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HOME, REACH, AND THE SENSE OF PLACE

by Anne Buttner

*"Country Road take me home  
to the place  
I belong..."*

Emotionally laden eulogy on the meaning of place rings through much modern poetry and song. Nostalgia for some real or imagined state of harmony and centeredness once experienced in rural settings haunts the victim of mobile and fragmented urban milieux. Like many a fortune seeker amidst the lights of Broadway who longed for the simple cottage near the rippling stream back home I suppose one could say: "you never know what you've got 'til it's gone". Patriotic songs about native soil and forest that built the spirit of nationhood in many of our countries were often written in the cities of North America and Australia. And today, as the uniqueness of places becomes more and more threatened by the homogenizing veneer of commercialism and standardized-component architecture, many long for their *hembygd* and *smultronställe*.

It is fascinating to notice when and where during recent history this notion of place has emerged as a strong motif in literature, politics, and popular song. The record synchronizes fairly well with periods of relatively abrupt change either within the social or physical environment or in the world of ideas. Late 18c and early 19c Romantic literature on place, for instance, corresponds roughly with the reaction against a Newtonian world view. Scandalous, it seemed, to impose a "scientific" grid on Nature - to reduce all that beauty, melody, and fragrance to the sterile metric of mathematics or physics. When industrialism and transport systems began

to rupture the old harmonies of peasant landscapes again protest was voiced in the language of place. Urbanization brought its own wave of rebellion against abrupt change: the old mosaic of artisan districts, open markets, and bourgeois villas became distorted and dismantled as within the city itself former cultural and economic equilibria gave way to the new. "Housekeeping" functions of civic life - residential, ceremonial, governmental, and religious - yielded to the growing importance of commercial, financial, industrial, and other "empire building" ones. In the bustling enthusiasm of early industrialism it was far more important to expand horizons of access to markets and clientele rather than seriously try to make the city a home.

Transatlantic migrations in the late 19c and early 20c mark another powerful source of lament and insight into the meaning of place. I don't know if migrant Swedes wrote songs about Dalarna or Småland but other European migrants certainly did sing the praises of home places. To those for whom the westbound oceanic voyage was a one way trip the longing for home resulted in a virtual torrent of feelings about places and their identity. Many groups had indeed tried to incarnate their images of "home" not only in social and political life but also in their choices of work, living and recreation patterns. The "Little Italy's", "Bohemias" and "Blarney Stone Irish" neighborhoods of American cities still display façades so "authentic" that the European visitor is reminded of his grandparents era.

Whatever its sources or explanations this literature on the sense of place reveals several consistently recurring themes. It appears that people's sense of both personal and cultural identity is intimately bound up with place identity. Loss of home or losing one's place may often trigger an "identity crisis". Bachelard, a 20c philosopher, in "The Poetics of Space" claimed that the relationship between place and personality is so intimate,

that to understand oneself, a *topanalysis* might yield more fruitful insight even than a *psychoanalysis* (Bachelard 1964). There are many dimensions to the meanings ascribed to place: symbolic, emotional, cultural, political, and even biological. People have not only intellectual, imaginary, and symbolic conceptions of place but also personal and social associations with place-based networks of interaction and affiliation. As with other members of Biosphere, too, humans display marked patterns of territoriality. When the fundamental values associated with any of these levels of experience are threatened, then protest about the meaning of place may erupt. Whether all these values are *consciously* articulated in legal or behavior terms does not seem to be the crucial point. In fact they are often not brought to consciousness until they are threatened: they are part of the fabric of everyday life and its taken-for-granted routines.

This does not suggest, however, that *ideas about place* are not significant. In fact the fundamental *Zeitgeist* or world view at any point in history which may be explicit in scientific and philosophical ideas about space, time, and nature is present implicitly also in conceptions of place. It is especially on this level that 20c brought unprecedented reaction and insight. The "post Newtonian shock" was over: science and rationality was beginning to triumph over all other competing alternatives. The idea that countries and places should be planned within a wider sociospatial horizon was gaining ground. World depression and war "justified" managerial convictions that people and their home places should no longer be trusted to carry on in the traditional way. An old Stoic idea that rational order should be imposed on nature and society became an apparently workable dream because of developments in science and technology.

