be flagged, where they would otherwise seem gross and phallic. The dominance of the building as
Chapter 8: Tall storeys

a landmark on the skyline is meshed with the feeling of power engendered by the commanding view from the corner office.

The view, however, is not for everyone. Some of the brochures offer indicative interior layouts and images which may be interpreted for the meanings and social hierarchies they indicate. There are four primary work settings which form these plans: the executive office, the reception area, the board room and the open planned work stations. Figure 8.6 shows these settings clearly and, with the exception of the work stations, they are widely illustrated elsewhere in the advertising. The executive office shows a male executive conferring with other men over an old style wooden desk. In the background is a fireplace and mantel with family portraits, all flooded with natural light. This is a highly personalized and masculine domain where solid conservative images prevail. The reception area, by contrast, is designed in glossy corporate fashion, is served exclusively by young women and has no windows. This is a mini version of the foyer, a tightly controlled image complete with dramatic lighting, flooring patterns and flowers. The board room is described as a ‘dramatic high tech board room with expansive views of the central city’. Two male figures are facing out while they study a report. The final setting is the open planned windowless work stations, which are identical and computerized. This setting is referred to in the text as ‘the engine room’, a nautical metaphor which relegates productivity to the windowless bilge of the dynamic corporate ship. The flexibility of this interior space is the dominant advertising theme.

Analysis of the indicative plans show that 42 per cent of all work stations receive natural light and views. While there are more egalitarian exceptions, the ideal tower is organized in general terms with an executive (male) rim surrounding a core of production. In the case of many indicative layouts, the private offices and executive areas are shaded on the plan to make the office hierarchy apparent on the image. It must be added to this that the consumption of floor space (and therefore of view) per executive is often several times that of the production worker and that the latter will spend a greater proportion of the working day at the work station. If a view and natural light are healthy, then the male head of the corporate body appears to get a disproportionate benefit.

Clearly the most highly valued place on any floor is the corner office, for the double views, the ‘light on two sides’ and the symbolic prestige that flows from these. The trend is towards the design of corrugated façades that produce extra corner offices; one tower has ‘up to twelve corner offices per floor’ (Figure 8.2). This can be linked in part to the fact that corporate headquarters are increasingly the command and control functions of larger conglomerates wherein much of the productive ‘engine room’ function has been decanted to suburban ‘back’ offices. This has produced an increase in the proportion of executive occupation of the corporate tower, and an increased demand for the prestige positions. However, there are two interesting contradictions in the corrugated façade. The first is that all of the external offices lose their privacy as they can be observed from corner to corner across the façade and from adjacent floors. There is no more view being produced; the ‘extra’ view is back into other offices.
The second contradiction is that the extra corner offices have to share the same amount of status, more corners equals less meaning per corner.

The final advertising theme concerns a cluster of myths constructed around the technology of the building. The brochures are replete with claims about the intelligence of the building and photographs of satellite dishes, micro chips and fibre-optic cables. It is tempting to interpret this advertising as simply good building services, but it too has a powerful mythological component; it is selling a future. The buildings are ‘Wired for Tomorrow’s Needs’, they ‘Communicate to the Future’. In his mock interview ‘Seurat’ claims: ‘I never start a picture unless I know exactly where I’m going. I feel the same school of thought applies to Bourke Place...I see Bourke Place like a giant printed circuit.’ The advertising posits a future which will bring rapid change in information technology and service space has been allocated to cope with this change. This belief in constant progress inside the building contrasts with the belief in the ‘timeless’ façade.

The ideal tower not only shelters but also connects; it is a node of the global village in an information economy. While selling this global information access, the buildings are also selling total secrecy. Information as commodity is protected by secure communications rooms on each floor connected to rooftop satellite dishes. Corporate operations are protected by 24-hour security whereby behaviour is monitored on closed circuit television. Lessees are offered an environment of total information control and global access in total secrecy. With its commanding views and high levels of both spatial and informational privacy, the corporate office tower is a prime example of the prospect/refuge effect writ large (Appleton 1975).

CREATIVE DESTRUCTION

To immerse oneself in this advertising is to become aware of a range of disturbing contradictions in the production of such a built environment. The ideal and the reality are logically and necessarily at odds with each other. Tall stories are woven around tall storeys. The first contradiction is that of ‘dominant contextualism’. The ideal tower achieves symbolic capital through its distinctiveness as a landmark that dominates its surrounds. Yet it also gains symbolically from being seen as in harmony with this context. The references to context cannot proceed beyond rhetoric without massively distorted images (Figures 8.2 and 8.4). The quest for dominance leads to a fragmentation of the city because, as Clarke (1989:56) argues, ‘symbolic capital must distinguish itself...It must define its edges to protect itself as a symbol and to protect itself as investment...As such it cannot be “infill” within the urban continuum’. The formal result of this contradiction is generally a podium on the street frontage with the tower set back behind. The symbolic spectacle of the foyer often claims the entire street frontage and the first few floors of the building—it separates the inhabitants from the street and inhibits any contribution to street life. At other times the podium becomes a thinly
disguised parking garage. The rhetoric of contextualism is a cover for a radical separation between life within the building and the life of the street.

To sell the locational advantages, the advertising shows photographs of human scaled streetscapes, sunshine, trees, street life and traditional buildings. This is the character of the neighbourhood which lends the location symbolic capital. Yet this character will be eventually destroyed by the addition of tall buildings. City districts with an attractive urban character then attract their own destruction at the hands of the corporate tower, a process not dissimilar to what Jacobs (1965) long ago called the self-destruction of urban diversity. Each new tower in a given district contributes to the collective decline in symbolic meaning until such time as the character has been transformed, its symbolic capital consumed.

The quest for locational advantage and the ‘powerful address’ leads to a clustering of towers. However, as this clustering occurs, the dominant landmark status and the commanding views are lost in the cluster. The quest for dominance and view will lead to both an increase in height and dispersal. The capital value of the building is enhanced by the view, yet every new building blocks everyone else’s view and lowers capital value. Corporate culture seeks to inhabit tall buildings in lower rise districts. The towers grow ever upwards and spread outwards. The quest for height, left unchecked, has no limit since every new tower devalues both the view and the dominance of adjacent towers and fuels the quest for both height and dispersal. Symbolic capital is not so much created as it is moved around from one temporary landmark to another.

The contradiction of ‘dominant contextualism’ is more than a gesture to the forces of urban conservation. It is linked to another contradictory image of ‘dynamic stability’ – the aggressive corporation with roots in the conservative past. The dynamic thrusting height of the tower juxtaposed on a solid conservative base is the source rather than the limit of its meaning. It is the perceived resolution of this contradiction in the signifier of ‘stable dynamism’ that maximizes symbolic capital (Harvey 1989:288). A final contradiction is that of the ‘timeless fashion’ – the corporate tower is forever chasing an image of timelessness which is paradoxically subject to accelerating cycles of fashion. The appetite for distinction leads to increased turnover of imagery and renders buildings very quickly obsolete. Signifiers of timelessness go in and out of fashion.

A complex set of dialectics are at work in the semiotics of the corporate tower. The quest for symbolic capital must ride a shifting tide of public opinion as the signifiers of success and domination become those of failure. This is not a new story but its cycles have accelerated. When banks collapsed in the 1930s the rock-solid neo-classical imagery of their buildings was undermined. One such building in Melbourne had a fine neo-classical façade removed at that time to renew its symbolic capital. The replacement façade appears in Figure 8.4 where it has been preserved as a contextual entry to a new building behind—which is paradoxically claimed to be ‘as timeless and enduring as the buildings which formerly graced the site’.
The use of design to address the contradictions of corporate culture reached new heights in the early 1990s when a tower in Sydney was developed as headquarters for a major corporation. Upon its completion the firm was bankrupt and its chief executive was in prison. The building was then renamed and advertised as reminiscent of ‘buildings designed at a time when business empires were founded on rock-solid principles of ethics and integrity’. Where this meaning market will take us is not clear, but design will continue to mirror a swiftly changing economy and symbolic market in the imagery of money. In the world of modern finance, money is water,’ writes Barna (1992:8–9), which helps to explain the mirrored glass and polished surfaces. I would expect an ongoing development of fluid and crystalline informational imagery which can capture the various mythologies of the natural, high-tech, sustainable and flexible. But corporate imagery will also remain based in older discourses of domination and timelessness. Thus what really persists are the dialectics of dynamism/stability—the timely coupled with the timeless.

So what kind of city are these forces of capital creating? First, I want to acknowledge again the positive side to the character of the high-rise city. This is well expressed by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy’s description of New York in the 1930s:

This is what made it so fantastic—these buildings, the skyscrapers of New York. Obelisks, menhirs, megaliths—every shape, historic and prehistoric...There was no detail. Night came and even the sharp edged contours melted. A million lights perforated the huge masses—switching, flickering—a light modulation dissolving the solid form...I got drunk—from seeing.

(Moholy-Nagy 1969:141–143, quoted in Ewen 1988:166)

This is the evanescent vision of the high-rise city, the play of light on surface with ‘no detail’. We can recognize in it the vision of the city that is reproduced in the advertising, in the glossy images and the distant views. This is the place experience of image consumption and even of inebriation. It is a particularly exciting kind of urban place experience which is strongly linked to the experience of the sublime—the encounter with immensity. It is the urban equivalent of being overwhelmed with the immensity of nature and it is reminiscent of Benjamin’s celebration of the emancipatory capacity of urban poetics. This intoxicating effect of the high-rise city is one kind of vital urban experience but it is not automatically produced by an unregulated market. The sublime experience of the high-rise city requires the clustering of towers; it is paradoxically created and accentuated by height limits which prevent dispersal.

There is yet a deeper paradox in that this most urban of buildings has not only spread across the suburbs, but also become a profoundly anti-urban building type. The contradictions embodied in the corporate tower can be seen as manifestations of ‘creative destruction’, the ‘perpetual struggle in which capital builds a physical landscape appropriate to its own condition at a particular moment in time, only to
have to destroy it...at a subsequent point in time’ (Harvey 1985: 25). The New York of the 1930s has largely gone and fifty years later Huxtable wrote:

As bulk and density increase, avenues darken and close in; shadows lengthen and downdrafts multiply; winter sun becomes a fleeting penetration of cold canyons at midday, leaving neither warmth nor cheer...Art becomes worthless in a city brutalized by over development. (Huxtable 1984:105)

The anti-urban character of the larger towers is also linked to increased parking requirements. Large towers require huge sites where much of the street frontage is dominated by several storeys of parking garage with gaping holes for entry and exit. These back doors and blank walls are highly damaging to urban street life and attempts to ameliorate their effects are generally superficial. The life inside the building becomes severed from the city since there are no windows on the street and many occupants drive in and out without ever setting foot in public space. The paradox is that as we go higher, urban street life becomes less dense and less diverse. Mega-towers are not the next phase of a vital city; they are anti-urban monoliths which kill urban life.

The scale, the grand foyer and the plinth of parking garage have produced a fundamentally different building type from that which captured the imagination earlier in the twentieth century. While the form of such towers may still inspire admiration from a distance and the views may be spectacular from within, their proliferation has become a form of place destruction in which architects and planners are deeply implicated. The advertising discourse above reveals a predatory character—the market preys upon vital and attractive urban places and destroys their value. Corporate towers spread, weed-like, across the landscape. They are not natural, necessary, or inevitable and they are not produced out of ignorance. Much of their prevalence can be attributed to the rational pursuit of symbolic capital. They are the popular buildings of a patriarchal and predatory corporate culture.

So what are the prospects for planning control and for architectural innovation? While my discussion on the advertising does not broach the intentions of the architects, this is not to suggest that they are always or only the mute agents of developers, creating mythology for a fee. It is rather because their stories are told regularly in magazines and coffee table books and scarcely deserve repeating. To critique such discourse is a larger task and the stories of symbolic capital are rarely told there. Architecture magazines tend to treat the economy as somehow neutral with respect to good architecture which is concerned solely with the autonomous creativity of architecture as art. Yet as Zukin (1991:161) has pointed out these magazines and picture books are crucially important symbolic circuits which establish the cultural capital of architects and therefore the symbolic capital of their buildings. Small wonder that lavish coffee table monographs are often funded by both the subject architects and their clients.
The use of well-known architects builds corporate credibility, but requires architects to have an identifiable ‘signature’. The developers of the building pictured in Figure 8.2 hired Philip Johnson simply to add an entrance and foyer. In his ‘deconstructive’ phase he added four non-functional columns, to the dismay of the local architects (Denton Corker Marshall).

It is the cultural and not the technical capacities of architects which make them indispensable to this market—using cultural capital to produce symbolic capital. This produces an uneasy relationship between developers and architects. While developers deploy the mythology of timelessness and authenticity to sell the building, they have their attention firmly on the bottom line and are often disdainful of the cultural elitism and presumed autonomy of architects. Architects on the other hand are disdainful of the economic determinism of corporate culture, seeing themselves as reconciling public and private interest in autonomous works of art. Each sees the other as self-interested—whether profit or reputation. But this is a marriage of convenience which works for each (Barna 1992), hence the joint funding of coffee table monographs. With the increased turnover and value of building image the architect’s work as producer of symbolic capital becomes more valuable than ever. The market for new images requires imagination and architects are the imaginative agents of capital development. Control over the production of taste is a form of control over symbolic capital (Knox 1982). To the extent that symbolic capital is socially produced, the ‘taste’ for tall buildings may be manipulable.

On the other hand so long as the quest for market domination is played on a field of urban imagery, so long as profits ‘rise’ and ‘fall’, it is difficult to imagine a corporate architecture which does not engage vertical metaphors in some manner. Architecture will always have its roots in the quest for identity and immortality—it has the paradoxical ability to simultaneously signify progress and construct illusions of immortality, of holding back time. And the urge to produce a timeless vertical erection cannot be divorced from the phallic. Much of the best architecture engages a certain aesthetic of sexuality which I would not want to eradicate. But the tall tower syndrome can also be construed as a variation on the schoolyard game of ‘mine’s bigger than yours’. There is some hope in the idea that the quest for height is a nouveau riche phenomenon where meanings begin to invert and size becomes a signifier of inadequacy.

While it is naive to expect individual architects to refuse the dreams of their clients it is in the collective interest of both the architecture profession and the community to support height limits and renounce these periodic orgies of place destruction. The short-term gains for the few undermine the longer-term legitimacy of the profession. A city wherein good architecture is possible and contributes to urban vitality, where recurring architectural commissions are distributed around the profession on merit, is a city with strong height controls. Professional ethics requires that design imagination is to be placed in the service of the larger community, to develop urban visions that capture the public imagination for a better urban future.
Chapter 9: Inverted city

The Beverly Centre is a three-level shopping mall sitting on a five-storey parking lot, at a major intersection in West Hollywood, Los Angeles. At street level is the Planet Hollywood restaurant with its iconic advertising image of a car entering the streetwall. A constantly changing digital sign documents the world’s rising population and its declining acreage of rainforest for an audience primarily sitting in traffic (Figure 9.1). Across the globe, closer to both the population and the rainforest, is a city which is similar in more than size. Blok M Plaza in downtown Jakarta is a close cousin of the Beverly Centre and employs its urban wall to support a giant video screen flashing images to the passing, though often jammed, traffic (Figure 9.2).

Los Angeles has a reputation for privileging wheels over feet, and for pioneering sequestered zones of safety in a dangerous urban public realm (Davis 1991). The main streets of Jakarta present one of the worst pedestrian environments in urban history. Only the poor walk anywhere and to do so they must negotiate tiny strips of sidewalk which are often blocked. Yet through the portals of either of these malls one experiences an inversion of urban spatial experience. The difficulties and tensions of public space are eased as one enters a protected realm of consumption and spectacle. The enclosed retail environment of the private shopping mall is the most popular and successful new building type of the second half of the twentieth century. It is in many ways the quintessential building type of the age, embodying new and evolving forms of subjectivity, representation and spatial practice.

ARCADE AND MALL

The term ‘mall’ derives from the game of ‘Pall Mall’, popular with the French bourgeoisie in the seventeenth century. A small ball was hit with a ‘mall’ or mallet along a strip of grass which was fenced and lined with trees. Protected from traffic, this strip soon became a popular place for promenading (Kostof 1991:251). Its formal qualities were consistent with those of the political vista and led to its use for military parades and to the naming of spaces of centralized power in London and Washington as ‘malls’, while also retaining the meaning of a protected promenade.
As a place for shopping, the mall has its sources in the nineteenth-century urban arcades. Milan’s Galleria Vittorio of 1867 is the prototype, a series of ‘galleries’ which radiate from a central domed space in a cruciform plan. These early arcades were located near the ‘100 per cent locations’ of maximum pedestrian traffic in the city. They created new means of access, adding to the permeability of the urban structure by providing private shortcuts. Thus they gained their economic life through the capacity to redirect existing pedestrian flows off the city streets. This connection of economic vitality to urban permeability was theorized much later by Jacobs (1965) in her famous study of American cities.
In the 1930s Benjamin recognized these arcades as the harbinger of a fundamentally new kind of space, an interior dream world of seductive commodities. In contrast to most theorists of his time, Benjamin saw modernity not as enlightenment or demystification but as a new mythology. Archaic collective myths steeped in ideas of the eternal were being replaced by a collective dream world of mass culture—the fleeting and dynamic myth of the commodity. In the arcades he saw a new integration in the production of space, architecture, commodity and subjectivity. The arcades caught the collective imagination, but curiously without the social solidarity of the public street and square (Buck-Morss 1989:261). Thus emerged a spatial milieu which was social but not communal, a zone of ‘public life’ that privileged the individual over the group. The arcades privatized the public imagination.

Benjamin linked the development of the arcades with the figure of the flâneur—the nineteenth-century stroller on the streets, promenading to see and be seen. The flâneur combined conspicuous consumption with urban voyeurism and consumption of street life as spectacle. The ‘enclosure’ of this spectacle also had a strongly gendered dimension. The nineteenth-century city was seen as labyrinthine, impure and dangerous—not a place for women (Wilson 1991). The development of the arcades coincided with the gendered ‘separation of spheres’ which marginalized women to the suburbs. The arcade constructed a protected place for women in the city, both as consumers and as subjects of the male gaze (Rendell 1996). Thus the economic advantage of the arcade came as a conjunction of innovations in urban spatial structure and the enclosure of a place with new forms of social relations and subjectivity.