As transport and communication systems shrank the distances between places, and the increasing mobility of

people, jobs, and armies continued to level our differences between places, it was in the urban context that the question of local identity became politically articulate. Prototypical examples of the place-based "culture shock" are, I suppose, the ethnic ghettos of the early 20c in North America. Migrants from rural backgrounds in Europe poured into the industrial cities of New England, Chicago, and the West Coast all eager to maintain some sense of cultural and kin identity while joining the queue for the unskilled job market. These pockets of first generation immigrants settlement quickly assumed a distinctive "ethnic" character. Usually circumscribed by either physical landmarks, zoning laws, or prejudice, they displayed an internal cohesion reminiscent in many ways of those older working-class districts in European cities. Social scientists became fascinated by the social order of the slum: they noted the interweaving of social and spatial arrangements and ways in which external landscape forms mirrored the world views and behavior patterns of their residents. With confidence indeed did the Chicago Municipal Authorities accept the recommendations for administrative boundaries offered by these community sociologists: boundaries which still persist despite massive demographic and cultural change. The lack of "fit" between administrative regionalization plans and the social character of local areas remains one of the end problems regarding the identity of *place*.

Prior to World War II most of what was written about place was construed in terms of a Newtonian world: container space for people and activities, areally-circumscribed domains of political authority and/or administration. The notion of place was still a very respectable one: credible to those who lived in them as well as to those who sought to plan them. It had served as a model for the resettlement of minorities after World War I: the boundaries of language and nationalism being understood as basic and unquestionable (Dominian 1917). It was



also a plausible concept for two key planning movements of the 1920's: the Garden City movement in Britain (Howard 1897) and the famous "Regional Plan for New York and its Environs" in the United States (Haig 1927).

It was only after World War II that the full impact of an Einsteinian world view began to express itself in applied science and its reverberations on character of places. National and multi-national economic planning became a moral imperative: political boundaries were dismantled and recombined in various ways, comparative advantages in production and delivery were sought, optimal spatial and structural programmes were designed to maximize efficiency and interaction. Sky was the limit, it seemed, on the advantages of agglomeration and scale economies. Most of these movements triggered significant popular reactions. Most striking, I suppose, is the way in which national stereotypes persist, for example, among the member countries of EEC despite the enormous changes in their actual patterns of interaction and exchange. But it was in the urban realm especially that the old refrain of place identity assumed the most dramatic forms.

Urban renewal programmes particularly in the UK and USA nearly always found their first targets in "slum" areas near the old city center - victims of the CBD's success as dominant pole within the empire-building city which had forgotten its housekeeping responsibilities. Bulldozers respected few of those invisible boundaries or sacred symbols of social space. (Few there were of course: in Glasgow today, several years after the first bulldozer arrived, pubs and churches stand like *mesas* atop a landscape razed to flatness - isolated from their clientèle whose houses once lay around and above them. In Sweden, I understand, trees enjoy a similar magical power over the bulldozer).

When social scientists got involved as consultants either to redevelopment plans or to their evaluation, they

usually brought along the older models of place identity which had been tried and tested in the 'twenties and 'thirties. Myths of "community" and "territoriality" had enjoyed a long popularity and indeed it appeared ideologically desirable for many political authorities to sponsor such people-oriented research. Most of this literature took the form of postmortem autopsy-grieving for a lost home - too late or perhaps too "safe" to influence the onward march of urban and regional "development" planning.

What emerged for many of the authors and audience of such studies, however, was evidence about the fundamental contrast between an "insider's" ways of experiencing place and an "outsider's" conventional ways of describing them. Lived space and lived time were poorly and only partially represented via disciplinary models of (representational) space and time. For many serious researchers the road ahead lay in exploring the lived worlds of people in place.

Critical philosophers have accused those who took such an existentialist approach of having fallen prey to manipulation by ideological and managerial interests (Adorno (1964) 1973). Beneath the jargon of authenticity, it was noted, lurked a tacit condoning of poverty, injustice, and alienation. Romantic descriptions of neighborhood life may indeed unwittingly have served to perpetuate myths like the "culture of poverty" or to trivialize the "insiders" perspective by refusing to articulate it in a language which would reveal the extent of structural inequity built into contemporary economic and political life. Herein perhaps lies one basic clue to the impasse: the language used to describe the resident's perspectives on place is still, by and large, the language of a Newtonian world - people, activities, and things contained within place - whereas the language used to plan the economic and technological horizons of place has been profoundly influenced by Einsteinian conceptions of

topological space, time, and process. To speak of "insiders" and "outsiders", places versus spatio-temporal organization, and other dualisms of this sort may serve reasonably well to describe the historical record. But to do justice to the fundamental life interests which could be evoked by the question of place identity today one needs to probe to a deeper level of meaning and there hopefully to find some common denominators for a dialogue between those who wish to live in places and those who wish to plan for them.

I suggest we think about places in the context of two reciprocal movements which can be observed among most living forms: like breathing in and out most life forms need a *home* and *horizons of reach* outward from that home. The lived reciprocity of rest and movement, of territory and range, of security and adventure, of housekeeping and husbandry, of community building and social organization - these experiences may be universal among the inhabitants of Planet Earth. Whether one thinks on the level of ideas themselves, or of social networks, or of "home grounds", there may be a manner in which one can measure and study the reciprocity of home and reach in all of them. For any individual the "home" and "reach" of one's thought and imagination may be quite distinct from the "home" and "reach" of one's social affiliations, which may again be distinct from the actual physical location of physical "home" and "reach". These distinctions are not just abstractions: if they are actually mapped within the lived space time horizons of any individual or group they could provide some clues into what constitutes place identity. If all three are synchronized or harmonized then one could speak of *centeredness* and hypothesize that one's sense of place is a function of how well it provides a center for one's life interests. Taken in a more general sense the question becomes how many of a local area's life interests may be centered within it and how many of them have their "home" elsewhere.



This process of centering is not at all identical with the notion of centralization - the rationally planned nodal concentration of power and social energy - rather it suggests an ongoing life process - the breathing in and bringing home which is a reciprocal of the breathing out and reaching toward horizon. The essential difference between "centralization" and "centering" may in fact symbolize the language barriers between outsider's and insider's views on place. For the words used to describe places *looked at from the outside* are nouns - artefacts like housing, land use, activity flows, political boundaries, and so from a national perspective one may speak of centralizing or decentralizing them. Centering is an essentially creative process authored by people themselves. The meanings of place to *those who live in them* have more to do with everyday living and doing rather than thinking so even to *discuss* place we have to freeze the dynamic process at an imaginary moment in order to take the still picture.

The observer speaks of housing whereas the resident lives the process of dwelling. The observer measures and maps activity systems and social networks and infers something of the native's *world within reach* whereas in the resident's experience *reaching* may be so fundamental a movement of everyday existence that it is not usually reflected upon (Schutz, 1962, 1973; Rose, 1977). One of the first steps to be taken in trying to straddle the divide between "insider" and "outsider" worlds, then, is to stretch our conventional "noun" or "picture" language so as to accommodate the "verbs" and "process" languages of lived experience.

To exaggerate a little, I see the "outsider's trap" in that we look at places, as it were, from an abstract sky: we try to read the texts of landscapes and overt behavior in the picture languages of maps and models and are therefore inevitably drawn toward finding in places what we *intend* to find in them. The "insider's trap", on the

other hand, is that we live in places and may be so immersed in the particulars of everyday life and action that we may see no point in questioning the taken-for-granted or in seeing our home place in its wider spatial or social context. For both "insiders" and "outsiders", perhaps the greatest challenge is a pedagogical one: a calling to conscious awareness those taken-for-granted ideas and practices within each of our worlds and then to reach beyond them toward a more reasonable and mutually-respectful dialogue.

The geographer, of all people, should find such a pedagogical challenge attractive. Whereas the bulk of our disciplinary models have fostered an observer's stance on places, we all sometime somewhere are "insiders" in some place. Would it not be a worthwhile goal then to examine our own experiences in various places and use this as a testing ground for our generalizations and also our efforts to achieve better communication across this divide? Before one leaps into issues of planning policy it would be vital, it seems to me, to understand the fundamental life processes which are at stake and are vulnerable to changes in the physical and political identity of place. (The question of decentralization in Sweden, for instance, might then be redefined as a problem that calls for an effort to revitalize the energies of local areas from the grass roots at the same time as one studies the feasibility of blueprints for redistribution from the top down.)

What I would like to present here are some insights and questions which have come to me from some exploratory efforts to understand the meaning of place in my own experience as well as in that of other groups. This is not intended as a model to be tested or a solution to problems but rather the story of a journey across the divide which most of us confront (or ignore) when we speak of people and places. In a way it is only the kind of "homework" which any scholar who believes in objectivity should

be willing to face: to unearth the "subjective" element and recognize its influence. I'm sure that many of the attitudes I bring to my geography, for instance, and certainly my cynicism about top-down bureaucratic planning, derive from my childhood experiences of life in Ireland.