A related source for the mall was the department store which paralleled the development of the arcades. The department store removed the obligation on the consumer to be shopping for something in particular. Instead, it surrounded the consumer with a world of possible goods and removed the counter as a boundary between the two. As Ferguson (1992:30) points out, ‘The department store is ideally a building which absorbs and swallows the shopper’. The consumer is not so much servicing a need as exploring a world. In this context the purchase is not predetermined; desires and identities are constructed in the shopping experience.

The arcade was at once a shortcut in the urban structure, a refuge from the noise, dust and weather, a zone of urban voyeurism and a dream world of mass consumption. The private shopping mall was a development of both the structural and representational effects of both arcade and department store. I shall deal with the spatial structure first.

SYNTACTIC INVERSION

The building type we now know as the mall emerged in the 1950s with the discovery that pedestrian densities could be created artificially in the car-based
suburbs through a coupling of the arcade with the department store as a ‘magnet’. Its invention is generally attributed to Victor Gruen, a modernist community planner concerned about the damage caused by cars and looking for an antidote to suburban sprawl. He wanted to re-establish face-to-face communication, community life and culture in a climate protected environment. The key innovation was the structural marriage of the department store and the arcade—the so-called ‘dumb-bell’ plan. A large ‘anchor’ store at either end was joined by an arcade (the ‘handle’) lined with a string of smaller shops. The essential innovation, however, was the syntax and not the plan. The principle was that the ‘anchors’ act as ‘magnets’ to draw customers past the smaller shops, increasing the density of pedestrian traffic and ensuring that there are no economic dead ends. While this spatial structure is named after its early ‘dumb-bell’ plans, the governing syntax was the lineal link from car park to magnet with the mall as control space and the two magnets generating a fan structure as in Figure 9.3.

Thus the new mall structure generated high pedestrian densities with high rental value. This added value lay in the potential to seduce the passing consumer into impulse consumption. This is the time-honoured function of the shop window. Yet the capacity of the architecture to transfer the attention of the consumer was new and was attributed to the architect as the ‘Gruen Transfer’ (Crawford 1992). The spatial syntax of the ‘dumb-bell’ structure ensures that the magnet stores which hold the power of attraction are located as the deepest cells of the structure such that entry to them passes first through the mall spaces and past the specialty shops. Yet it is in the interest of both the consumer and the anchor store to give direct access from the parking lot to the anchor store, permitting the consumer to engage in convenience shopping and avoid the mall entirely. This of course undermines the viability of the smaller stores which rely on passing traffic and impulse purchasing. Thus the structure of the mall is fundamentally coercive in that it manipulates consumers into long pathways to maximize impulse consumption. The shortcut of the urban arcade becomes a detour in the suburban mall.

Figure 9.3
The mall genotype
While the dumb-bell principle remains pervasive it is rarely built in its pure form. The manipulation of consumers through long pathways is in contradiction with the need to attract them with convenience. Direct entry is sometimes given to anchor stores and the structure has been elaborated over the decades into multiple levels and multiple ‘dumb-bells’ often in diagonal and cruciform plans. Furthermore a large range of hybrid malls has developed, based on the realization that anything which attracts people can have a mall inserted between the entrance and the attraction. Thus we have a proliferation of malls grafted onto waterfronts, museums, airports, theme parks, movie studios, casinos, hotels and historic attractions (Kowinski 1985; Sudjic 1993). A good deal of attention has focused on mega-malls.

Figure 9.4
Three typical malls: spatial structure
like West Edmonton Mall and the Mall of America, where the mall itself becomes a regional attraction (Karasov and Martin 1993; Shields 1989). My concern however, is with the more generic type and its more pervasive effects on everyday life.

Figure 9.4 shows a spatial analysis of three typical suburban malls. Chadstone and Forest Hills in Melbourne, Australia, were developed in the 1960s and expanded in the 1980s with about 200 specialty stores on two or three levels. Each has from six to eight anchor stores including supermarkets, cinemas and department stores. The Metro Centre near Newcastle upon Tyne, England, is a larger mall with a children’s theme park, two ‘town squares’ and themed shopping zones (‘Roman Forum’ and ‘Mediterranean Village’). The spatial analysis treats the car parks as a base, with the various internal courts and malls sections as segments of the structure. Smaller shops lining the malls and courts are omitted from the diagrams for clarity. While there is a certain arbitrariness about this segmentation method, it reveals the remnants of the generic dumb-bell structure within complex multilevel structures of this kind. The mall segments and courts are located at an average of about two segments deep from the car park.

While the anchor stores have a higher average depth than the mall segments, as the mall grows larger the simple dumb-bell structure is dissipated. Attractions such as the fun park and food hall become directly accessible from the car park and the sheer size of the mall becomes an attractor in itself. While these structures are deeper and vastly more complex than the original dumb-bell, the manipulative control over the pathway from the car park to the anchor stores remains evident. These common and complex malls can be construed as a series of interlacing dumb-bell structures which sometimes accede to direct connections with anchors while maintaining a primarily internal orientation.

Once one penetrates to a depth of two or three segments, this structure becomes highly permeable or ‘ringy’. There are many alternate paths for circulation throughout these levels, but the parking lot is never part of a ring. The most shallow segments, where one enters from the car park, have a primarily lineal syntax. These locations are generally marginal to the dominant modes of economic life and encounter within the mall. While car parks may connect with each other, their use is governed by the lineal connection to the closest entrance to the mall.

The ringy heart at a depth of two to three segments is the most significant structural development since the dumb-bell. It combines the dumb-bell with high levels of permeability. There is a strong connection here with Jacobs’ (1965) insight that urban ringiness or permeability is strongly linked to urban street life. The staged events and spectacles, which are the major ‘adjacent attractions’ of the mall, are usually located at these levels. Thus the mall structure uses the drawing power of its anchors to artificially generate a certain vitality and permeable sense of urban encounter at its heart. This is one primary sense in which I suggest that the mall is the ‘city inverted’. Urban public life has been ‘recreated’ in private space. The open encounter of the permeable street network has been enclosed under conditions of controlled encounter. And ironically, the urban impermeability generated by large lump developments like the mall is inverted once inside it.
The structure of the mall determines rental values within it, and unlike the city where rental values are a function of competition, the mall is a highly controlled market. The variety of shops is determined by a formularized ‘mix’ to maximize profit for mall management. The anchor stores or magnets get the cheapest rental space because they are the attractors. The shallow shops close to the car park entrances are the cheapest of the small shops since people rarely pass except when entering or exiting. These shallow marginal locations are used for convenience outlets such as photo shops, dry cleaners and banks. They are also used for low-profit specialty stores which attract a particular rather than a general clientele–carpets, furniture, fabric, do-it-yourself, pets and optics. In this function they operate as minor attractors for specific customers. Peak rents are charged in the ringy heart, the primary zone of impulse purchasing where the ‘mix’ favours jewellery, gifts, clothes and accessories. This zone constitutes a structural separation between the low rent conveniences of the entry zones and the anchors. By combining a large range of shops in one location and then making the attractors difficult to get to, the mall creates high levels of convenience and inconvenience simultaneously. Free parking and one stop shopping in a safe environment are meshed with controlled and enforced window shopping.

The lessons learnt from Jacobs’s critique of urban functional mix are also apparent in the design of the mall. She noted the ways in which a free property market squeezed out marginal uses in a process she termed the ‘self-destruction of diversity’ (Jacobs 1965). Districts with a vital urban mix tend to attract high rent functions which displace low rent uses and destroy the diversity which attracted high rents and vitality in the first place. The mall seeks to address this problem with a formularized mix of anchors, specialty shops and small stalls, coupled with differential rent fixing. Banks are not permitted to deaden the vital pedestrian frontage at the heart of the mall as they can do in the city.

While the mall is designed to resemble the vital diversity of the urban realm, there is little freedom of enterprise within the mall. The range and variety of goods on offer is a product of policy and control over shop proprietors is strong. Restrictive leases ensure control over opening hours, shopfront design and product placement. Management have access to financial records, often receiving a share of the turnover. Enterprises which do not fit the formula are excluded from the successful mall. Small business comes under the control of big business. Formularized chain stores (big business with small outlets) are the only small stores which can hold their own in this league. Genuine diversity is eliminated.

Such totalizing control within the mall renders the market somewhat opaque. There is little of the ‘transparency’ which Lynch (1981) theorizes as a primary value of urban form. There are no closing down sales; one cannot read the signs of success or failure. The semiotics of urban space come under the control of mall marketing as vacant shops are swiftly filled and shopfront designs are regularly renovated. Advertising is strictly controlled to avoid saturation of the visual field. There is only so much space in the semantic field and it is managed to maximize consumption. While there is little of the free market within the mall, there is fierce
competition with other malls and with public shopping districts. This competition is often framed in terms of the scale of the centre and the range of stores it can offer. Thus malls grow ever larger and more complex in the urge to outgrow each other. But this competition is also one of design and semantics as malls seek to differentiate themselves as places within the suburban landscape.

The mall structure embodies a central contradiction between convenience and manipulation. The mall attracts consumers with greater convenience than other malls or shopping centres. Yet this imperative to attract is coupled with the imperative to manipulate consumers past as many shops as possible. To this end paths through the mall are often bent on the basis that if consumers can see the long distance they will not walk it (Garreau 1991).

**SEMANTIC INVERSION**

The spatial opposition between the mall and its context is both structural and semantic; to enter the mall is to undergo a set of semantic inversions. The mall constitutes a safe and predictable realm within a world rendered dangerous by both crime and cars. It also holds a strong attraction in terms of shelter from the prevailing weather. It contrasts with its context as cool when the weather is hot, warm when cold, dry when wet and calm when windy (Crawford 1992). There is no mall weather. While malls first became popular in cold climates they have a similar advantage in hot and humid climates, and are now very popular in South-East Asia. The mall is a clean and highly designed place in contrast to a sometimes derelict context. It embodies the signifiers of class—terrazzo paving, brass and glass—and there are no signs of poverty. The mall creates a purified environment, not only physically and climatically, but also socially. The mall offers at least the illusion of a vital public life and harmonious community. These meanings are congruent with those of ‘home’—a stable and sheltered sense of enclosure which gains its meaning from the inside/outside dialectic explored in Chapter 4 (Dovey 1985b). The mall establishes its meaning in opposition to the perceived dereliction, danger, placelessness and alienation of the public realm. Indeed the more the public places of our cities decline in quality and safety, the greater the relative advantage of the private mall.

These oppositions are at once semantic and structural inversions. The mall establishes a place that is semantically and structurally severed from the city which sustains it. Such oppositions are often starkly apparent in the entry transition from the car park to the mall. The car park is a continuous rationally gridded surface with long sight lines, abstract codes for orientation and minimal design expression. Undercover car parks have low ceiling heights, often with poor light and air quality. This world inverts on the threshold between the car park and the mall. On one side the subject is conceived and constructed as rational, destination oriented and asocial, with aesthetic judgements somehow suspended. Beyond the threshold, the world reverses and brightens as the senses are pampered and seduced with a massive investment in design.
This inversion is akin to Bourdieu's (1973, 1977) notion of the *habitus* as a 'world reversed', where the rules and the game can shift on a threshold. In this case one enters a kind of theatre. Shopping is no longer a functional task, it moves to front stage and becomes a form of lifestyle (Shields 1992). As in the department store, one is consumed by the mall which combines entertainment with consumption. As in a theatre there is an element of hyperreality, a suspension of disbelief strongly influenced by the theme park. It is a heterotopic environment where far flung and exotic places come together in a collage of simulations.
kind of 'reverse tourism', the mall brings the world to us. Its fantasy themes are often drawn from film and television—from ancient history (Figure 9.5) to a high-tech future—any time or place that catches the imagination can be simulated in the mall (Gottdiener 1995).

But if this is theatre it is a theatre of life—the world as stage, on which our role is to consume. The function of fantasy in the mall is the stimulation of consumption (Gottdiener 1995:289). Court and plaza segments of the mall are designed as 'adjacent attractions'—fountains, events and displays which relieve shopping fatigue and revive the shopper for another round (Crawford 1992). Yet its effects rely on the fact that it is a 'liminal' space, it lies between categories—theatre/life; entertainment/consumption; public/private (Zukin 1991). Our consumption of the micro-climate and spectacle melds into our consumption of commodities as part of our immersion in the 'sense of place'. The mall is a place of fluid identity where the suspension of disbelief becomes reflexive. It is a place where we 'watch the world go round' (Ferguson 1992), but this is a world where we lose our 'selves' in both space and time. There are no clocks within the mall and views to the surrounding landscape are rare. Entrances are 'one-way portals' (Clarke 1989) which read as entry from the exterior but not as 'exit' from the interior.

The mall is the most pervasive everyday example of what Jameson (1984) named postmodern 'hyperspace'—a disorienting world of fragmented surfaces and superficial reflections coupled with a highly eclectic collage of architectural styles. The deliberately decentring effects of 'deconstructive' architectural style with clashing grids and glass floors are easily incorporated into the mall (Figure 9.6). This is a form of design which confounds our capacities for cognitive mapping (Jameson 1988). In his seminal work on urban imagination Lynch (1969) established a language for speaking about the image of the city, the ways we make sense of the public world through cognitive imagery. While his work was weak on issues of meaning, the categories of landmarks, nodes, districts, paths and edges have persisted. The mall both utilizes and confounds such imagery. It seeks to establish the malls as landmarks in the urban landscape. But the orientation to an urban landscape is then displaced and replaced with a reorientation to a new set of co-ordinates—primarily the nodes, landmarks, plazas, attractions and the connecting paths between them. Thus the mall has no cognitive edges—the interior is a seamless web of continuous façades.

Shields (1989:155) suggests that this disorientation in space and time 'wreaks havoc with our cultural sense of collective identity, with the spatial metaphors which mediate and represent the relationship between communities and individuals, and with linear notions of historicity as progress'. The mall uses a 'sense of place' to dismantle a 'sense of history'. The temporal orientation to a particular history is replaced with a collage of places and times. 'Mall sickness' is the label some give to a vague sense of anxiety, the loss of the sense of time and memory of what you wanted to buy (Kowinski 1985). This 'zombie' effect is not unlike that which can be induced by too much television. And like television, the mall can induce both excitement and docility simultaneously.
**PUEDO-COMMMUNITY**

The control over spatial structure and representation is coupled with strong controls over behaviour, enforced by surveillance cameras and security staff. The mall is a highly purified and controlling place where anything different to the norm of the happy consumer is subtly excluded. The mall constructs an ideal ‘community’ with no poverty, division or eccentricities. It has a permanently festive atmosphere geared to spending with abandon, but without the genuine abandon of the public carnival or the tensions of political protest.

These are Foucauldian regimes of ‘normalization’ whereby potential disruptions to the designed effect are recognized and evicted. Variations from the neatly dressed and normally behaved consumer are suspect. Shabby clothes, sitting on the floor or even for long in one place can all lead to exclusion (Boddy 1992). These prohibitions are, in some contexts, made quite explicit, including clothes ‘likely to create a disturbance’ or any ‘expressive activity without the written permission of the management’ (Beckett 1994). As everyday practice, however, these forms of control are generally invisible; the ‘rules’ are embodied in the *habitus* of the mall. The subtle exclusion of difference melts into the exclusion of overt politics—leafleting, picketing, demonstrating and lobbying. Limited forms of managed politicking are permitted in malls where they function as forms of legitimation, reassurances that this is a genuine public space while sources of disruptive conflict remain repressed. Indeed shopping malls have become ideal places for politicians to meet and mix with ‘the people’ during election campaigns. The mall offers a collection of ‘normal’ folk in a bright yet passive mood, in a context where any genuine conflict will be avoided. The exclusion of politics has political uses since it delivers a guaranteed ‘community’ of docile subjects.

The pseudo-public space of the mall constructs what Habermas (1989) has construed as a distorted speech situation, a situation which generates the illusion of free speech. The mall is framed as unstructured encounter yet with instrumental imperatives. This is a spatial manifestation of the system colonizing the lifeworld of ‘public space’. It is far from Arendt’s ideal of a space where words and deeds are joined, where power is defined in the capacity to reach agreement and to act in concert (Arendt 1986). While its signifiers are heterotopic the mall embodies the utopian desire for a purified community of social harmony, abundance and classlessness.

Yet the mall needs the illusion of genuine public life—community organization, politics and festivity. It claims the meanings of public space without the politics; the ideal consumer will see it in one way and use it in another. A schism is introduced between the place as text and as lifeworld. This reduction of place to text, the construction of illusion in everyday life is given scope by the spatial frame within which it is controlled. While it is owned and controlled privately, it claims the meanings of public space often down to the use of street signs and the ‘town square’.3

Shields (1992:9) points out that leisure and legitimation share the same Latin root *lex*: ‘law’. And in this sense the mall is a zone of legitimized pleasure...
linked to Bakhtin’s (1984) notion of the carnival as a spectacle of urban transgression and inversion where social codes and hierarchies are suspended. The carnival constructs a place and time of fantasy, intoxication and exaggeration wherein emotions may be unleashed (Featherstone 1991:22). The mall aims for an almost permanent yet benign festive effect—exuberant spending without behavioural abandon. The proliferation of banners in malls is part of this construction of permanent carnival. A series of banners at the Metro Centre
(Figure 9.7) features various staff members of the mall and constructs short narratives weaving together their roles as consumer and worker: ‘Nikki works for Marks and Spencer selling kitchen ware and buys impulsively, mostly sparkling jewellery’. This forges a community of interest between shopper and staff, discouraging shoplifting and encouraging spending.

The mall embodies the contradiction of a ‘private community’. As a space of private control coupled with public meanings it relies upon the illusion of public space. Thus the mall needs public buildings, politics and community life to sustain this illusion and the mall as a building type is gradually opening up to ‘public’ functions—churches, police stations, museums, libraries, social services and medical facilities (Shields 1989). Cities are negotiating and paying for the inclusion of public facilities within the private space of malls and it remains to be seen just where this will lead. Thus far such public facilities tend to occupy marginal locations within the mall structure so as not to disrupt the representational effects nor consume vital retail frontage.