Even to an audience that consists mostly of geographers I doubt if I could find words to describe what the experience of living in this place still means to me. As I look at these pictures (figs. 1 and 2) it is a total experience of milieu which is evoked: I recall the feel of the grass on bare feet, the smells and sounds of various seasons, the places and times I meet friends on walks, the daily ebb and flow of milking time, meals, reading and thinking, sleeping and waking. Most of this experience is not consciously processed through my head - that is why words are so hard to find - for this place allows head and heart, body and spirit, imagination and will to become harmonized and creative. So far rationalization of agriculture has not disrupted the fabric of our local landscape or the predictability of sonic and other intrusions throughout the day; somehow to live there allows one a sense of being in tune with the rhythmicity of Nature's light and dark, warmth and cold, sowing and harvesting.

Now as a geographer I could probably tell you what soil types there are, what the crop rotation system used to be, the time-cost-distance to markets and so on, but even when I had done the round of "geographical" interpretations I still would feel it was only an opaque picture - insufficient to tell you whether the administrative/economic/political boundaries of place should be revised or what realms of human life interests should be left to our discretion or abrogated by regional or national authorities. Perhaps here I'm encased in the "insider's trap"? Experiences in several other environments, however, have convinced me that the solutions to many regional problems which have been discovered through



Figs. 1 and 2. The Glenville area, Cork, Ireland.



trial-and error over generations may still be more rational than those conceived by the urban or foreign civil servant. Experience also suggests that any solution which we do not consider to be "our idea" will be resented, avoided or rendered ludicrous over time.

Attuned as I was to a relatively stable rural world with its taken-for-granted "place" for everything, the urban landscapes of North America seemed indeed to lack identity (fig. 3). Suburbia especially seemed such a "placeless" sprawl of concrete and plastic nowhere-land grid-iron (fig. 4). Even in University districts, one searched in vain for that kind of sidewalk café where one could linger for hours: rather one found the short order eating places which prided themselves on quick turnover and throughput (fig. 5). It did not take long to discover how false it could be to judge the book by the cover: many of these nondescript hamburger stations were meaningful nodes in teenager and truckdriver social space.

To many people, for whom *reaching* is more important than *home making*, I suppose places are really points on a topological surface of access. Eventually the architectural monotony or discordance within any one physical place could be the result of coincidence rather than design: each component is part of a spatial linkage and the center of each lies at a national or multinational headquarters. How things will eventually combine within any particular geographical milieu, therefore, is quite incidental both to those who design them and those who will use them (fig. 6).

The skyscrapers, airports, freeways and other stereotypical components of modern landscapes - are they not the sacred symbols of a civilization which has deified *reach* and derided *home* (fig. 7)? The gaping wounds of mining and industrial landscapes (fig. 8) simply the refuse heaps of a civilization intoxicated with promethean hubris?





Fig. 3. Downtown Toronto.

Fig. 4. Suburbia, Chicago.

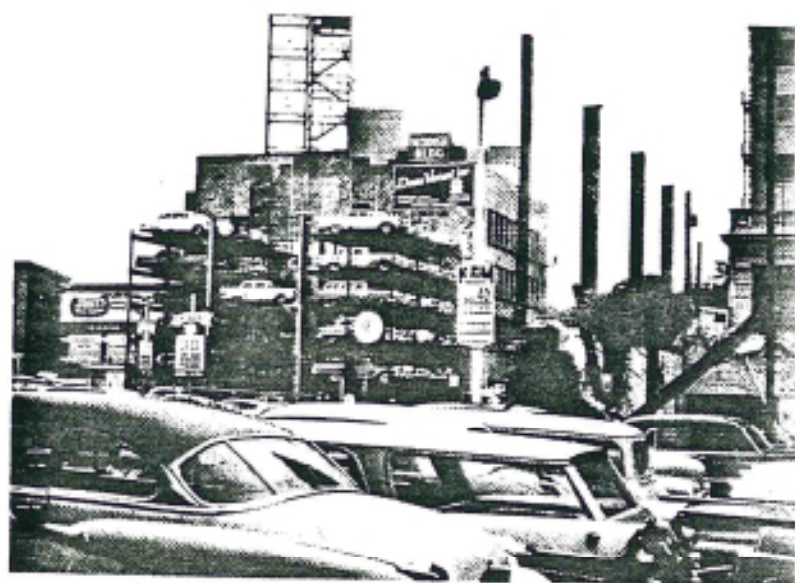
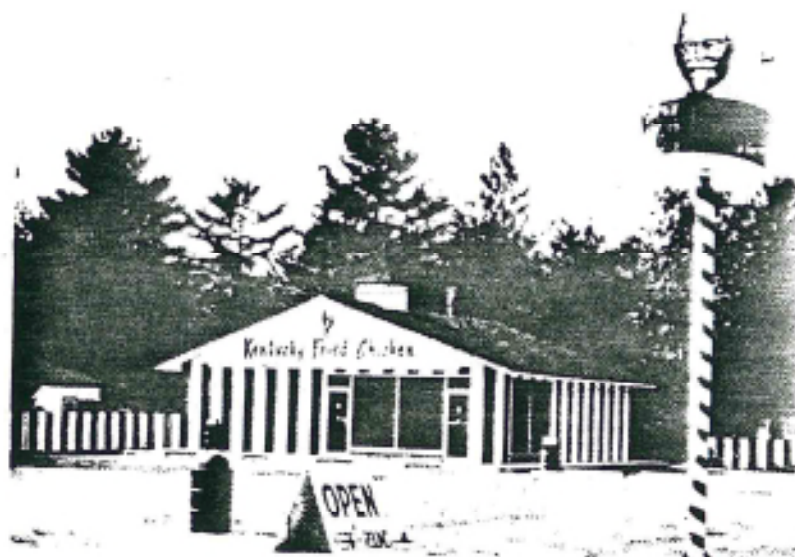


Fig. 5. The ubiquitous Kentucky Fried Chicken.

Fig. 6. "Coincidental development" in Portland, Oregon.



Fig. 7. Freeway access to downtown Minneapolis.

Fig. 8. Open pit mine, Minnesota.



It is difficult for a native of rural Ireland to take such a culturally relativist attitude toward the placeless landscapes of reach (Relph 1975). This is not because of aesthetics alone or sensory overload, rather it derives from a nausea about values which make machines, commodities, movement and salesmanship more important than human encounter or letting nature have some breathing space. It is even hard to be wholeheartedly in favor of restoration movements in parts of cities if the aim is simply to reconstitute a museum for the benefit of the tourist industry or to salve the consciences of societies which have trampled on history: it is the style of life associated with place which is still far more important for me than its external forms (fig. 9). Grady Clay's "How to Read the American City Close up" has indeed been an eye-opener (Clay 1974).

The "placing" of objects and activities within interior space was also a surprise to someone socialized within an Irish rural home. In this era of consumerism, it has become not only stylish but also profitable to design interior space in ways that will appeal to prospective buyers. Proxemics and territoriality - inside and outside the home - tend to become academically interesting research topics at periods of collective claustrophobia or political commitment to the expansion of *Lebensraum* - like the late 1960s at both sides of the Atlantic. It took the Germans to invent a field called *Bürolandschaft* and to order furniture and acoustics in ways to facilitate optimal work efficiency. In most of our "developed" urban societies what appeals after a certain threshold of media message has been reached is quite frequently what pays - either in terms of commercial profit or ideological consensus.

Perhaps the applied ideological or commercial fringe of territoriality study has overshadowed the deeper issues. Norberg-Schulz in his very lucid textbook on architecture outlines what is involved in making architectural

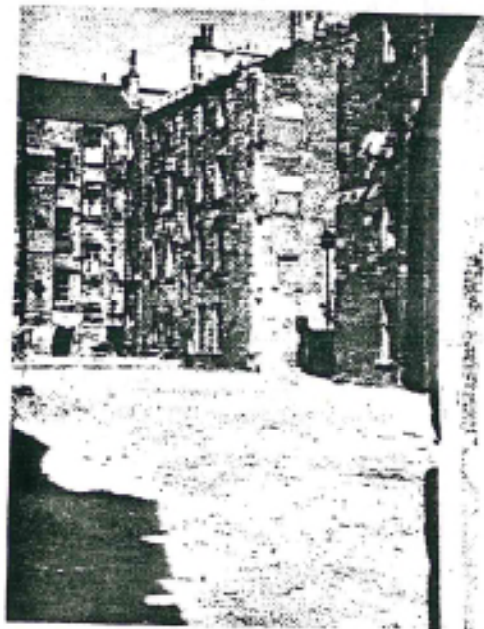


Fig. 9. Old Montreal.

space a reflection of existential space (Norberg-Schulz 1971). I am, of course, doubtful that all significant aspects of existence in place can be readily translatable into architectural terms but this does not really seem to be the important point. The crucial philosophical and pragmatic problem lies in what potential role is allowed for residents to have any creative say in designing them.