The mall seeks to legitimize itself as public and communal, yet this mostly leads to gestures of legitimation which are framed within private space. A good example is the proliferation of car raffles, where gleaming luxury cars are parked in the mall and raffled for the benefit of ‘charity’. The cars serve also as adjacent attractions and community legitimators. They are seductive ‘wish images’ which also represent the public interest idea of charity and goodwill. Yet unlike real charity raffles, these are highly instrumentalized with strings of identical cars (but only one real prize) on display throughout a string of malls. This ensures a swift turnover of both raffle draws and ‘adjacent attractions’. The mall generates an illusion of civic life and a mis-recognition of community (Shields 1989). As Gottdiener (1995:289) puts it, the mall is ‘instrumental rationality disguised as social communion...Urban ambience is harnessed to the profit motives of privately controlled space’. This illusion is not only representational but also constructed through structural inversion. This ‘enclosure’ of the ‘urban’ that one finds in the typical mall generates a curious new category of space. Hillier and Hansen (1985) argue that exterior and interior spaces have a fundamental difference in that interiors are far more deterministic of behaviour and encounter, with greater capacities for control and social reproduction. By contrast the free flow of life in exterior urban space renders social encounter more probabilistic than deterministic. From this viewpoint the mall enables a new coupling of the illusion of free encounter in fluid urban space with the higher levels of control of the segmented interior.

**RESISTANCE**

Lest this argument sound too totalizing, the mall is too complex to be reduced to a mechanistic function of the imperatives of the market. Practices of resistance within the mall would seem to refute such instrumentalizing, as Shields argues:

its carnivalesque appropriation as a site for *flânerie* by its users...redeems
the authenticity of the mall, which is pushed into the background of users’
authentic meeting and interaction...one finds individual reversals,
destabilizations, and interventions in a continuous play for the freedom of this
space made by users who must not be ‘written off’ as passive consumers.
(Shields 1989:161)

Fiske (1989:37) shows evidence of this for adolescents who use the behavioural
code of the mall as a foil for confrontation. They deploy guerrilla tactics for
disrupting its regimes and creating a spectacle for their own consumption. They
drink alcohol from soft drink cans under the nose of security guards, and the
inverse—acting inebriated to goad security guards into action.

Following the work of de Certeau, Fiske celebrates such forms of resistance
and points out the paradox that ‘power can achieve its ends only by offering up
its underbelly to the attacker’ (Fiske 1989:41). The carefully contrived
representational effects of the mall, its exclusions of difference, make it vulnerable.
The production of a carnival atmosphere encourages carnivalesque behaviour.
The more the mall deploys the signifiers of democratic public space, the more it
encourages democratic public use. Malls are meeting the adolescent challenge
with restructuring—locating game arcades, cinemas and food halls in a manner
that will separate them from the heart of the mall. Thus the logic of the ‘dumb-
bell’ structure is undermined as magnets become accessible directly from the car
park and teenage behaviour is subtly spilled to the car park and street, where
they become a public rather than private problem. These defensive strategies
show a certain power of the mall subject to resist the mall’s seduction and to
alter the manner in which its manipulations are exercised. However, these forms
of resistance are rarely more than trivial. My suburban high school in the 1960s
was full of such resistances, creatively testing the boundaries of disciplinary regimes.
To suggest that it redeems the mall is to trivialize the practices of power and the
more general constructions of docile urban life. Practices of behavioural control
in the mall are highly sophisticated, as Langman (1992:48) argues: ‘the control is
not so much through surveillance as the organization of spatial settings and the
allocation of fantasy and pleasure’. The mall operates like a drug rather than a
prison—teenage resistance may be no more than an early phase of submission.

Sennett (1973, 1974, 1994) has long argued that a diverse urban public realm is
crucial for the constructions of identity that occur during adolescence and for the
forms of tolerance that characterize truly ‘civil’ urban life. It is in diverse urban
encounter with ‘difference’ and ‘otherness’ that we grow up and become fully civilized.
For Sennett the fear of ‘otherness’ leads to a stunting of identity and a retreat to the
ideal of a purified community. He notes the rise of individualism in public space in the
nineteenth century with the emergence of the right to not be spoken to on the
street, linked to the rise of the urban flâneur (Sennett 1994:324). This links in turn to
the retreat to the suburbs and the urban marginalization of women (Wilson 1991).
From this view the mall can be seen as part of a larger imperative to reduce uncertainty
and to neutralize the potency of urban space. The great tragedy of the mall is not so
much the manipulation as the loss of opportunity—it offers neither the genuine challenge nor the inspiration of urban life.

There are also clues to this question of resistance in a return to the work of Benjamin, who saw a revolutionary energy at the heart of the collective dreaming of commodity culture (Buck-Morss 1989). He believed the ludic dimension of creative imagination in childhood play becomes repressed by forces of social order, and that these repressed fantasies were exploited in the carnivalesque seductions of the arcades. Benjamin suggested that the creative connection between perception and action that characterizes childhood play also characterizes revolutionary consciousness in adults (Buck-Morss 1989:263). This repressed ludic dimension embodies a liberating energy of resistance, a rejection of given meanings and creation of new meaning. The repression of the ludic embodies an acceptance of ‘correct’ meanings and a repression of action—look but don’t touch. Yet for Benjamin it is possible to see the dream as a dream through a dialectic of awakening. Arcades and malls as ‘dream worlds’ harbour a utopian wish for an ideal society of harmony and abundance. For Benjamin such ‘wish-images’ have a political potential which can be awakened by each new generation, bringing the old symbols back to life (Buck-Morss 1989:275).

From this view the danger of urban life is part of its vitality, linked to the aesthetic of the sublime (Savage 1995). Benjamin saw that urban experience offered an aesthetic realm which resisted the loss of the ‘aura’ that characterizes twentieth-century art. Unlike the fine arts, the urban spectacle is experienced in distraction which lends it an added potential to trigger dreams and memories. While the ludic dimension thrives in the mall, this is an expropriation of the urban. The mall polarizes the city, it offers a place of ersatz pleasure without danger within an urban context that increasingly offers the danger without the pleasure.

The high hopes of the early shopping malls were understandable. The damage to street life and community from cars was apparent and the dangers of privatization were not. The utopian ideals of remaking community life were pervasive and there are some who celebrate a limited success. For Kowinski (1985):

The malls responded with what the city no longer had: clean, safe, human-scaled environments where people could walk and see other people...They didn’t lock out the kitsch and kin of human tastes and interaction; they enclosed them in a protective embrace. They didn’t embody visions of the ideal; they fulfilled pedestrian fantasies.

(Kowinski 1985:272–273)

This portrayal of the enclosure as protection rather than manipulation, the spectacle as fulfilment rather than seduction, shows the ideological success of the mall. Its advantages over its urban context lead us to rationalize away what has been lost. It is often suggested that the mall has a democratizing effect in bringing a taste of luxury to socially disadvantaged areas. But Gruen’s dream of community life has not been realized. He became disillusioned with these
forms of ‘community’ and disowned the mall idea long before he died in 1980 (Kowinski 1985).

The seductions and manipulations of the mall are not totalizing but neither are they easily resisted. They are coupled with enough genuine convenience and spectacle to attract shoppers. In a sometimes derelict and dangerous city, the mall is clean and safe. Indeed the more car-ridden and dangerous public space becomes, the more banal its designs, then the greater the relative advantage of the private malls. One of the dangers of the mall is that it generates a powerful lobby against good urban design. Investment in genuine spectacle, art and design quality in public space, undermines the profitability of the mall. The proliferation of private malls and their hybrids is an invasion of public space by private interest. They are slowly but surely turning our cities outside-in—capturing the meanings of the urban, the vital and the fantastic, but in a manipulative and seductive manner. Public life itself is being consumed by new zones of consumption.

There are, however, many things to be learnt from the mall and primary among them is the importance of a vital and imaginative public realm. The mall captures remnants of the urban imagination and shows our public efforts of urban design to have become unnecessarily restrained and paralyzed. If highly expensive forms of design expression are viable within the mall, then why not in the public realm? The tragedy of the mall is not that it operates on our imagination, but that it does so in the private interest.
Chapter 10: Domestic dreaming

There is something irresistible about space for it brings with it a feeling of freedom and real contentment. It opens the door to endless possibilities. (model house advertisement)

MODEL AND HOME

The suburban dream home of North America and Australia is packaged for consumption in the form of ‘model homes’ or ‘display houses’ advertised in the property supplements of weekend newspapers. Maps lead to display ‘villages’ where full-scale models are open for perusal (Figure 10.1). The model ‘home’ (it is never called a ‘house’) is furnished to the last detail and the advertising text spells out the narrative:

you are walking through the front door into a room that soars upwards into light filled space. You are standing on the upstairs balcony looking down into that same room, past the staircase and past every feeling you’ve ever had of there not being enough. You know only the joy of openness...Someone should shout ‘lights, cameras, action’ as you sweep down the staircase for, in this home, you entertain in a manner people talk about for a long time.

Model houses are a primary marketing tool for suburban housing. They offer a phenomenology of the future, an ideal world which we are enticed to consume. The ‘model home’ is a mirror which at once reflects and reproduces a suburban dream world. And it is a mirror in which we might read the suburban condition and some of the cultural values that drive it.

The experience of ‘home’ is at once the most primary of spatial meanings and ideologies. The meaning of house and home is founded upon a series of linked dialectic oppositions—home/journey; familiar/strange; inside/outside; safety/danger; order/chaos; private/public and identity/community (Dovey 1985b). These dialectics are at once universal and socially constructed. The experience of home is based in childhood when the habitus of the first house establishes a spatial and cultural order, a vision/division of the world (Bourdieu 1985b).
1977). It becomes an anchoring point for what Giddens, drawing on Heidegger, calls ‘ontological security’ (Giddens 1991). The meaning of this familiar world is established through the dialectic of journeying out from it into the ‘other’ world—the different and the strange (Buttimer 1980). The ideal home is a place of safety in a world of danger; a place where a certain taken for-granted order prevails within a context of chaotic differences. In its architectural manifestations the experience of home constructs an inside/outside dialectic; a private spatial enclosure is protected from the public gaze. And the house as a spatial base inevitably mediates, constructs and reflects one’s social identity in a community.

To speak of the experience of home in such universal terms is also problematic. The ‘home’ is too often where the horror is; its ‘sanctity’ deployed as a cover for violence, paedophilia and gender oppression. But one will not understand the social constructions of domestic space if one ignores its ontological roots (Dickens 1989). The discourse of house and home presses some very deep and conservative buttons—that indeed is its prime engagement with mediations of power.

What follows is an interpretation of advertising discourse for display houses and communities in Australia and California. The interpretation is based on newspaper advertisements, visits to display houses and analysis of the brochures. The method here is similar to that for the corporate tower, mixing discourse analysis with spatial analysis to understand and articulate the experience with which the dweller is asked to identify. However, the advertising evokes the ideal rather than the lived. The models represent an apotheosis of the dream, where suburban mythology surfaces in a manner that makes it available for interpretation—as text, as spatial program and as place.

It is important to note that these are both relatively wealthy states with high levels of house ownership (over 70 per cent in Australia) and where such...
tenure is hinged to constructions of class identity. Both societies have low levels of public housing (6 per cent in Australia) which is stained with a low symbolic status. In both cases the context for suburban planning is market driven. California is wealthier and with a higher level of car ownership and a lower investment in public transport. While these mass-produced detached houses are a very substantial piece of the market they are but one piece. Specifically excluded are all forms of rental, custom designed and attached urban house types.

GENOTYPE

Saunders and Williams (1988) have argued that the house has a central role in the reproduction of social life. Their metaphors are mechanistic and deterministic but provocative, the house is a ‘social factory’, the ‘engine room’ of society. It is the setting which makes interaction meaningful and predictable, linking intimate emotional and sexual life to economic and political life. It both reflects and reproduces the social world of gender, age and class relations. Such a view evokes both Giddens’ (1984) notion of the constitution of society through the spatial punctuation of situations and locales, as well as Bourdieu’s idea of the house as a structuring structure (Bourdieu 1977; Donley-Reid 1990).

With this in mind I want to consider how domestic space is programmed, based on the naming of segments in the advertising. The names are framings of places which may or may not be enclosed and are often clustered into zones within the house. The plan is thus a signifier of both the semantics and the syntax of domestic space. It is not assumed that each segment is necessarily used in one particular way, only that the houses are sold in this manner. Such analysis reveals the model houses to incorporate anything from ten to twenty-five segments. While the individual plans show a myriad of variations there is a genotype which dominates to a remarkable degree. This genotype can be described as a set of structured relations between four primary clusters of space as follows:

- A **formal living zone**: incorporating living, dining, entrance, stairway and den or study.
- An **informal living zone**: incorporating the kitchen, nook (meals area), family, games and terrace (deck or outdoor living space).
- A **master suite**: incorporating master bedroom, bathroom, dressing and perhaps a ‘retreat’ and deck or court.
- A **minor bedroom zone**: incorporating children’s and guest bedrooms, bathrooms and recreation areas.

These zones are the primary divisions of domestic space which mediate relations between inhabitants and visitors, and between different generations and genders within the house. This genotype is shown in the plans and spatial analyses in Figures 10.2 – 5. It is a genotype in the sense that similar clusters
and syntactic relations between them can be detected in the vast majority of detached house models. However, many of the individual spatial segments
may or may not be present and there is some variation in the relations between them.

The primary structural relation between these zones is that formal living is always shallower than informal living and the entrance to the latter is through the former. In addition to the clusters listed are a range of service and ancillary spaces. Most important among them is the garage because it is also the private entrance to the house. It is often part of a service cluster which incorporates the laundry, workshop, storage and service yard. Beyond this there are some variations. The master bedroom suite may have a shallow location close to the entrance—separating zones for adults and children. The point of entry from the garage varies from the front entry area to the informal living areas. There are also differences between Australian and Californian samples, and regional differences in each. Models are generally larger in California, more focused on the top end of the market and they are more likely to be double storey. Australian models are more likely to separate adult and child zones within the house. Beyond these differences, similarities in meaning are consistent; my concern here is with global aspects of the discourse and I shall mostly ignore the regional differences.

The formal living zone is an area of formal display, the remnant of the parlour, a place for ritualized talk—the dinner party and pre-dinner drinks. Yet the primary function of this zone is symbolic display as an entrance promenade, conspicuously framing the pathway of guests from the entry to the new informal zone. The visibility of the formal zone from the point of entry and the entry pathway is a key. In down-market models dining and living areas may be little more than alcoves hung off the entrance pathway. In up-market models they soar upwards with ‘cathedral ceilings’ and ‘sunburst accent windows’. The impact on visitors is the imperative: ‘I feel so proud when I have people over. The high windows and ceilings in the living and dining rooms create a wonderful impression.’

The formal living zone may have an extra room adjacent, variously labelled ‘den’, ‘guest’ or ‘study’ (Figure 10.2). It is often furnished with masculine signifiers of the dark wooden desk and heroic biographies, less often with a couch and flowers. This room generally has double doors opening onto the formal entrance area where it becomes a display of the more intimate pursuits of the owners. When the master bedroom suite adjoins the formal living zone it is also placed on display through double doors for a similar glimpse of intimacy. The formal living cluster frames the entrance to the house and celebrates the major pathway from the front door to the new ‘heart’. It is the domestic parallel of the diplomatic promenade or the corporate foyer—highly ritualized and awe inspiring with high symbolic value and low use value.

The informal living zone has developed from the kitchen—traditionally a multifunctional place of cooking, eating, conversation and informal activity. I have explored the development of this zone in Australia since the 1960s (Dovey 1994) where it has ballooned to outstrip the formal living zone in area. Its expansion to encompass the ‘meals area’ or ‘nook’ and then the family room was a means of separating eating from cooking, connecting it to television and protecting the formal living area from the mess.
This split between formal and informal living has now become ideological, part of the unspoken definition of what constitutes a 'family house'.

The visual integration of the family/meals/kitchen area has a strong gender dimension linked to surveillance from the kitchen. 'Leave your Husband' suggests one advertisement boldly, for he will never understand a woman's love of the kitchen. The small print proclaims the virtues of 'total visual control of your children's play areas, both inside and out'. This panoptic function is enhanced by sunken family, meals or games areas—there are no sunken kitchens. The female voice still predominates: 'This kitchen and family room layout really brings the family together. We gather here and share the events of the day while I'm fixing...
There is a good deal of evidence to support the notion that the house remains a haven for men away from public demands for equal opportunity. And the increasing importance on maintaining the visual imagery of an increasing area would indicate that the domestic workload has grown exponentially.

The informal zone has taken the position of the ‘heart’ of the house and its carefully crafted ‘informality’ has become the primary setting for social performance. Many expensive design features such as cathedral ceilings and skylights are now also found in the informal zone. In the models these zones are increasingly furnished in a formal manner with dining settings, bar, fireplace and piano. The television, a primary reason for the development of these areas, does not feature. In this
formalized informal zone the image of one’s informal lifestyle must be carefully monitored and new retreats (‘games’, ‘recreation’ and ‘media’) have emerged to cope with the chaos. The advertising is quite explicit about the shifting centre: ‘The Kitchen and Family room are the heart of any home’. Sometimes the informal area is called a ‘great hall’ linking images of status, power and baronial splendour. It is in this new oversized heart that the dream of home life is increasingly focused.

The informal zone universally incorporates the outdoor living area which it often wraps around to generate visual links from indoor areas. This is also an integration of nature with culture: ‘It’s comforting to walk into a big space and see your garden through a wall of glass...what’s outside can now be appreciated from within’. The interior has been naturalized through the profusion of light, space and indoor plants: ‘it brings the garden inside without soiling the carpet’. The productive and service aspects of the backyard (garbage, washing line, etc.) have been excluded from this view. The laundry does not open onto the informal living zone. The backyard is transformed from a place of production into one of consumption as vegetable garden and solar clothes drier are displaced by swimming pools, electric clothes driers and designer landscapes.

The ‘master suite’ has been second only to the informal heart in its progressive expansion and segmentation into ensuite bathroom, dressing rooms, retreat and courtyard or deck. The spa bath is common, often in a window bay. In the dressing area, walls of mirrors create an illusion of infinite space as the body image is multiplied ad infinitum. This reflects a growing importance of grooming and the cult of the body and is most pronounced in the Californian examples. The parents’ retreat is advertised in terms of its separation from the house: ‘once you’re there you’ll never want to leave’, a place to relax in the spa and ‘wonder how the other half lives’. One image shows a relaxed couple on crumpled bedsheets and a female voice:

Whoever said ‘Never on a Sunday’...Good grief. Three kids and I’m walking around feeling romantic...I won’t feel guilty about long Sunday mornings in bed. I’m just going to lie back and enjoy them.

The separation between adults and children is sometimes achieved by a spatial structure which locates the master suite in a shallow location adjacent to the entrance. This construction of the generation gap is marketed in terms of both privacy and as a solution to social problems. One model is described as the ‘peace plan’ wherein the warring generations retreat to opposite ends of the house. Another is sold on the basis that parents need not see the children at all: ‘If it didn’t have an intercom you’d spend days looking for the children’. Family relationships are to be improved by largely severing them: ‘absence does, after all, make the heart grow fonder’. The generational split generally leaves the parents adjacent to the front door, with good powers of teenage surveillance.

Children’s bedrooms reflect an imperative to provide a separate room for each child. These rooms are small individual territories, often signified by gender stereotypes. Girl’s rooms are pink with tea party settings, doll’s houses and
cushioned window seats. Boy’s rooms are filled with images and equipment for outdoor action; some even have ‘mess’ fixed to the bed and floor. It is certainly not reflected in the advertising but worth noting that the segmentation of children’s bedrooms is a spatial structure which enables paedophilia.

**STATUS AND AUTHENTICITY**

Adams has argued that the hinging of class identity to house type, tenure and location is particularly pronounced in immigrant cultures with high social mobility: ‘In an immigrant society like the U.S., a society that lacks a visible and established class or caste structure, other markers are introduced to establish and maintain social order and to communicate its meanings’ (Adams 1984:520). Australia is another such society where the quest for status and identity is particularly focused on the housing market. Model houses are powerful mediators of class relations through a differentiation between models which are each marketed as a rung on the social ladder. The bottom rung marks the establishment of a new identity as homeowner and escape from a life of 'money down the drain'. Here the advertising is sometimes blatant: ‘raise your status now!’ Down-market models tend to shrink the genotype and shed its features while maintaining its structure. Thus the games rooms, extra bathrooms, dens and so on disappear while maintaining distinctions between formal and informal zones, and between master and minor bedrooms. Another cost-saving tactic is to abandon design quality in favour of quantity—the full dream is framed within a large box wherein segments are named rather than designed. Eating nooks and entries may be shrunk until they are merely named on the plan rather than actually accommodated.

As one climbs this social ladder, the house signifies the social values of the class immediately above the subject: ‘Invite your boss to dinner he’ll feel right at home’. The dream becomes a progressively elaborate lure which remains one rung higher as one climbs in social status. The house as a symbolic package both establishes status and communicates it to others through the ‘impact it will make on all future visitors’. The house is at once a stepping stone ‘for the family that’s going places’ and a reward for all the sacrifices: ‘we designed it because you’ve made it’. Towards the top of the market the narrative of the house as a mirror of the self is spelled out in detail:

You know about success. You know it can be achieved and achieved without compromise. It’s reflected in everything that surrounds you. Like the home you choose to live in. A home that makes a statement in every one of its striking lines. A statement about you. About working towards your goals, and ultimately making your mark…A reflection of success.

Yet at the top of the market the ‘statement’ of success begins to invert as it tries to differentiate itself from the crass signifiers of the *nouveau riche*—‘understatement’ becomes part of the statement:
You know you’re successful but you don’t care who else does. The goals you set are for your own benefit. You have nothing to prove. And like everything you do, everything you have, your home is a reflection of this.

There are other contradictions. While the models are designed to be popular, we are told: ‘Mr and Mrs Average will hate them’. Everyone is above average yet remains at least one rung below the dream. The satisfaction of desire and the production of envy are conflated in a market where distinction and difference are mass produced. The models are replicated by the thousand, yet marketed as the unique creations of a craft industry that will display the owner’s taste and artistry. The ‘Da Vinci’ (Figure 10.2) is sold with images of paint palettes, brushes and tubes suggesting that ‘Home building, like great art, is the result of masterful attention to detail’.

The quest for authenticity has led to a proliferation of ‘archetypal’ imagery. In one model ‘an exciting entry whisks you past a stately column’ — the column is an ‘optional item’, the load it carries is symbolic. The spiral stair is often a pivotal point in the house as it sweeps upwards around the axis mundi of an indoor tree, towards a skylight. Fireplaces proliferate, generating vertical elements on the elevation (Figure 10.1) and signifiers of intimacy and gathering within. Yet these fires lose their function for heating and gathering as they are grafted onto various domestic segments including bedrooms and bathrooms (Figure 10.2). Even in southern California models often have three fireplaces which ‘beckon with hearths of marble’. The apotheosis of the fetish is in the symbolism of the bathroom where you can bathe simultaneously in sunlight, firelight and water; framed by stately columns, marble hearth and coffered ceiling; and gaze across the landscape from the prospect/refuge of a bay window.

I argued in Chapter 4 that it is not simply by accident that the market focuses on ‘universal’ forms. The claim to essential and unchanging meanings gives them a privilege in the market, boosting exchange value. I also argued that one cannot dismiss universal dimensions of dwelling; that myth can be constructed on deep or shallow bases. But in order to be marketed they must be packaged as formal imagery where they become arbitrary fragments of discourse. Fire presses a sensitive button—the conflated symbolism of ‘heat’, ‘heart’, ‘hearth’ and ‘home’; as a centre of light, life and passion it can be linked to the inside/outside dialectic (Bachelard 1964). Likewise, the columns, chimneys and spiral stairs are linked to the vertical/horizontal dialectic.

This reduction of archetypes to text proliferates in response to a burgeoning quest for ‘authenticity’. But it cannot be realized through the consumption of packaged forms. The question of authenticity is an ontological one which entails a commitment to the ambiguities of experience; it joins the construction of new meanings to the excavation of old ones (Dovey 1985a). While the proliferation of archetypal imagery holds the promise of a deeper dwelling experience, the imperatives of economic exchange contradict any resolution. Exchange value is served not by the satisfaction of desire but the ongoing production of envy. Four fireplaces, a marble spa-bath and a spiral stair can never be enough or consumption would cease.
Each model home has a name which I have interpreted and clustered according to the various provinces of meaning that they evoke (Figure 10.6). The most common and consistent theme is for names that are linked to images of nature (Glenvale, Brentwood). These names evoke a place with a view of the natural landscape (Parkview) or are associated with water (Meadowbrook), trees (Laurel) or flowers (Primrose). The dream of suburbia is an escape from the city to a life enveloped in ‘nature’.

Another theme is for names with a British ancestry such as the Ascot and Mayfair, capturing connotations of tradition, class, privilege and heritage. Mediterranean names such as the Riviera and Monaco have long been fashionable and remain so. They are linked in turn to others of Spanish (Granada), French (Provence) and Italian (Tuscan) sources. All of these indicate a Eurocentric and heterotopic imagery—the ideal home is found in other places and other times. There are also regional names linked to the distinctive histories and geographies of California (Malibu) and Australia (James Cook).

Names which signify power, such as Dominion and Statesman, are popular along with those evoking progress (Vogue, Precedent) and self-image (Esteem, Karisma). Some houses are named after artists (Van Gogh), films (Casablanca), stars (Gemini) or gemstones (Onyx)—linking the quest for a timeless authenticity with drama, dreams, art and glamour. The names are not easily categorized; indeed their powers of seduction are increased when they capture two or more of these provinces of meaning in one name. Thus, Windsor and Westminster manage to evoke both British heritage and power, and Camelot adds a touch of Hollywood as well. Sherwood and Park Lane span images of nature and British heritage.

The strongest general province of meaning indicated by the model names is the highly conservative clustering of names related to heritage. The ideal home
is securely based in an unchanging past, it ‘takes you back to the good old days’, where ‘History repeats itself. This is the nostalgia which dominates the street styles of the model houses: many plans come with a choice of eras. The term ‘nostalgia’ suggests a sentimental indulgence in familiar forms which evoke memories or myths of the past. Yet it was originally a medical term for ‘homesickness’; travellers in the eighteenth century were diagnosed with ‘nostalgia’ and sent home (Starobinski 1966). If the popular housing market is a guide, nostalgia is a pervasive spirit of our age which reflects a kind of ‘dis-ease’ with modern life.

Forty and Moss (1980) suggest that the pseudo-vernacular, based on the myth of harmonious village life, enables its residents to reconcile contradictions between stability and change. The pseudo-vernacular offers a stable frame against which achievement can be measured—static imagery for mobile people. The nostalgic imagery in the models is often coupled with modern ideals of progress and freedom. The ideal house embodies this contradiction and refers both to the past and the future. It is rooted in the permanence and tradition of the past, yet modern in its outlook to the future.

Tradition appeals to you. No one can deny the inspiration we draw from styles of less hurried times. No one can deny its appeal...But there is a lot to be said for the modern outlook and its emphasis on freedom. There is freedom in space.

Nostalgia for a past offering certainty is coupled with a desire for the freedom of modernity. These ideals are linked through the prospect of an escape from the present. The suburban home embodies an escape not only from the city but also from the broader problems of everyday life.

Saunders and Williams (1988) argue that the home carries an increasing load of aspirations as it internalizes social problems. The new segmentation of the model houses often claims to resolve problems between generations and between genders. The model house promises a model family where ‘the fights seem to be over’; where the children spend more time at home yet appear less often. The home is a retreat where life ‘is not so rushed and crowded all the time’. The games room is called upon to solve marital disputes: ‘the family that plays together stays together’.

The dwelling experience is increasingly packaged to meet a desire for ‘freedom’. But it is a strangely involuted freedom which is identified with interior space: the model house ‘opens the door to endless possibilities’. This door to freedom opens inwards, a freedom of escape from a difficult public lifeworld.

SANCTUARY

‘Clos du Lac’ is a small gated community in northern California where eighty-seven model houses surround artificial lakes (Figure 10.7). As one descends past the gate, through some vineyards and olive trees, one retreats in both space and time:
Figure 10.7
‘Clos Du Lac’: northern California

Figure 10.8
‘Siena’: southern California
In the tradition of southern France, the spirit of Clos du Lac is the spirit of another time. It was a time when family estates were passed from generation to generation, along with the vineyards and olive groves producing wine and oil bearing the family name. It was a time made possible by the impeccable, rock-solid workmanship and design skills of Provençal artisans. Clos du Lac marks the return of that time. The spirit of fine design and construction lives again...—it’s all part of the authentic Clos du Lac experience...As you stroll through Clos du Lac...repeat to yourself, ‘This is not a Fantasy’.

The street syntax is formed of a large loop plus smaller courts. The enclosure of backyard fences has been abolished in favour of a communal village effect which ‘laces’ the ‘community’ together with walkways through olives and vines. Thus, while the perimeter is accessible only through one set of electronic gates, the interior is highly ringy. The models are in French vernacular style yet generally follow the genotype outlined earlier. There are rough-hewn ceiling beams and ‘hand-carved “keystones” over each window and door’. One room is furnished as an artist’s studio with appropriately creative mess fixed to the floor. Like good wine and art, your home will ‘improve with age’. This is a world into which one retreats in both space and time.

Blakely and Snyder (1997:85) have estimated that about 8 million people now live in gated communities in the USA. They suggest three primary motivations—to protect the amenity of a certain lifestyle (centred on clubs, sport and leisure); as elite compounds (protecting the rich and famous from the common gaze); and as security against crime. These three trends are mixed in most enclaves. They offer a communal camaraderie of the privileged, protected against an underclass. Siena is a gated and guarded compound in southern California complete with a communal swimming pool, ‘Tuscan tower’, clubhouse and a range of models from the Tiara to the Eleganza (Figure 10.8). Cameray Pointe nearby is marketed to singles with the swimming pool as a site offering ‘camaraderie with neighbours’. The brochures show plans which highlight the enclosed syntax, gates and guardhouses.

Gated communities proliferate under conditions of social inequity, crime and an impoverished public environment. An enclave developer in Australia argues: ‘Sanctuary Cove is an island of civilization in a violent world, and we have taken steps to ensure it remains so’. Australia is not a violent place, but it is not in everyone’s interest to keep it that way. And the enclave is the opposite of what ‘civil’ means—to pass through the gates is to abandon both citizenship and civility. The names of the enclaves are revealing of the meanings being constructed. Sanctuary Cove is evocative of safety, protection and enclosure on the one hand, and of ‘sacredness’ and ‘nature’ on the other. Clos du Lac and Siena suggest the closure of the fortified town. The enclave is a packaged version of the dream of an ideal community—pure, secure and natural.

Gated enclaves are generically referred to in the USA as Common Interest Developments (CIDs). The enclave constructs such a ‘community of interest’ through severe controls over both behaviour and built form. At Los Lagos, a gated enclave in northern California, the ‘Architectural Committee’ polices design standards to achieve
‘an aesthetically pleasing overall appearance’. No garages, basketball nets, clothes lines or political signage may be visible from the street. Cars cannot be parked overnight on the street, nor even in the driveway if closer to the street than the house. There are to be no recycled materials, prefabricated houses or chain-link fences. Some gated communities have rules against behaviour such as entering by the back door, gathering in the street and kissing in the driveway (McKenzie 1994). It is surely a paradox that totalitarian forms of social control are being voluntarily entered into by the most privileged citizens of the most individualistic of states.

Enclaves are master planned with the imperatives of generating and preserving property values. Such ‘communities’ are then isolated and insulated from the city and from forces for change. Governance within the enclave is private and corporate. Despite equal voting rights among residents (excluding renters), the ‘constitution’ of the ‘community’ is not debatable—management displaces politics (McKenzie 1994). Enclaves have some roots in the garden city movement divested of the public interest ideals. However, the retreat behind gates and walls shows deeper sources in the medieval town and the walled compound of the colonial world.

Structurally and semiotically the enclave has similarities to the mall. Both are walled compounds which establish their meaning in the opposition between inside and outside. Both benefit from the deterioration of the public environment and establish a simulation of an ideal community within. Both enforce totalizing codes of behaviour in order to construct such ideal imagery and to protect it as economic and symbolic capital. The mall, model and enclave can integrate in the emerging gated communities of up to 6,000 hectares and more which are beginning to emerge, especially in South-East Asia.

It is very difficult to draw a line beyond which it is clear that such developments are against the public interest and should be prohibited. They are often defended on the basis that they are nothing more than the apartment building writ large, with a few amenities added to the foyer. However, there are three main arguments for the prohibition of gated enclaves of more than about a hectare in urban areas. First, gated communities drain the capital, the commitment and the skills of the affluent (McKenzie 1994). They enable the elite to bypass public institutions and thereby undermine the market for them. In the end this leads to a quest for tax rebates for enclave residents who do not wish to fund amenities they do not use (Davis 1991: ch. 3). Responsibility for the city is abandoned in what Reich (1992:270) has termed the ‘secession of the successful’—a secession both from public space and from collective tax responsibilities.

Second, the impermeability of gated compounds means that they are anti-urban in their spatial structure. The apartment building or complex may enclose common space yet still remain integrated with the urban life which flows around it. As they spread horizontally, gated communities obstruct the flow and accessibility of public space. Such compounds are often attracted to adjacent public amenities such as beaches, which they then ‘capture’ for exclusive use since access is not possible through the enclave. Children outside the walls have no access to those within, integrated open space plans cannot be implemented. There is an opportunity cost to the public purse.

Finally, and most importantly, the gated community produces new and stronger
forms of ideological control and social engineering. This is a particular issue for children who have not chosen such totalizing controls and have a right to grow up in a public community. Through the eradication of difference the enclave breeds ignorance, intolerance and homogeneity among its children. Ultimately it produces and reproduces a generation stunted in their abilities to deal with a diverse and problematic world. While it is clear that the enclave stimulates paranoia (Ellin 1997), there is little evidence that it delivers more than a partial displacement of some forms of crime. Hillier (1988) has argued that an integrated and permeable urban spatial structure embodies a deeper resistance to random street crime than does the retreat to enclosure.

The retreat to enclaves both reflects and reproduces an enclave mentality. Franck (1997) suggests that the suburban sanctuary is a ‘double cocoon’ around both house and community. It is based on oppositions of public/private, built/natural, work/leisure, non-family/family, poor/rich and frail/strong in a manner which privileges the latter and excludes the former (Franck 1997). Segregated from sickness, poverty and difference we construct a ‘community’ without connections to the moral dimensions of life. Gated enclaves undercut the conditions necessary to a vigorous democracy; indeed they offer the illusion of democracy coupled with secession from it. As Flusty argues, the enclave ‘creates an impediment to the cross cultural communication necessary to knit together diverse publics...class is solidifying as caste’ (Flusty 1997:58–59). Enclave developments are but an extreme of the more pervasive retreat from urban difference—a spatial retreat behind walls and a temporal retreat into styles of the past which Sennett suggests is a claustrophobic perversion of placemaking:

Place making based on exclusion, sameness or nostalgia is socially poisonous and psychologically useless; a self weighted with its insufficiencies cannot lift the burden by retreat into fantasy.

(Sennett 1997:69)

While a critique such as this can lead to a reinforcement of the idea that these houses and communities are cultural and architectural wastelands, this is not my intention nor my view. These places frame real and interesting lives and enable forms of agency and resistance about which I have said little. Indeed the suburbs are the site of much interesting innovation in housing types (Franck and Ahrentsen 1991). The model houses and enclaves are perhaps symptoms of a certain homesickness; they reflect a legitimate desire for ontological security. I began with the notion that the experience of ‘home’ is a dialectic construction. Yet the meanings of house, home and community are not ultimately serviced by this retreat from the urban and the social. Starved of its other, the home becomes a fetish, a fantasy, even a prison. While my task here has been to articulate some meanings of suburban life as they surface in the advertising, the larger task is to keep alive the various dialectics of private/public, inside/outside, familiar/strange, security/danger and identity/difference. We need to design new ways of putting roots in place which resist the totalizing retreat into either the past or the walled enclave.
Part IV

Localities
Chapter 11: On the move

Seeing is believing. Melbourne is changing before our eyes...At long last Melbourne is really on the move.

Victorian Government brochure (1996)

For Walter Benjamin, as we have seen, the city is a labyrinth of dreams and wish-images; it captures the collective imagination with the power of the sublime. Such ideas link to those of Debord whose ‘Society of the Spectacle’ in the 1960s proclaimed a world where capital accumulates into imagery and ‘All that once was directly lived becomes mere representation’ (Debord 1994:12). These ideas were highly prophetic, heralding a new world of urban theatre. New social relations are mediated on an urban stage where the suspension of disbelief is the condition for the consumption of meaning—‘seeing is believing’.

MELBOURNE

Melbourne is a city of 3 million people, capital of the state of Victoria, which has developed since the 1830s based on a gold rush, followed by agriculture and manufacturing. Located on a river which opens to a large port and bay, the gridded colonial city flourished in the late nineteenth century. This era, of ‘marvellous Melbourne’ as it is known, produced a substantial Victorian urban heritage with a generous and urbane public domain. Much of this has been sustained as the infrastructure of what is now a very multicultural city. Post-war migration has supplemented the Aboriginal and British with a cultural mosaic as Vietnamese, Cambodian, Greek, Italian, Bosnian, Turkish, Chinese and other cultures circulate around the city, forming hybrids and juxtapositions in different districts. While the urban life is vital and diverse, the landscape is flat and seemingly unremarkable. Melbourne has been voted the ‘world’s most livable city’ by the Washington-based Population Crisis Committee (1990), yet it is not easily marketable to tourists and investors.