Looking back I suspect that my decision to accept an invitation to join a team of experts on a critique of planning standards in the United Kingdom probably stemmed from an emotional resentment against the ways in which benign technocrats and planners seemed to be actually killing places through their very efforts to "renew" them (figs. 10 and 11). It was this resentment, plus the hope that somehow there could be some place for reason in the highly rational world of liberal planning, much

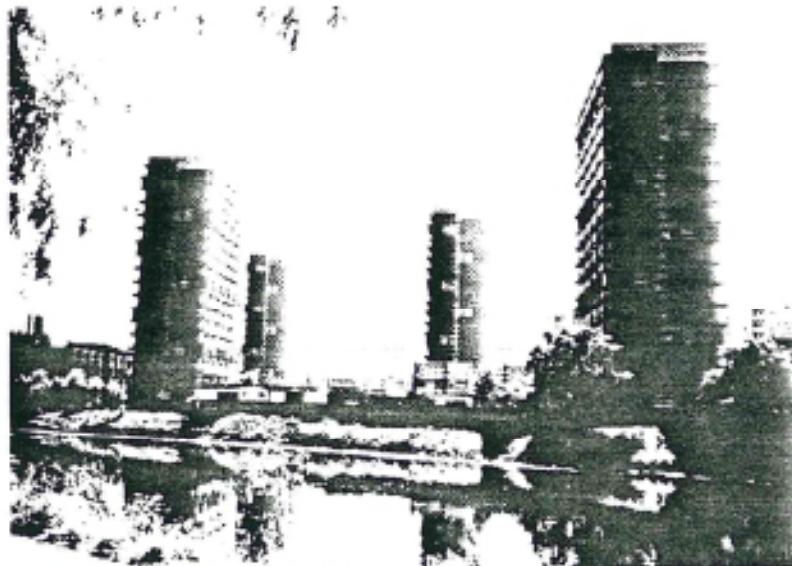




Figs. 10 and 11  
(opposite page).  
Before and after  
urban renewal,  
central Glasgow.

more than intellectual curiosity about applied geography that motivated me to investigate the lived experience worlds of working class families in Glasgow. Equipped with the analytical and theoretical languages of social science on the one hand, and deeply aware of how traumatic a change of home can be, I felt that I could perhaps play a mediator role between "insiders" and "outsiders" in this context (Buttimer 1972).

The details of this study are perhaps less interesting than the insight which later reflection yielded regarding its strengths and limitations. There were several ways in which the actual models used prevented me from letting the residents articulate their own versions of the situation or from communicating directly to planning authorities themselves. From an analytical viewpoint also there were several dimensions missing: analyses of perceptions, behavior, territoriality, and attitudes in cross-sectional fashion at one point in time did not allow me to take sufficient account of the temporal dimension. It was



clear that those habits and preferences which had the deepest roots in people's memories were also those which were likely to survive and many of those were not really plannable. It was also a very anthropocentric study: even environment was defined in "human" terms (architectural form, access horizons, functional boundaries, etc.) and insufficient attention was given to the actual physical environment. But most significantly, in retrospect, it was not an objective interpretation. Even though residents spoke about "home ground" and "sense of place" I heard those words through the filters of my own experience. "Home" for me should ideally have those qualities of my own home - quietness, fragrance, spaciousness, and rhythmic flow of light and dark, winter and spring. These Glasgow housewives would probably have gone insane in such a milieu! For them the noise and bustle of street life, the regular whistle of factory and train, the occasional gangfight and football match - these would probably have been more important for them than the presence of