In 1992 a new state government was elected with a charter to undertake economic reform and reduce state debt. With a Thatcherite agenda of privatization and free market ideology, Melbourne has been transformed through a series of highly visible urban projects. An inner city park has become a Formula One
Localities

A new casino occupies half a kilometre of river frontage where it belches huge balls of fire on the hour. Waterfront public docklands are under private development in 30 hectare lots with the 'tallest building in the world' as one proposal. The public freeway to the airport has been sold to become an electronic tollway. An existing public icon, the 'spire' on the arts centre, has been lengthened and made to 'ejaculate' electronic lights at night. A cluster of new civic icons are built or proposed; all marked by a dynamic aesthetic signifying the state slogan: 'on the move'.

GLOBAL/LOCAL

While this transformation clearly reflects local politics, it also reflects a broader conjunction with global markets. In Chapter 4 I introduced some theories of the global/local which I want to recall and extend here. Globalization incorporates a range of accelerating trends all of which have effects on urban form—an increased flexibility and mobility of capital investment; the compression of effective distance; and increased flows of people around the planet (King 1990). These globalizing effects raise the power of some 'global cities' as command and control centres of global enterprises. Such cities become great attractors of banking and finance, the bases for new classes of managers and image makers. Global cities are where ideas are produced, money is raised for them, and global implementation is managed. They attract investment and therefore grow faster, wealthier and more powerful. Depending on methods of interpretation, the top rung of such cities includes London, New York, Tokyo and perhaps Paris, Hong Kong and Los Angeles (Sassen 1994). The lower rungs of this hierarchy are far less clearly defined and it is here that competition is most fierce. The competition between cities for positions in the global hierarchy has a major impact on the manner in which urban projects are conceived, designed and approved. Before turning to how this occurs in Melbourne I want to sketch some general yet related effects of globalization on urban design.

The first is a generalized tension between local and global forces, both cultural and economic. Local culture is embedded in a community of face-to-face communication and infused with rituals of everyday life and collective memory (Featherstone 1993). This is the lifeworld of everyday life, shot through with differences of ethnicity, class, gender and age. Local places develop a 'local character' based in these differences and are layered with a combination of landscape, architecture and urban form. The local may be diverse and seem insignificant in relation to the global, but as Hannerz (1996:28) argues: 'in the aggregate it is massive'.

Local differences of urban character are attractive to global marketing strategies. Globalization does not simply iron out differences between cities, it also stimulates them. Thus globalization produces urban projects that have a global/local tension written into them. As Zukin (1991:15) argues, this is a tension between global capital which moves and a local community which does not—life space versus
Chapter 11: On the move

Economic space. Globalization brings a reconfiguration of the urban ‘meaning market’ and the constructions of both individual and social identity within it:

In any discussion about identities, the built environment of space and place is a crucial, critical factor which both inhibits as well as facilitates the construction of new individual as well as social identities...

‘Boundaries’ are constantly being drawn round cultures, and subcultures, in terms of power, economic, political or social; territorial markers establish specific domains, whether laid down by the state, the market, by ethnic groups, or by people who are inside, or outside. (King 1991:151)

The revaluing of local places for global consumption brings a renewed focus on urban imagery and spectacle, on the constructions of city identity.

Local places become appropriated to global strategies. Urban marketing requires civic imagery which can identify places and cities as different products. In particular this stimulates the market for iconic imagery embedded in ‘signature’ projects which signify a ‘sense of place’ for global consumption. The quest for the world’s tallest building is part of this discourse as the city becomes part of the set for the ‘world stage’ (A. King 1996). This principle applies at a range of scales, from the backdrop to the TV satellite interview, to smaller scale images of street life used in civic marketing. The Manhattan skyline, Westminster, the Eiffel Tower and the Sydney Opera House set the standards of urban iconography. Like corporations without logos, cities without icons are not in the market.

The competition between cities for large-scale urban projects lends power to global developers who extract concessions from city governments, based on the threat of taking their flexible capital elsewhere (Sassen 1994). Primary concessions include lowering taxes, making public land available, bypassing planning procedures and agreeing to contractual secrecy. While all of these are problematic, the last two are a real threat to local democracy. Globalization creates conditions under which cities seeking global investment are asked to suspend processes of democratic participation and to exclude public scrutiny under cover of commercial secrecy. If this is achieved then the public interest cannot be debated since these visions of the urban future, their costs and potential benefits remain hidden. The community is rendered completely blind.

While global capital brings increased wealth it also brings new extremes of inequality. Mega-projects produce highly uneven urban development and polarized landscapes wherein islands of luxury and privilege are juxtaposed with a broader decay, disuse and dereliction (Davis 1985; Zukin 1991). Tax concessions traded to secure the investment undermine the tax base needed to deal with the broader inequalities, including the declining quality of the larger public landscape.

Such forms of investment are inherently large lump and antithetical to the piecemeal development which most theorists would argue is necessary for genuine urban diversity. Investors seek out and are offered large sites of public land for...
mega-projects which are often mixed zones of up-market consumption and housing enclaves. But the ‘mix’ in such projects is a formula based in consumption lifestyles of specific market sectors—reinforcing spatial divisions of social class.

While these dichotomous landscapes harden boundaries and fix identities at one level, at another they construct what Zukin (1991) terms spaces of ‘liminality’—spaces between categories and identities where public and private interest are deliberately fudged. In one sense this is the familiar realm of the shopping mall writ large in urban space—a depoliticized ‘pseudo-public’ realm of broad public access but without the spontaneity and freedom of the public realm. An alliance forms between the public state and private estate whereby the public interest is signified while the private interest is served; public meanings are coupled with private control. As in the mall this generates a zone where the ragged, the homeless and the political can be removed without loss of legitimacy to the state.

These zones are also ‘liminal’ in that they fudge the boundaries between culture and commerce. Private investment in public art becomes meshed with advertising in that the framing, location and content of the art are geared to politics or consumption (Bourdieu and Haacke 1995; Schiller 1989). Public art becomes neutralized by corporate sponsorship with a subtle censorship of any ideas which do not stimulate the consumer mood. ‘Places’ are framed in a manner that renders artistic expression as docile as the passing people. Urban designers, architects and public artists alike gain new markets at the cost of a certain loss of autonomy; their marketability relies on an ability to produce symbolic capital in these new and shifting fields of ambiguous meaning.

Commerce colonizes public space as logos begin to appear on paving patterns and public street signs. Both popular and elite culture is colonized as public museums, galleries and sporting fields become sites for corporate events. Such facilities are constructed to incorporate function rooms and boxes which are annexes of the corporate office, framing places and times where deals can be struck with clients in a seductive location. Commerce mixes well with sport, culture and art-fields of production wherein economic interest is denied (Bourdieu 1984).

These liminal spaces often produce carnivalesque and heterotopic themed spectacles wherein the boundaries between natural/artificial and imaginary/real, are erased as completely as possible. Imaginary landscapes of visual consumption are lent added value as a retreat from an increasingly banal urban context where democratic development has become paralyzed by a ruptured tax base. The spontaneous and authentic diversity of urban life makes way for a commodified version of the same thing.

The new urban spectacle often has the appearance of a rear view mirror. According to Boyer (1996) we are in the midst of a ‘crisis of collective memory’—a shared disjunction of our relations to the past. This is linked to rapid urban change as modernism and industrialization disrupts the myriad of ways in which cities house a collective sense of history. The crisis of collective memory provokes a desire to collect the past in a tokenistic manner and to reframe it in urban scenography. Such scenographic representations repress the mystery and disorder
of urban life which is collapsed into ‘scenes’—as we have seen in the shopping malls and housing enclaves. History becomes a product which is packaged and consumed; a symptom of the crisis is prescribed as a cure for nostalgia.

Many of these tendencies are reflected in urban planning ‘policies’ where integrated strategic plans are replaced by fragmented collages of a glossy future. Public planning documents begin to resemble advertisements for theme parks as real strategic planning is done in secret by private corporations. Since globalization undermines local democracy and does so under the veil of commercial secrecy, this undermines the perceived legitimacy of the state. Being less based on debates, plans or policies, the credibility of political authority needs legitimizing imagery— the age-old trappings of power. The state then tends to negotiate forms of legitimation into the design of urban projects. Like globalization itself, there is nothing particularly new in this but its currency in the political process is revalued.

Urban designers and architects are given a highly problematic, if not impossible, task: to reconcile the global/local tensions; to frame ‘public’ space under new forms of private control; and to legitimize political authority in the face of an eroding democracy. And then they must lend their signature to the project, certifying it an authentic work of art which rises above the imperatives of the market. I now turn to how these issues are manifest in Melbourne.

CROWN AND STATE

The first Crown Casino opened in Melbourne in 1994 (Figure 11.1). Marketed as ‘the jewel in Melbourne’s crown’, both the name and logo establish linkages with the state and its traditional base in the ‘crown’. The logo of a ‘crown’ formed out of a series of white dots which spray upwards and outwards has swiftly become a familiar image. This image also signifies an eruption of energy, a ‘splash’ (‘splash out’, ‘lash out’), a joyful climax (champagne bubbles, fireworks, sex) and the act of ‘winning’. This touches the Dionysian urge towards hedonism and emotional abandon, while hinging it to the legitimacy of state power. The state government logo is also a crown which surmounts white stars on a blue background. The jewels in the casino crown are white dots on a blue background.

Connections between casino and state, between private and public interest, have been more than semiotic. The Treasurer of the Liberal Party was a dominant shareholder in Crown when the licence was awarded by the Liberal government. Questions about the propriety of the decision were never resolved due to the secrecy of the process. The casino first opened in temporary quarters immediately adjacent to the police headquarters, where the two crowns were juxtaposed at the entrance (Figure 11.1). The semiotic effect again is to establish the connection of the casino with the state and to disrupt any lingering associations or allegations of casino/crime or crown/crime. The funding which flows from the casino taxes has become a major new source of state revenue; the state becomes a quasi-shareholder with a growing dependence on its share of the profits.
The logo has also appeared on over fifty ‘public’ street signs which purport to direct strangers to the casino (Figure 11.2). The use of the logo and the incorporation into the same frame as the street sign operates to frame the city as a casino-town. The signs become signifiers for ‘government says gamble’; those who navigate the city become subject to regular reminders to gamble. With gambling tax forming an increasing percentage of state revenue, the state becomes complicit in this seduction through urban design. Like the pseudo-public zones of liminal space, these signs are both billboards and public street signs, with a similar mix of public meaning and
private control. This is the kind of advertising that cannot usually be bought; the conflation of public and private in the signage has huge market value. These are the urban equivalents of product placements in films or ‘advertorials’ in newspapers, subtly pushing sectional interests under the cover of ‘art’ or ‘news’.

The new Crown Casino opened in 1997 on a site comprising 7 hectares of formerly public land with half a kilometre of prime river frontage facing the city. The design of the building was also the subject of a secrecy agreement, protected from public scrutiny except for superficial imagery. The consortium of architects were forced to set up a special office under the client’s control and all architects signed secrecy agreements. The justification for this was that the design was an integral part of the ‘commercial in secrecy’ agreement. The 7 hectare site quickly grew to encompass surrounding blocks with additional hotels, theatres, car parks and shopping malls. The design was changed many times during construction and rubber stamped at each stage by the state. A major piece of the city and half a kilometre of its prime waterfront was planned and designed in complete secrecy. What began as a casino and hotel complex expanded into a small entertainment-based ‘city’ incorporating 5 hectares of ‘gaming’. The word ‘casino’ disappeared from the advertising of what is now ‘a world of entertainment’ with theatre, conference, cinema, restaurant and retail facilities.

The consortium of architects (Daryl Jackson; Bates Smart and Perrott Lyon Mathieson) were caught in a difficult circumstance here—trying to reconcile an urban sensibility with a profoundly anti-urban program. When the finished building was lambasted as ‘crass’, the casino owners deferred the criticism onto the architects. But it is not the role of architecture to cover up, blend in or camouflage the aberrations and excesses of society. Architecture is expressive; it constructs and represents the identities of our institutions, revealing our values as it frames our lives. Perhaps it would have been interesting to push parts of the design into the realm of the outrageous, where meanings invert when over-expressed, where the outrage might find a place in the architecture. Perhaps the building could use a dose of irony or self-mockery, but that would not change anything.

The most significant aspects of the design were not controlled by the architects. The 5 hectares of gaming floor are almost entirely internalized and subdivided internally along class lines—from the local working-class poker machines at one end to the exclusive ‘high roller’ rooms several hundred metres away to the east. The interior design of the building has been undertaken with attention to the principles of *feng shui* and a ‘courtesy bus’ trawls regularly through the local Chinese district for customers. All entrances from car parks are filtered through the controlling syntax of a shopping mall which also mediates the relation of casino to riverfront. The eruptions of joy marketed on the logo now erupt in an hourly spectacle of huge gas fireballs from a series of towers lining the riverfront (Figure 11.3). This is essentially advertising masquerading as a fireworks display; public land turned into the world’s longest billboard. This is a dramatic spectacle of persistent carnival—the illusion of exciting urban dynamism coupled with the archetypal energy of fire. The television advertising superimposes carnivalesque
images of a giant masquerade with those of the building and its explosions of fire. As a spectacle it constructs a space for ‘play’—theatre, indulgence, exuberance, leisure and liberty—the antithesis of work, constraint, poverty and addiction.

This literal form of casino capitalism has now added both the state and many of its citizens to gambling. Evidence of gambling related poverty and suicide mounts as consumption shifts away from local communities and retail spending. The state becomes increasingly dependent on gambling taxes which are also used to fund projects which form part of a larger constellation of new mega-projects.

ON THE MOVE

Across the street and downstream from the new casino, the Melbourne Exhibition Centre was completed in 1996. It occupies a site that was formerly intended for a major new public museum. Indeed the museum building was four storeys high before construction was halted with the change of government in 1992. The new exhibition centre, funded entirely from casino taxes, swallows the abandoned superstructure of the former museum. With its diagonal entry icon saluting the city, this is a powerful image, judged by the architects’ institute as the best new building in Australia in 1996 (Figure 11.4). A huge extruded ‘aerofoil’ roof nearly half a kilometre long serves as ‘high-tech’ packaging for changing exhibits. In formal terms this is a fine design (by architects Denton Corker Marshall) which shamelessly indulges in the architecture of the slick package—gift wrapping for the ever-changing commodity. However, in programmatic terms, commerce has displaced culture; the museum has been banished to a suburban park. The museum was removed from this site because it was initiated by the previous government and could not be used to legitimize the new one. The new building effectively signifies this turn of political history—the new authority consuming the old; commerce consuming culture. But the museum was also displaced because it has less spin-off value for a new constellation of global projects—exhibition centre, casino and racetrack—all of which attract global ‘high rollers’.

Until 1993 Albert Park was a huge but run-down inner city park centred on a large lake. It has now been upgraded into a Formula One Grand Prix racetrack to service a two-hour global spectacle once a year. The park has become a civic billboard by placing Melbourne’s urban panorama on the global stage for a few hours every year. A variety of grandstands and sporting facilities have been built or replaced, all in high-tech style, together with a new lakeside look-out tower from which to view the transformation.

Global/local tensions and contradictions are laced through this project. The advertising slogan for the event—‘A Great Place for the Race’—evokes this tension as it plays on the rhyme of ‘place’ and ‘race’. The idea is that the race must claim this inner city location in order to exhibit the urban panorama on global television. Yet the television coverage is so focused on the race that the government must buy trackside billboards to announce the ‘place’—‘Melbourne’
Chapter 11: On the move

Figure 11.3
Crown Casino, Melbourne: explosions of joy

Figure 11.4
Melbourne Exhibition Centre: saluting the new order
is reduced to a brand name for global consumption. Place is reduced to text and not without cost. Over two hundred mature trees have been killed to build the track and public access to the park is restricted for several months of each year. During practice and racing the noise can be heard up to 10 kilometres away; the most ‘local’ of cafés and restaurants suffer a loss of business. For the remainder of the year the track has to be ‘tranquillized’ with speed barriers to prevent locals from emulating their global heroes. A large new pit building, omitted from the original publicly released plans, lines the racetrack, blocking access and views to the lake.

The tensions in this project have flared regularly into community resistance so persistent that the state has excised the park from local government control and legislated against general public access. One lesson here is that the potential of the local to mobilize against the global is considerable, especially if the state can be forced into overtly undemocratic action to maintain an alliance with private interests. However, the project does attract an annual influx of high-rollers to the casino and the annual spectacle of the world’s fastest cars delivers a certain credibility to the claim of a state ‘on the move’.

The City Link project, due for completion in 1999, involves a privatization of the public freeway to the airport. The freeway will become a tollway framed with electronic gantries scanning transponders in cars—a panoptic information system which authorities swear will never be used for anything other than toll collection. The freeway will also be upgraded and extended to include a new bridge and tunnel. This contract is akin to selling off the ‘front door’ to the city, and to enable it to happen without ‘cost’ to the public purse some extraordinary conditions were negotiated. Fifty new advertising billboards will ensure that the city is framed for its visitors as a city of consumption. In addition, the state has agreed to restrict traffic on bypass roads—not only selling the ‘front door’, but also closing the ‘back door’. The deal also involves an agreement that the state will not establish public transport links to the airport. By any measure, this was an extraordinary deal which has stretched the credibility of the state to be acting in the public interest. To deal with this problem the freeway is also to be enlivened with two more civic ‘icons’ which serve both a global strategy for changing Melbourne’s image and a local strategy to build political legitimation.

**SALUTING THE NEW ORDER**

All of the new urban icons are designed by architects Denton Corker Marshall, and there is something of a house style in the orthogonal and diagonal blades and columns on the Exhibition Centre and the City Link ‘icons’. The entry canopy to the Exhibition Centre is a diagonal blade which hails the city but does not frame nor shelter the path of entry (Figure 11.4). It evokes some powerful and problematic antecedents, including Italy under the Fascists who shared both a state slogan (Italy On the Move) and a taste for a ‘futurist’ inspired architecture which doubles as state propaganda (Etlin 1991). The Exhibition Centre is an exciting design but it is
also firmly in the service of political advertising. It operates metaphorically as a ‘salute’ to the new order. As a government brochure puts it, the blade ‘reflects the forward looking stance of a city that means business’. Like a plane taking off or rising profits, this is the dynamic rising image of a state ‘On the Move’. Interestingly, the Exhibition Centre blade was originally designed to slant in two directions, a ‘salute’ with a certain ‘slippage’. But this less stable image, perhaps more ‘Bolshevik’ than ‘Fascist’, was ‘straightened out’ by the client minister.

The City Link freeway has two major icons under construction. The first of these is an urban ‘gateway’ formed of a giant diagonal yellow column, projecting 60 metres over the freeway where it is opposed by a ‘wall’ of orange columns to form an urban ‘entrance’. The motorist will curve under and through these columns on entering the city (Figure 11.5). Unlike a vertical image, these diagonal forms will swiftly transform with every new angle, generating an illusion of movement as we swoop through. Such dynamic imagery will have a major effect on the city image in the tradition of the ‘city gate’. Yet in the context of a private tollway lined with new billboards, such ‘public’ art is hinged to political legitimation. Government brochures claim that ‘the sculpture has been designed to give a positive first message to visitors arriving from the airport about the cultural values and commercial strength of Victoria’. It is marketed as a modern ‘triumphal arch’—corporate troops returning from global battle will ‘swish’ through the ‘gateway’ in the spirit of the Nike logo—‘just do it!’ (don’t think about it!).

The other City Link icon is to be part of a highly visible bridge over the redeveloping docklands. It is formed of twin orthogonal towers 120 metres tall with a silver metallic finish, floodlit at night. This image (Figure 11.6) featured on the cover of the state’s annual report and has been widely used as a signifier of progress, even though still under construction. It is a much more stable image than the others and it will be visible from a far greater range of viewpoints including the freeway, docklands and most city buildings. While the purity and starkness of the shafts make this icon appear both empty and timeless, it is also full of the politics of its time. The poker-faced image and dominating scale reflect a climate of intimidation. And while it represents the strength of the state, it also betrays its role as a ‘bridge’ for a credibility gap.

These orthogonal shafts, both diagonal and vertical, have played on the public imagination, not least in cartoons. For Michael Leunig, the icon evokes the original meaning of the ‘icon’ and a prayer of despair (Figure 11.7). This cartoon hints at both the intimidating and seductive effects of such imagery, laced with the irony of an era wherein such images can indeed mobilize the beliefs of the population. Yet these icons resist literal interpretation because such resistance is integral to their forms and necessary to their effects. They combine a sense of order, purity, elegance, dynamism and stability. Yet for many they will have other meanings—signifying public funding of political advertising; the ‘triumph’ of private over public interest; an aesthetic cover for privatization and the erosion of democracy.

As part of a visual arts project in 1996, a series of City Link construction hoardings were painted with slogans such as ‘Why do you control?’ (Figure 11.8).
Figure 11.5
City Link entry icon: ‘triumph’ of a new order
Drawing by Jamie Brown, *The Age*

Figure 11.6
Melbourne Docklands: bridge icon and proposed tower
They struck a chord of popular sentiment, and a raw nerve—they were soon removed by order of the planning minister. There are always spaces for resistance, and the removal of the slogans revealed a certain vulnerability as it flagged how important the urban realm has become.

This is a new world of spatial practices and representations we are entering—at once seductive and coercive; exciting and autocratic. Authentic urban places are being displaced. Boundaries between the public state and private estate are
being fudged. Public ‘debate’ is conducted under conditions where the urban future is subject to secret commercial agreements. The global economy remains largely unregulated with government at the mercy of global investors who will extract the best concessions they can. And it is pointless to blame developers or designers for pursuing the oldest imperatives in maximizing profits or getting the job.

Melbourne is but one of many cities under threat from global mega-projects. Just as symbolic capital moves from one landmark building to another (as we saw in Chapter 8), so symbolic capital circulates around the globe from one mega-project to the next—the world’s tallest building, biggest casino, fastest cars or most exciting spectacle. And the symbolic capital invested in these projects can invert. At time of writing, the Asian currency crisis has stemmed the flow of high-rollers and the casino seems likely to go bankrupt unless the government assists with a bail-out. The belching fireballs along the river have slowed down as they become the logo of a ‘loser’. The Grand Prix attracts few people because the best view is on television (without earplugs) and it loses money every year because the city does not own the television rights. The Exhibition Centre is a fine public facility which is largely empty most of the time. Faith in the development of the nearby docklands is sustained by a massive advertising budget. Melbourne’s best avant-garde architects (Ashton Raggatt MacDougall) are occupied designing seductive images of a fictitious future while the real planning of the 200 hectare site proceeds under cover of commercial secrecy. The world’s tallest building remains a possibility.

What are the prospects for cities which want the investment without the damage? There is clearly no hope for places which simply turn inwards, hoping the damage will land somewhere else. The only possibility is for an informed local democracy wherein cities and citizens can learn to understand these dilemmas and debate their urban futures. The issue of secrecy is crucial—commercial secrecy agreements involving the design of major urban projects are not legitimate in a democracy. Good urban design does not mean swallowing the formularized stereotypes of global capital; rather it looks to the specifics of local places as sources of urban imagination. Long-term local and global interests lie in the development of genuine and authentic local amenities. The world class cities of the twenty-first century will be those which have not sacrificed their future in the fading years of the twentieth.
Chapter 12: Rust and irony

There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence...Haunted places are the only ones people can live in—and this inverts the schema of the panopticon.

de Certeau (1984:108)

Places are experienced in states of distraction. We read them and act within them while pursuing the agendas of everyday life. To ‘understand’ places one must ‘stand under’ them. This requires an attention to how we each construct places through action and in memory. This chapter, then, is a turn from theory towards the personal—how might theories of power and built form change the ways we understand and ‘excavate’ places in our own lives? It is a rather personal account of Rottnest Island, off the coast of Perth, Western Australia. And it is a turn towards questions of liberation, exploring the ironies of a place of incarceration becoming a place of emancipation and then exclusion. Rottnest is a place of semantic inversions, haunted by intangible and buried meanings. The tactics for excavating and articulating them are necessarily oblique.

ROTTNEST ISLAND

The Rottnest Island ferry left at 9 a.m. With bicycles lashed into a small mountain on the deck we set off down river and across to the island. Entering the open sea in a south-west breeze the ferry would roll nauseatingly. Clutching paint-encrusted rails with sheets of spray lashing my face, I tried with mixed success to vomit over the edge. ‘The best thing is to have a good breakfast,’ said the man collecting fares, as mine disappeared into the Indian Ocean.

My memories of Rottnest Island are laced with small ironies such as these. The seasickness was tempered by the powerful attraction of the island growing larger on the horizon. For me at least, Rottnest offered an intangible sense of freedom. And this is the larger irony since the place was originally developed as an Aboriginal prison.1

Rottnest was an uninhabited island marked by a proliferation of small marsupials when it was named (‘rat-nest’) by Dutch explorers in the seventeenth century. The prison colony was developed from 1838 when it was observed that Aboriginal prisoners in the British colony of Perth suffered from spatial
Localities

confinement more than whites. The island became the colony of a colony and offered the chance for some spatial latitude within its larger confines. Every Sunday the prisoners were set loose, unfed, and encouraged to hunt for their own food. The landscape, hitherto covered with cypress forest, was largely denuded at this time and has never recovered.

All of the early buildings at Thomson’s Bay were built of local limestone by the prisoners, mostly to the design of Superintendent Henry Vincent. Those that remain include a large collection of cottages lining the top of a grand sea-wall. After an early prison burnt down, the main prison was built in 1864—at the top of a small hill with a single entry facing down towards the bay (Figure 12.1). It forms an octagon of about 50 metres diameter comprising a continuous ring of cells and support rooms facing a courtyard, known as the Quod (slang for prison). There was formerly a well in the centre, now a small octagonal building.

Vincent’s design shows the influence of Bentham’s panopticon prison (Evans 1982). While the Quod lacks the transparent visibility and the central guard tower, it can be construed in Foucault’s (1979) terms as a panoptic technology for the disciplining of heterogeneous behaviour through surveillance. Vincent had previously been the gaoler at Fremantle prison on the mainland, where Bentham’s ideas of reform through surveillance had been influential. Figure 12.2 shows the prisoners lined up in three rows—sitting, bending and standing respectively—on display to a white audience with all the bodily discipline of a sporting team poster. They are flanked by guards, contained within the encircling structure of the prison, under the lamp of British civilization—and framed within the photograph for display. Treatment of the prisoners by Vincent was brutal and he was eventually removed from his position. Up to five prisoners slept in each 6 square metre cell, conditions that led to one influenza epidemic killing a third of all inmates. The victims were buried in unmarked graves to the north-west of the Quod.

Other buildings which date from the nineteenth century include a range of agricultural buildings and a governor’s summer house, an ostentatiously castellated affair on the beachfront. The island’s penal role continued and was expanded in 1881 to include a boys’ reformatory adjacent to the prison. The prison was closed in 1901 and, in the face of powerful pressure to privatize, the island was declared a public reserve in 1917. It was then developed as an inexpensive public holiday resort. The prison and adjacent reformatory became a hostel, the governor’s house became flats and then a hotel. Most of the old cottages were let to holiday makers. During the Second World War large sections of the island were appropriated for military purposes. Two 9-inch guns with a 30 kilometre range and a 360 degree arc were built on the hills with panoptic views of the sea lanes.

Over the years of my childhood and adolescence I stayed in a variety of places. The first was a former prison cell in the Quod. I recall the room as tiny and dark. The enclosed prison yard, where I first learned to ride a bike, was alive with children. Another time we stayed in cottage F, on top of the sea-wall where I struggled to haul suitcases up the broad set of steps from the ferry (Figure 12.3). Cottage F began its life as part of the superintendent’s house. I recall a
minuscule bedroom, a skewed and sloping passage and an almost circular semi-detached kitchen. I sensed none of the history, but the strange forms left a
delightful and indelible memory. The cottage was built of limestone and rendered with a lime and iron sulphate mix which lent a sense of unity to all of the old buildings through the distinctive ‘rust’ colour.

I also stayed in a two-roomed weatherboard bungalow, built between the wars. The large verandah was semi-enclosed with wooden lattice which we wove with newspaper and plastic to keep out the worst of the August weather. The bungalows were scattered throughout the settlement, painted in a motley range of faded pastels. They were but one step up from bathing sheds upon which they were modelled—tiny and cold with no bathroom. But these holidays would never have been possible without them. I later stayed in a newly built brick ‘cottage’ and, confronted with the familiar, I began to realize what a different kind of place Rottnest was. And the architecture was but one piece of it.2

Rottnest was a liberating place for parents because children would disappear safely for most of the day—adolescents for half the night as well. The movie hall was a large shed filled with deck chairs, canvas stretched almost to the floor, often under the extra stress of teenage passion. People outside threw pebbles onto the corrugated iron roof, pitched near the ridge so that they rolled noisily to the eaves. The film in the projection box caught fire once and it seemed like part of the show. Afterwards came a walk to the haunted house, inland from the settlement beyond the salt lakes. The journey was lit by the western lighthouse with an arc of light sweeping regularly across the lakes as we walked across the narrow causeway. Behind some trees on the bank of Herschel Lake was an abandoned wooden house, haunted indeed by teenagers hiding in the trees, roof and dark rooms.

In the centre of the island on Oliver’s Hill were the 9-inch guns from the Second World War—the guard without the prison, keeping the exogenous population out rather than the indigenous population in. Nearby we discovered a hole in the bricked-up entrance to an underground building. We crawled through and felt our way along a pitch dark broad tunnel which opened into a large
rectangular chamber with niches in the walls and the floor. An opening in one wall led to a narrower tunnel just wide enough for two people to pass if they turned sideways. It twisted and then climbed into the hill. The underground complex seemed dangerous but this forbidden, unknown and unclaimed world was far too interesting to ignore. We returned with a torch and followed the tunnel up some steps until it forked into a small complex of chambers and tunnels under one of the guns. In subsequent visits we became more daring—walking through from one end to the other without a light, not knowing what or who we would bump into. The haunted tunnel, like the haunted house, became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The guns were connected by railway to a small military base called Kingstown. The barracks lined a quadrangle on three sides with a tower in the centre. Officers occupied detached houses facing in a circle at a slightly higher elevation and higher still were the commanding officers. While the base remained under army control, abandoned military buildings were scattered nearby. One year some friends squatted in the attic of one of these buildings. We could hear planes taking off a few metres overhead as we played cards and drank cheap brandy. Nearby were gun turrets and concrete bunkers covered in rusty metal camouflage. I found a small piece of brass with no decipherable use, took it home and kept it polished for many years. It spoke of a military world which I held in disdain, but detached from its context the shining solid brass also came to represent the appropriation of abandoned form and space that Rottnest offered.

As I became old enough I camped on the open campgrounds north-west of the Quod. This was a broad swathe of tents and campfires, a noisy mix of alcohol and teenage passion—and complete oblivion to the ‘spirits hidden there in silence’.

To endorse all of these experiences would be both irresponsible and somewhat contradictory. They were dangerous at times and adult endorsement would drain them of meaning. But, they were some of the most exciting and significant experiences of my adolescence. Thirty years later I still find Rottnest indelibly stained with these memories. While some of the recent changes are lamentable, I am grateful for the continuity of form that has been preserved, and which enables this persistence of memory.

The movie hall has been painted with a seemingly endless supply of ‘rust’ coloured paint. The haunted house is a private dwelling. The army barracks has become an Environmental Education Centre, as an educational regime replaces a military one. The nearby collection of camouflaged bunkers is packaged as a ‘heritage trail’. Out on Oliver’s Hill a volunteer guide leads hourly tours of the cleaned and painted tunnel complex under the guns. The empty chamber, which I once explored in the pitch black, is now lined with photographs explaining how the live artillery shells were prepared and protected. The complex is safe, well lit and worth a visit.

Cottage F has been restored and the bungalows mostly survive. The newer architecture of Rottnest is unashamedly backward looking. But it follows the precedents of the past, in most part, without the pretensions of kitsch and fakery. Just as the forms of nineteenth-century Rottnest were borrowed with little thought
and some adaptation from elsewhere, the forms of late-twentieth-century Rottnest are borrowed with little thought and some adaptation from the earlier century. The more recent settlements are formed in rows of simple cottages directly onto a sea-wall, a model developed from prototypes at the old settlement.\(^3\) Many of the dwellings are without freshwater showers, a tactic that preserves fresh water (which is in short supply) and keeps the rental broadly affordable.

The former reformatory and prison, however, has moved upmarket, developed, extended and renamed ‘The Lodge’. This is a rather ersatz enclave for ‘house guests only’ with green lawns and a swimming pool. A clear social hierarchy has emerged on the island and it is signified spatially—from the campground at the bottom, through the bungalows, to the cottages and then the Lodge. The most upmarket units of all are moored out in the bays.

Despite the changes, social egalitarianism remains important to Rottnest as a place. When the prison closed, there was a proposal to sell off private lots on the island and it is clear where that would have led. There was a struggle to ensure that it became a public reserve and it has been a successful case of public development in the public interest. Furthermore, Rottnest offers lessons in public amenity planning, as a working example of what can be achieved without cars. There are no car parks, service stations, drunk drivers or dangerous streets; there is little traffic noise and no carbon monoxide pumped in children’s faces. A bicycle gives five-minute access to beaches, shops, recreation, medical aid, ferries and pub. Children of 7 years get the kind of spatial access they won’t otherwise get until 17. Rottnest shows how safe, quiet, healthy and efficient the bicycle is in the absence of cars.

The sense of relaxation and even liberation on the island is palpable and, I would contend, widely experienced. Rottnest resists, to some extent, the excesses of industrialization and capitalism. The absence of cars and private property is linked to the relaxation of the regimes and hierarchies of everyday life. While the food prices are often outrageous, the best things on Rottnest are still free—the beaches, the landscape, the architecture, the place. In a world where everyday life is increasingly packaged for consumption, a ‘lifeworld’ colonized by the ‘system’, this former ‘colony of a colony’ seems to have a certain resistance. The island satisfies a quest for places that are not simply products of the market. It has not (yet) become reduced to what Lefebvre (1991:361) calls ‘that “world of the image” which is the enemy of the imagination’. Rottnest Island is a place of bodily pleasure, where codes of dress and behaviour are relaxed. In my imagination at least, it is a place of liberation, the very antithesis of its beginnings as a prison.

These experiences are nourished also by the built setting, its layers of meaning and successive appropriations. There is a potential liberation, especially for the young, in the leftover places described earlier. Imagination thrives in the margins and cracks left abandoned or unfilled by the regimes of power, capital and image. This authentic appropriation of place contrasts with the passive contemplation of formal imagery and the consumption of preconceived meaning. These appropriations generate a landscape of hidden meanings, which, as de Certeau
argues, can insinuate themselves into the very structures of surveillance and discipline. The older penal and military developments on Rottnest are such transparent symbols of those regimes that they become ironically untied from those meanings, without losing them. Meaning becomes mutable through reappropriation. ‘Like words,’ argues de Certeau (1985:131), ‘places are articulated by a thousand usages.’

With all of this in mind, there are signs of deterioration on Rottnest Island. The most obvious is the proliferation of the distinctive rust colour, now a copy of the iron sulphate original, marketed by a local paint company as ‘Rottnest Orange’. Houses, temporary buildings and toilet blocks, whether steel, brick or timber, have turned to ‘rust’. As in a military camp, there is little choice being exercised under this new regime. The rust colour is an important part of the Rottnest heritage, but it superseded an earlier whitewash. Like authentic rust, it was the product of the vagaries of time, not purity of intention.

The formal language of much of the newer architecture also lacks the richness and variety of the originals. Indeed the architectural history of the island is more varied than the current ideology. This lifeworld was not produced from a precious attitude and it should continue to develop without one. If ‘authenticity’ can mean anything in an era which tends to reduce lifeworld to text, then it stems from the imagination and not the image. Authenticity is the very well-spring that brings meaning to form (Dovey 1985a). The threat to places such as Rottnest is that they will be tailored to meet certain expectations. And the island’s best defence is that despite its historic importance and amenity it will never be a particularly marketable product. People who visit on a day trip are often unimpressed. When a newspaper held a competition for ‘worst travel destinations’, Rottnest received a nomination. The ‘Rottnest Experience’ is not easily consumed; one cannot see it while trying to look at it. The ‘place’ must therefore be protected against such expectations.

One of the design lessons of Rottnest is the importance of the contingencies of built form in its development. What was once a hay-store and mill (now a small museum) has an odd bulge in the plan produced by the circular motion of the horse driven grain mill. The severe enclosure of the octagonal Quod bounded the Aboriginal prisoners within a secure colonial order. The monolithic curvilinear sea-wall, the round kitchen of cottage F and the iron sulphate render are all products of specific circumstances that have now passed. While the symbolic and practical functions may have gone, these colours and forms remain the hooks on which we hang our memories precisely because of this specificity which lends them their differences.

Some narrow steps penetrate the sea-wall where it curves up towards the shops, framing the lighthouse in the gap as you approach. The top is flanked by large rusty anchors, monuments to sunken ships which have been forgotten. Yet for me they anchor memories of balmy nights flirting with the possibilities of teenage life. Such are the contingencies of place; opportunities that form enables yet no designer determines. Places and landscapes are the warehouses of memory, their forms and colours are the mnemonic hooks upon which we hang experience. Places anchor occasions through the contingencies of built form.
Paradoxically Rottnest holds lessons in how little the specificities of form matter by the manner in which it has worn the changes in occupation and meaning over 150 years. The former hay-store and stables have long served well as shops. The governor’s house with its ostentatious turrets makes a wonderful hotel. The former colonial front garden is crowded with adults while children spill across the old stone fence onto the beach. The guns and tunnels produced under the imperatives of war are appropriated by the teenager and then delivered back to the public in the guided tour. Forms of the old order are appropriated by the new and the cracks are filled by the spontaneous appropriations of youth.

In this regard the prison Quod, the settlement’s *raison d’être*, seems not to have found its place. The former prison cells are now termed ‘settler’s rooms’ and they sell for over $100 per night (Figure 12.4). But the Quod as enclave is almost deserted, a manicured green lawn with alcohol dispensed from the site of the prison well. The main entrance gate is locked and unused. The boundary function has been reversed, from keeping Aboriginal prisoners in to keeping the Rottnest community out. There has been an erasure of Aboriginal history, indicated by the renaming of the prisoners as ‘settlers’. Plans to construct a
swimming pool in the Quod have run into opposition from Perth’s Aboriginal community, who are keen to reclaim the honour of those who built this settlement, which they term a ‘slave camp’. Their persistent efforts have led to a ground probing radar survey which has revealed a burial ground covering about 2 hectares to the north-west of the Quod. The campgrounds, ten buildings and major streets were developed directly on top.

While this was never Aboriginal land, the importance of buried remains in Aboriginal culture has rendered it so. The area has now been fenced off from human use with streets severed; an eerie void has been inserted between the settlement and its golf course. The disruption to the landscape has a certain shock value—a deconstruction without the style. No doubt formal design will follow, along with another round of the debate between memory and forgetting.

The former prison Quod, its front gate sealed, now faces mutely down the hill (Figure 12.5). This was an architecture produced under conditions of racial tyranny which stands in stark contrast to the hedonistic present. Laced as it is with contradictions, this ‘self-built prison’ is a fine form upon which to anchor the memory of the Aboriginal contribution to the island. It is ripe for Aboriginal reappropriation. This would be a final irony, since Rottnest is one of the very few parts of Australia that was uninhabited before the British invasion.

Ironic, like rust, is one of time’s retorts to the certainties of meaning.
Afterword
Chapter 13: Liberty and complicity

Liberty is a practice...it can never be inherent in the structure of things to guarantee the exercise of freedom. The guarantee of freedom is freedom.

Foucault (1997:371)

There are many threads to the place/power nexus that I have explored here: the controlled syntax of the lineal enfilade; the disorientations of the ringy mall; the intimidations of the corporate tower; the enclosures of hidden power and purified community; seductive significations of nature, harmony, stability, authenticity, progress and freedom. I have no intention of weaving a grand theory out of these threads, nor do I claim to have done little more than touch the surface of such practices. Rather I want to conclude with some questions about the prospects for designers who wish to engage in making places which embody something of the quest for equity, justice and liberty.

Two generalizations in relation to the nexus of place and power seem plausible. The first is that there is no zone of autonomy or neutrality in which to practice architecture and urban design. Such practice exists only in alliance with those who control land and resources. The imperative to build and the forms of that construction cannot be unhinged from the quest for power. The second is that the built environment does not inherently oppress or liberate; rather, people use built form in the attempt to do so. There are no styles or forms of liberty or oppression. Any built form can serve interests for which it was not intended. Claims of liberation from practices of power through design are often revealed as either new practices of power or more of the same in the guise of the different.

Oppression and liberation are forms of social practice which are mediated by built form. These practices ‘take place’: they frame and are framed by certain spatial structures and provinces of meaning. The nature of architecture and urban design, their silent framings of everyday life, lend themselves to practices of coercion, seduction, domination and the legitimation of authority. There is no way around this nexus. Rather designers must enter into and understand some necessary complicities and complexities. The mediations of power in built form have both positive and negative manifestations.

Power is a two-sided coin. Buildings necessarily both constrain and enable certain kinds of life and experience; they are inherently coercive in that they
enforce limits to action. This coercion is a large part of what enables agency in everyday life to ‘take place’. The control over access to the tutorial room or the bedroom enables freedom of debate or of sexual behaviour, which an open syntax would constrain. Designers who believe that they are engaged in an architecture of liberation by refusing to segment space are simply engaged in a different form of coercion—an ‘enforced’ subjection to uncontrolled encounter and a disciplinary gaze. Both open and closed spaces each enable and constrain human action. Enabling and constraining are poles of a dialectic of coercion in architecture. Architects ‘manipulate’ spatial behaviour—the issue is not whether but how they do so.

Inasmuch as all design of built form attempts to satisfy human desire, all successful architecture and urban design is seductive. Like all forms of art and advertising, architecture and urban design engages in imaginative play with our dreams (identity, sexuality, domination, immortality) and our fears (violence, death, difference). Dominating scale in architectural and urban form can both inspire and intimidate. The joys and delights, fears and horrors of the various experiences of place and dwelling cannot be unravelled from the seductions of place. Designers inevitably engage with human desire and fear—the issue is not whether but how they do so.

All built form has inertia, it ‘fixes’ a great deal of economic capital into a certain form in a certain place, stabilizing spatial ‘order’ and ‘identity’. And it inevitably carries ‘authority’ as symbolic capital; as Hollier (1989:ix) puts it: ‘Architecture is society’s superego’. The complicities of built form with practices of power are inevitable. They are to be understood, recognized, theorized, critiqued and debated. But the attempt to avoid such complicity is often fraught with new forms of deception. As a means of opening up such issues I shall briefly discuss four well-known contemporary architectural projects. They are chosen because they are each infused with a certain liberating intent, fine architectural talent, and certain complicities with practices of power.

**AUTHORIZING MADNESS**

Parc de la Villette in Paris is the most famous and celebrated of deconstructionist projects—a 35 hectare complex of museum, park and cultural facilities primarily designed by Bernard Tschumi on the site of a former slaughterworks. Tschumi’s design is an abstract layering of points, surfaces and lines which includes a series of bright red folies occupying the node points of an invisible grid. They are inspired by the deconstructive desire to unpack the ways that meaning is constructed; to oppose fixity of meaning; to expose underlying ideology. They are also inspired by the liberating spirit of Bolshevik ‘constructivism’ for which the redness is a clear reference. The folies have no predetermined function, they seek to undo architecture’s supposed grounding in function and shelter. They are called folies to evoke the ‘madness’ of an architecture which defies reason, the frivolity of the traditional gazebo in the park and the idea that their meaning remains ‘in play’ (Figure 13.1).
In terms of Tschumi’s intent this is an architecture which has severed its contaminating relations with function and authority—the language of architecture is used against itself, an assault on the idea of stable meaning (Tschumi 1987, 1988). Through the evasion of function the folies are designed to call into question an architecture which ‘serves’ authority in any simple manner. Yet severing
relations with authority is more difficult than it seems since the project relies strongly on its representation and theorization in architectural magazines, including the philosophical authority of Derrida, who argues: ‘These folies destabilize meaning, the meaning of meaning...They revive, perhaps, an energy that was infinitely anaesthetised’ (quoted in Jencks 1988:24).

I would suggest that it is not in the simulated world of the journals but in the lived world of Paris that the work must ultimately be judged. If we explore Parc de la Villette as a lived place, we find the folies are intriguing, engaging and often quite beautiful. They are all scaled for human use with sheltered space and many can be mounted as lookout towers. Like fragmented echoes of the Eiffel Tower they are progressive urban objects which continue the highly innovative and refined aesthetic standards of French public design. But what of their deconstructive effects—the ideological shock value? Framed and encountered as a series of sculptures in a verdant context they clearly do not disturb those who explore, climb and gaze across the landscape. Complacent expectations for park design are wonderfully displaced but the subject is scarcely ‘shocked’ out of old mythologies.

Despite the denial of program, the folies also service a conservative agenda, beyond the control of the architect, about which they are silent. Hollier (1989:xiv) suggests that the park is a site of cultural consumption with the function ‘to appropriate and discipline proletarian expenditure’ and Markus (1988) calls attention to certain hidden agendas which have not been deconstructed:

The text which needs deconstructing is not the metaphorical one of the buildings, but the real one which designs the building as soon as it is written, without the presence of designer...Who is to define the function of the red cubes; whose resources for conversions or re-use will be available? How will decisions be made—by whom, for whom, in the real political world of Paris?

(Markus 1988:16)

The erasure of function and the celebration of madness and difference create an illusion of design freedom which in turn obscures a covert program. Parc de la Villette is one of the ‘grand projects’ of the French state, programmed to demonstrate and promote French cultural, intellectual and aesthetic authority. How better than an aesthetic showcase that one needs to read French philosophy to understand?

The folies, however engaging as architectural forms, are not without ideological function and fixed meaning. They signify the aesthetic and intellectual supremacy, and therefore the legitimacy, of the French state. This does not diminish the formal design but I would suggest that any design which can so successfully capture the imagery of an architecture of emancipation, also and at the same time may be appropriated to other ends. The liberating ‘energy’ referred to by Derrida is precisely the ‘symbolic capital’ which Bourdieu argues the avant-garde have traditionally supplied in service of aesthetic authority.
DECONSTRUCTING LAW

The Loyola Law School campus in Los Angeles is the site of a series of projects by architect Frank Gehry since the early 1980s. Gehry has long been a master of semantic inversion—the use of devalued and ‘cheap’ forms and materials redeemed through a sophisticated collagist architecture in a manner reminiscent of Duchamp’s ‘found objects’ redeemed as art. On the Loyola campus Gehry has engaged in a play of the relationship of architecture with law. Building types traditionally used in the legitimation of lawful authority such as temple, column and chapel become fragments of a collage—columns without pediments raising questions about support, authority and the rule of law (Figure 13.2). As Ross King puts it: ‘All the set pieces of classicism appropriate to a law school are there, except that they all imply discontinuity, difference’ (R.King 1996:165). The architecture is designed to throw into doubt the legitimizing symbols of law and order for an audience of students preparing for practice in one of the most class-divided cities in the world.

The location of the Loyola School on the fringe of downtown in a Central American barrio has led to it being constructed somewhat like a fortress. The campus covers a whole block with all buildings facing inwards and only one guarded entrance to the street, primarily for cars. The basic urban plan form (the spatial syntax) is that of the enclave. All of the playful imagery is focused on a framing of the central open space of the small campus. By contrast the street elevations are hard-edged and streetsmart as the project fences out the crime.

In his well-known book on Los Angeles, Davis (1991) points out a range of complicities of ‘fortress building’ in Gehry’s Los Angeles work. Under the title of ‘Frank Gehry as Dirty Harry’, Davis characterizes Gehry as producing a form of ‘make my day’ architecture which highlights the use of playful displays of force to
create beachheads of privilege in decaying landscapes, a ‘recycling of the elements of a decayed and polarized urban landscape... into light and airy expressions of a happy lifestyle... combining delightful geometries with complex security systems’ (Davis 1991:81). He calls the Law School ‘neo-conservative’ for its refusal to engage with the local Central American community in anything more than a provocative and exclusionary manner (Davis 1991:239).

Davis’s critique of Gehry is a refreshing balance to the cheerleading which often passes for architectural criticism in the journals but it is a partial view. Blaming architects for such complicity sets them up to take the blame for a system where it suits quite a range of interests to locate the problem in the design. One effect is to drive the best designers into ‘gallery architecture’ or ‘boutique’ practices (where many already hide), leaving the built environment to more regressive alternatives. Davis is derisive of the lack of engagement with the public realm, yet Habermas (1989) defines the ‘public realm’ in terms of the possibilities for communicative action. He has pointed out the historical importance and emancipatory potential of the bourgeois public realm—places which don’t fit the open traditions of the agora yet which approach the ideal speech situation of democratic communicative action (Calhoun 1992). While the Loyola campus is a privileged enclave restricted to students and staff, it is also a retreat from a public lifeworld which is brutalised by crime and saturated by the penetrations of the market. Recall that Arendt defines power as the capacity for agreement in a public realm ‘where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities’ (Arendt 1958:200).

The central open space of the campus is a rather pleasant place to study, chat and debate. Its collagist play of imagery and fortress-like enclosure have some parallels with the shopping mall and housing enclave. But it is the very engagement with the tensions of urban life that gives Gehry’s early work much of its interest. He has now graduated beyond the social problems of the barrios to become the sculptor of museums and concert halls—safe from the overt complicities of Loyola and from critics like Davis. This is a common story for successful architects, reflecting the desire to define architecture as a pure artform operating within an austere and abstract zone of autonomy. Would the Loyola School be better architecture, or a better law school, if it were in a middle-class context representing a spurious harmony between law and community? I think not, and its complicities with power would simply be more hidden.

INCISING MEMORIES

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, designed by Maya Lin, was the result of a public competition in 1982. The site is in the Washington mall among a constellation of monuments to founding fathers of the US state. The Washington obelisk, the Lincoln temple and the Jefferson pantheon evoke a
Chapter 13: Liberty and complicity

familiar narrative myth of empire from Egypt, through Greece and Rome to the White House (Vale 1992:57–67). The new memorial is slightly off-axis between the Washington and Lincoln monuments. The program called for a memorial that was reflective and contemplative, that harmonized with its site and the surrounding monuments. It had to include the names of the 58,000 dead and make no political statement about the war.

Minimalist in style, but rich in meaning, the design is a simple V-shaped incision in the grass landscape with the concave interior of the V cutting down to about 3 metres deep at the point (Figure 13.3). The earth walls formed by this incision are lined with polished black granite inscribed with the names of the dead. The place is structured as a single pathway along the wall into the enclosure, turning at the bottom, and then out. The black granite enclosing walls are aligned with the nearby Washington and Lincoln memorials. These at once celebrate the alignment with traditions of power and democracy, yet also beg questions about the relationships between the war, founding values and the history of empire. The V-shaped path can be read as a diversion from the main axis.

No narrative of the war is offered with the exception that the names are inscribed in the order in which they died, without reference to rank, company or place. The lack of an alphabetical order requires a search for names among those who died in the same year. The stone is highly polished and the surface of inscribed names becomes a screen through which we see images of ourselves and others. The inscriptions are designed for pencil rubbings, fragments of memory which disperse across the nation. The memorial is not visible from a distance and it begins and ends imperceptibly, reflecting a war that was never declared, against a barely identifiable enemy. The semi-underground space is highly charged with emotion. The grief of veterans in battle fatigues who have largely appropriated the place mingles with that of tourists. The search for particular names echoes the larger search for meaning which the memorial engages in the general public.

While the memorial engages in a play of significations, it does so in a manner which integrates place with text. The inscribed walls frame the semi-underground space within a grove of trees. It is a landmark which establishes its place in the cognitive map of Washington—the icon of the nation. Yet it marks the land by subtraction rather than addition. It has an unsettling quality due mostly to its silences and absences—it establishes the memorial as a question rather than an answer. It also has a strongly figurative quality in its inverted tetrahedral form, yet this ‘figure’ is void rather than mass, absence rather than presence. It is a tomb-like form with some traces of Egyptian and Greek antecedents, yet it captures the ‘mnemonic’ quality without the ‘monumental’ scale. It engages the vertical/ horizontal dimension by excavating, not by ‘grounding’ our aspirations so much as by signifying a ‘loss of ground’.

These ‘readings’ of the memorial could indicate that its success stems from the multiplicity of significations, yet the potency of the design is experiential rather than intellectual. Indeed some of the meanings that can be gleaned are a bit glib—the V for Vietnam; an inversion of the V for ‘Victory’. As text it is relatively accessible and
‘readerly’, yet I would suggest that it has a deconstructive dimension in that it incisively addresses issues of ideology and keeps meaning in play. It has unsettled many veterans who lobbied with some success for more literal affirmations of the war. A figurative sculpture was added nearby, followed by a large flagpole with the base inscribed ‘they died for our freedom’—a single answer to displace so many questions.

The memorial takes its place in the packaged tour of American identity, framed by the larger constellation of monuments through which the nation-state affirms and legitimates its domination. The memorial has little capacity to disturb this larger order, yet it affirms the idea that one can design public and political monuments that touch a broad public consciousness without affirming authorized narratives or legitimizing authority.

**CONSTRUCTING LAW**

The Uluru/Kata Tjuta Aboriginal Cultural Centre was completed near Uluru (formerly Ayers Rock) in central Australia in 1996. It is a place of cultural exchange with the goal to enable tourists to understand the meanings of an extraordinary landscape from the viewpoint of its traditional owners. The design process was highly collaborative between the local Anangu Aboriginal community and the non-Aboriginal architect (Gregory Burgess). It incorporated the commissioning of paintings of the rock and its major ‘Dreaming’ story as a source of design. Many aspects of Anangu law or Tjukurpa are embodied in this story of a struggle between two snakes (Tawa 1996). The plan of the Centre is formed of two metaphoric ‘snakes’ framing a central open space—the likeness is a metaphoric weaving of serpentine pathways, walls and rooflines rather than literal representation (Figure 13.4). The building appears in the desert landscape as a series of undulating roofs dwarfed by the overwhelming presence of the rock. The tourist pathway through the centre begins with a tightly controlled and darkened sequence of spaces which tell stories of Anangu law. Beyond this display, pathways branch to include shops, restaurant, environmental displays, craft work and performance spaces. The view from the open space frames the enormous rock between the buildings but photographs are forbidden. The Anangu community use the centre and do not wish to be photographed.

From both tourist and professional architectural points of view this is a highly successful design which has won prizes and been broadly published in the international architectural press (Tawa 1996; Uluru/Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre 1997; Underwood 1996). But how successful is it for traditional owners? Based on discussions with Anangu elders and others, I suggest two different responses.² First, there is an appreciation of the form of the building and the manner in which the Tjukurpa stories (law) have been represented, coupled with pride in their role in this process. Stories previously ‘held’ in the rock are now also ‘held’ in the architecture. Yet the second response from the Anangu is to deflect questions away from the form of the building, refusing to adopt the privileged
aesthetic gaze from which the building is judged. The community design process generated expectations of a space of genuine cultural exchange and economic development—and it has largely failed to deliver. Instead there is a perception that Anangu culture has been packaged for the tourist market—Aboriginality is consumed rather than understood. There is resentment that despite the formal success of the project, in social terms it has not produced equality of recognition.

Funding for the building was based on the tourist market and the major source of visitors is package tours which funnel their subjects through the centre on half-hour cycles geared to global schedules. Such schedules always allow the necessary two hours to climb the rock, yet a major part of Tjukurpa law is that the rock is sacred and should not be climbed. Indeed the success of the cultural centre is measured by many in the declining number of climbers—in enabling visitors to see the landscape from perspectives other than that of the dominating gaze.
The building services a global market wherein its meanings are not under the control of either traditional owners or architects. In this context the building invites a postcolonial critique which would suggest that the voice of the native ‘other’ is framed and heard only within the dominant forms of discourse. In this sense the serpentine zoomorphic forms of the building identify Aboriginality with the irregular and organic in contrast with the regularity and abstraction of modern architecture. To what extent does this reinforce a reassuring stereotype—the Aboriginal as part of ‘nature’, as ‘other’ to the modern global subject? And how do we reconcile such a critique with the fact that zoomorphic forms are a broadly recurrent feature of Aboriginal agency in architecture. At a time when race relations in Australia are subject to deep division and heated debate, can the building be read as a gesture of reconciliation, representing a spurious harmony?

The Uluru building attempts the opposite of the Loyola Law School—instead of deconstructing the legitimizing images of western law, it constructs legitimizing images of Anangu law. While the design does the opposite of deconstruction (it orients, it establishes presence) it also aims to displace stereotyped ways of seeing. Visitors cannot approach the rock without the prejudices framed by the tourist industry: they come to see the ‘real’ thing, to photograph and to climb it. The centre attempts to supplant such preconceptions and throw stereotypes into doubt.

This is a highly complex project which meets its various meaning markets: the commercial market as a signature building for cultural tourism; the political market as a signifier of reconciliation; the architectural market as an aesthetic object. Yet it also creates a space for another way of seeing. And for the Anangu? While the project has not delivered on its illusions of reconciliation, recognition and equality, this may be a liberating lesson.

LIBERTY AND COMPLICITY

Each of these projects embodies aspects of both emancipation and complicity in the mediation of power. In each design the formal language and the creativity of the architect is fundamentally important to the constructions of meaning. Yet my purpose here is not to pass judgement on the architects. A major problem with the architectural profession lies in its focus on a fragile hierarchy of professional reputations, and within this frame the role of academic critique becomes easily reduced to that of cheerleading or booing. While these projects are scarcely bereft of the heroic quest (a struggle for power which I have not addressed in this book), architecture is too important to be sidetracked by professional jealousies.

Return again to the question of what are the prospects for a liberating architectural practice? The most plausible answer is that the answer must remain forever in play. And again, my two conclusions: there are no forms or styles of liberty; and no zone of neutrality in which to practice. As Foucault suggests, there are no guarantees because liberty is something one ‘practices’. But he adds in a rather uncharacteristic comment that architecture ‘can and does produce
positive effects when the liberating intentions of the architect coincide with the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom’ (Foucault 1997:371–372). This talk of ‘positive effects’, ‘real practice’ and a coincidence of interest suggests a certain congruence between the deconstructive imperative to undercut prevailing ideologies and some kind of ‘community architecture’. This phrase would probably be anathema to him and Foucault never spelt out what this might mean, but it is surely more than a play of formal imagery and more than current stereotypes of ‘community architecture’.

Community architecture is to some degree a tautology—all architecture takes place within a community of interest. All architectural practice is a form of what Habermas (1984) calls ‘communicative action’—a consensus seeking task which presumes a certain transparency of representation and meaning and participative decision-making. Yet how is this to be reconciled with the necessary creativity of architectural form-making? The participatory process must go beyond any ‘community architecture’ stereotype which suggests the simple handing over of power to client or community groups. Such practices are rarely free from manipulation, no matter how well intentioned. And the built forms which result can become banal emblems of democracy, indeed a cover for its declining practice. The idea of communicative action with a focus on the ‘public interest’ does not imply that a community of subjects holds a consensual view nor that they understand their own interests. It does suggest that they share a ‘common interest’ in the future of a place and certain rights to debate that future. The public interest does not exist pre-formed but is constructed in the design process.

The idea of the ‘public interest’ affronts many architects with its implications of populism and comfortable consensus. Yet while communicative action may generate consensus, it may also expose sectional interests and contradictions. Differences of identity, ethnicity, age, class and gender can be frightening, but they are precisely the stuff of deconstruction—the exposure of sub-texts and contradictions so often hidden under false consensus (R.King 1996:169). Deconstruction and communicative action are united by the imperative to enter into the difficulty of things, resisting the desire to remain above the fray.

The deconstructive task must lead to more than a play of formal imagery. It cannot be achieved by a retreat from function nor by a retreat into private dialect. The design of built form must proceed in the knowledge that any 'shock value' will be cashed in the ‘meaning markets’ of property, politics and profession. Innovation will be absorbed, as Frampton (1991:26) puts it, into ‘a succession of stylistic tropes that leave no image unconsumed’. And in a decentred, disoriented and fragmented world the shock value may come from a reintegration and reorientation (Mann 1991). There is also a larger deconstructive task which is to unpack and reconstruct the lifeworld and its spatial programs. Such a programmatic deconstruction would entail a systematic engagement with the ways in which the lifeworld has been sliced, its functions categorized, coded, juxtaposed and omitted (Markus 1993:317–318). Issues of program cannot be segregated from design, as Pecora argues:
If architecture as a discipline ever hopes to cut through the various ideologies that continue to maintain its symbolic capital, its aura, it will have to take seriously the fact that architecture is embedded in the habitual utility of social relations, that it is precisely those social relations that finally give meaning to all built form.

(Pecora 1991:74–75)

The key role of designers is to join imagination to the public interest; it is to catch the public imagination with visions for a better future. There is an ancient model for such a role which Plato called the ‘demiurge’—the creative spirit who shapes the visible world out of chaos. The ‘demiurge’ is an artisan who encounters a world which resists rational ordering; a bricoleur who engages with chance, disorder and contingency. As the etymology suggests (demos: people; ergos: worker) the ‘demiurge’ works for the people—creative imagination is deployed in the public interest. The ‘demiurge’ is a useful model for designers of buildings and cities, yet it must be divorced from Plato’s ideal ‘forms’ and authoritarian politics. Communicative action relies instead upon the Socratic ideal of public debate. As Saul (1997) suggests, the basic principle of democracy is that the legitimation of authority lies in the effective participation of citizens in public affairs. Such a principle predates capitalism, modernity and the industrial revolution; and it will outlive postmodernity and post-industrialism. If architecture and urban design always represents and stabilizes authority, then the task of the architect or designer is to engage with the processes of authorization and legitimation.

I began this book with the suggestion that the task for designers, albeit in a small way, is to ‘change the world’. The understanding of how power is mediated in built form is necessary, but ultimately not sufficient, to this task. All current practice must engage with a major antinomy of our era—the theoretical and methodological tension between deconstruction and communicative action. How can we remain open to the lessons of deconstruction and yet redeem notions of truth, justice and democracy? As Bernstein (1993) argues, we must hang onto these antinomous elements—we must refuse to refuse either. Design practices, along with education and research, maybe kept in play by this tension. One cannot predict the forms that will result, nor their meanings. Differences must be permitted to speak for themselves (Schatzki 1993), there can be no rules for liberating practices. The task is not to reduce design to ideology—there will remain a certain mystery in the ways the best designs play on our imagination. Designers have a leading role at a certain moment in the life of a place—fixing some forms within which life will be lived, upon which memories will be hung and meanings constructed. This must be done with imagination, rigour, courage and integrity. The task is to keep alive the liberating spirit of design without the illusion of autonomy. In the end, the complicities of built form with power rest on a tautology: places are programmed, designed and built by those with the power to do so. To practice in the light of this complicity is the primary liberating move.
Notes

Chapter 1: POWER

1 There is a considerable literature in this regard and contention over definitions. In addition to specific citations, what follows garners various insights from Airaksinen (1992); Ball (1992); Barnes (1988); Cox, Furlong and Page (1985); Kertzer (1988); Lukes (1974, 1986); Ng (1980); Olsen and Marger (1993); Rosenbaum (1986); Wartenberg (1992); Weinstein (1992); Wrong (1979).

Chapter 2: PROGRAM

2 Bourdieu was the French translator for Panofsky’s ‘Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism’ (Panofsky 1967) which interprets architecture as a form of knowledge. His early structuralist account of the Berber house (Bourdieu 1973) was the base for the theory of habitus. See also Bourdieu (1977, 1990b, 1993); Jenkins (1992); Robbins (1991).
3 Key sources include Foucault (1979, 1980, 1988, 1997). See also Dandeker (1990); Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982); Fraser (1989); Miller (1993).
4 What follows is primarily based on Hillier and Hanson (1984). See also Hillier et al. (1986, 1987); Hillier (1988); Hillier et al. (1993); Hillier (1996a).
5 This tripartite division is borrowed from Robinson (1994) as adapted from Hillier and Hanson (1984).
6 I am indebted to Tom Markus for an ongoing debate on these issues. However, I note his strong disagreement with this interpretation of the limits of spatial syntax.
7 I am thinking here of the early promise in work such as Altman (1975); Altman and Chemers (1980); Barker (1968); Hall (1966); Lynch (1969, 1981); Rapoport (1982).

Chapter 3: TEXT

Chapter 4: PLACE

2 I am indebted to Tony King and Tom Markus as series editors for a robust challenge to the ideas outlined in these preceding pages. I note both their tolerance and their continuing disagreement.
3 There is a great deal of confusion over the concept of ‘type’ in architectural and urban discourse (Franck and Schneekloth 1994). This includes the differences between Platonc ideal types and Jungian archetypes as sources of architectural theory. There is also confusion over distinctions between formal types (such as tower or courtyard) and functional types (such as office or kitchen).
5 There is some confusion on these categories, see Soja (1991); Zukin (1995:293); Lefebvre’s labels are ‘spatial practice’, ‘representations of space’ and ‘representational spaces’, a nomenclature I find confusing and will therefore avoid.
6 These terms are translated in various confusing ways such as ‘at handness’ versus ‘on handness’; I shall retain the originals for clarity. See also Dovey (1985a:36–38)
7 Sorkin’s (1993) renamings of place types (‘Habs’, ‘Nabes’) and their insertion into an urban design code involves a similar tactic which forges new juxtapositions.
8 Sources here include Benhabib (1992); Calhoun (1992); Forester (1985); Fraser (1989); Habermas (1971, 1983, 1984, 1989); Held (1980); Mayo (1985).

Chapter 5: TAKE YOUR BREATH AWAY

1 The communists were acquitted and a Dutchman (van der Lubbe) was executed for it. Goering, who had underground access to the building, reportedly later bragged that he had a hand in the fire (Shiner 1960:193).
2 Sources on Hitler’s attitudes to architecture include Helmer (1985); Krier (1985a), Lane (1968); Masen (1973); Speer (1970); Taylor (1974).
3 While Heidegger’s well-documented Nazism has been used by critics to undermine his ontology, it problematizes rather than refutes his ontology of dwelling. See Dovey (1993). Mugerauer (1997) also makes the point that constructions of Heideggerian dwelling as ‘fixed’ and as excluding ‘wandering’ are misreadings of his work.
4 Hitler had annexed Austria and part of Czechoslovakia, and his plans for Poland and the remainder of Czechoslovakia were in train as the Chancellery was completed.
5 The best sources on these plans are Helmer (1985a) and Krier (1985a). There were many versions of the plan; comments here are on the most developed plans of 1938–40.
6 Much of his time after 1941 was spent at the eastern front headquarters at Rastenburg, where his quarters were initially camouflaged as the local vernacular before he moved into a giant bunker (O’Donnell 1979; Speer 1970:217).
7 This will be the topic of a forthcoming volume by Paul Jaskot, to be published by Routledge in the Architext series.
Chapter 6: HIDDEN POWER

1 My account here owes a strong debt to the work of Zhu (1994). Other sources include Meyer (1991); Weng (1982); Yu (1984).
2 The term ‘eunuch’ derives originally from the Latin eunuchus, ‘keeper of the bed’; the meaning of the castrated male comes later. Their power base and name parallels that of the ‘chamberlains’ of the European tradition.
3 Zhongnanhai was occupied by the Yuan Shikai government in 1915, Cao Kun in 1923, and Zhang Zuolin in 1927 (Zhou 1984).
4 All references to the spaces of Mao’s private life are from Li (1994).
5 This account of the development and meanings of Tiananmen Square owes a good deal to Wu (1991).
6 Mao’s doctor describes both his pessimism about the effectiveness of the embalming and the construction of a provisional wax replica (Li 1994).
7 A great deal has been published about the sequence of events from April to June 1989, much of it is sloppy reporting and some of it remains in contention. This account draws especially from Brook (1992) and also from Chung (1989); Salisbury (1989); Spence (1990); Wark (1993); Wu (1991).
8 It appears that the substantial underground tunnel system from the Great Hall to the military headquarters in the western hills was not used, perhaps because this would have compromised security for Party leaders (Brook 1992).
9 Brook (1992:151—169) has convincing arguments for this ‘guestimate’, which is shared by the Red Cross.

Chapter 7: TRACES OF DEMOCRACY

1 There has also been debate over who designed it, with strong evidence that Pugin had a key role (Port 1976).
2 The term ‘liminal’ is adapted from its use by Turner (1969: ch. 3) in anthropology to describe transitional zones of social identity.
3 The ‘dismissal’ was regarded by many as a technical coup d’état and charges of CIA involvement persist, but that is another story.
4 For a more detailed discussion of Burley Griffin’s plan and its symbolic dimensions see Reps (1997); Short (1991); Vale (1992); Weirrick (1989).
5 The influence of the archetypal ideas of Giurgola’s teacher and colleague Louis Kahn are most apparent here, see Lobell (1979).

Chapter 8: TALL STOREYS

1 The analysis involved a total sample of seventy-two brochures and advertisements marketing a total of twenty-three towers ranging from eight to fifty-six levels and from about 3,000 to 82,000 square metres of lettable space. Most were speculative developments with naming rights available. The forms of advertising ranged from a glossy hardback book to once-off newspaper advertisements.
2 See for instance Jhally (1977); Wernick (1983); Williamson (1978).
3 The sample was eleven plans with 687 work-stations.
4 It was given to the University of Melbourne where it is now a protected historic facade, fronting the geography department.
5 Developed by Alan Bond and the Bond Corporation, later renamed the Chifley Tower.
6 Architectural magazines, in contrast to the monographs, are largely funded by the advertising of building materials.

Chapter 9: INVERTED CITY
1 This work remained in note form at the time of his death in 1940 and I rely here on the interpretations of Buck-Morss (1989). See also Benjamin (1992); Gregory (1994); R. King (1996).
2 Gruen’s first mall was Southdale in Minnesota in 1956. An earlier project with an open street of shops with a car park was designed by Graham and built in Seattle in 1950 (Rybczynski 1993) but it lacked Gruen’s structural innovations. For the early history of mall design see Crawford (1992); Kowinski (1985).
3 The US Supreme Court determined in 1968 that since the mall claimed the meaning of public space, it was subject to constitutional rights of free speech (Kowinski 1985). This decision was reversed in 1972 on the grounds that adequate other channels for communication exist. This issue has now become a state issue within the USA but remains essentially unresolved. See also Hecht (1993).

Chapter 10: DOMESTIC DREAMING
1 There is a substantial literature on the meanings of home which I will not explore here. See Altman and Werner (1985); Buttmer (1980); Cooper Marcus (1995); Despres (1991); Fried (1972); Lawrence (1987, 1991); Seamon (1979).
2 Examples are drawn from the Sacramento, Bay Area and Los Angeles areas in California, and from Melbourne and Perth in Australia. Much of the Californian fieldwork was done with Clare Cooper Marcus, whose various insights I much appreciate. See also Cooper Marcus et al. (1987).
3 Quoted in Smith (1987).
4 Sources on gated enclaves include Blakely and Snyder (1997); Davis (1991); Flusty (1997); Guterson (1992); Judd (1995); McKenzie (1994).

Chapter 11: ON THE MOVE
1 The meanings of the ‘crown’ here are mixed—Australia has never formally severed ties with the British monarchy and the state is still referred to as the ‘crown’. These ties are purely symbolic but there is a strong republican movement which will probably see them severed within a few years. Of course the meanings of the casino logo go far beyond this, marketed into Asia where there are a range of connections to state power.
2 Most of the signs were removed after newspaper coverage of the issue in 1996.
3 The term ‘icon’ is traditionally limited to a signifier with a mimetic relation to its signified. However, the term ‘icon’ is now used in a much broader manner—the Statue of Liberty, Big Ben and the Opera House are national ‘icons’ without any resemblance to the nation. Thus the meaning of ‘icon’ has subsumed a part-for-whole signification (‘synecdoche’) and I will adopt this broader usage.
Chapter 12: RUST AND IRONY

1 Historical material is from Ferguson (1986); Government of Western Australia (1995a, 1995b, 1995c); Seddon (1972, 1983).
2 For a good critique of these and all pre-1970 developments see Seddon (1983).
3 The architect is Ferguson, also one of the island’s key historians (Ferguson 1986).
4 Government of Western Australia (1995b). I am grateful to Andrew Saniga for information and insights about the Aboriginal burial ground.

Chapter 13: LIBERTY AND COMPLICITY

1 The park was commissioned at a similar time as the nuclear tests and Greenpeace bombing/murder in the South Pacific.
2 This account is based on a brief evaluation of the centre in 1997 including interviews with Anangu elders Barbara Tjikati and Tony Tjamiwa (translated by Karina Lester). Jane Jacobs and Mathilde Lochert shared this field trip and their insights may be apparent here.
3 See also Dovey (1996); Dovey et al. (1998); Jacobs (1996).
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