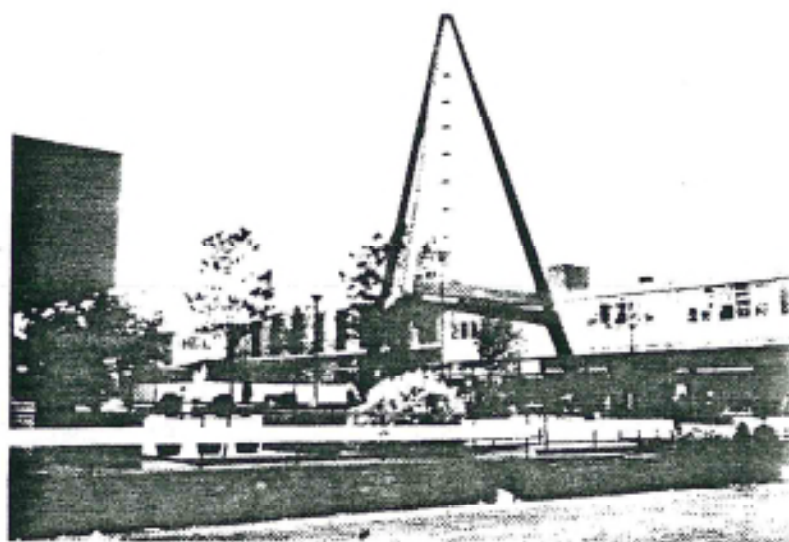
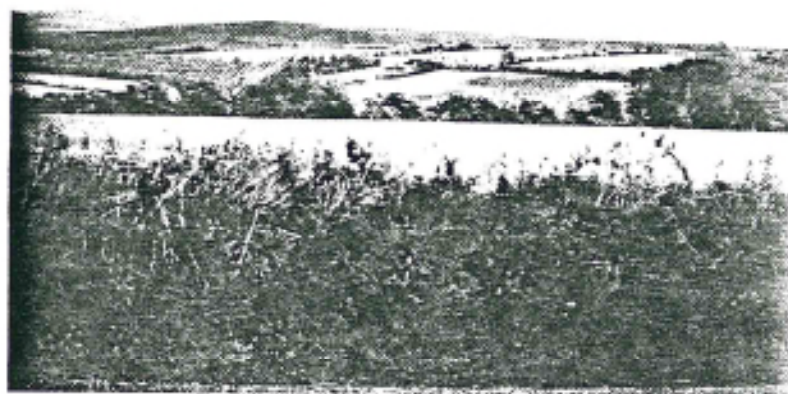


Fig. 12. "Home" - in urban Glasgow.



Figs. 12 and 13. "Home" - in urban Glasgow and rural Cork.

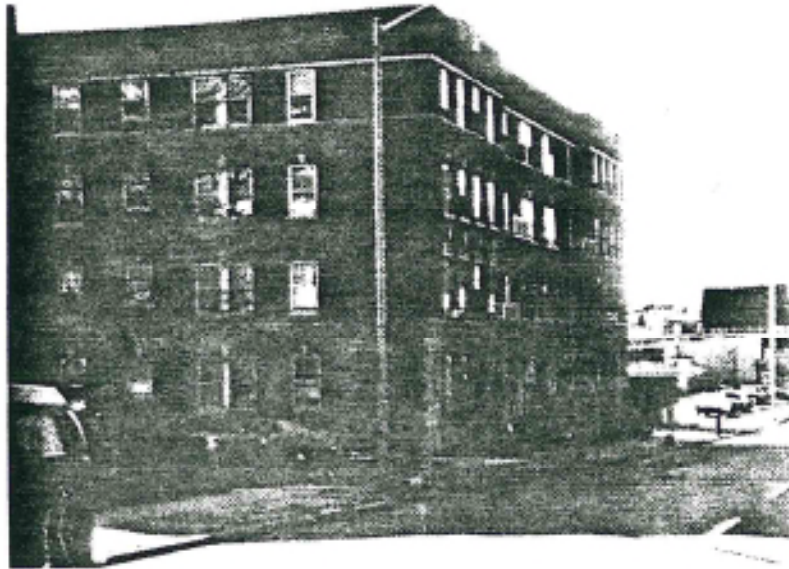


Fig. 14. 1039 Main Street, Worcester, Massachusetts.

cows or birds (figs. 12 and 13).

Conscious of the ways in which disciplinary models and one's own socialization can influence one's approach to the study of *place* I have tried over the past few years to develop a method of investigating my own experience of *home* and *reach* in the two contrasting milieux where most of my time has been spent: the Glenville home in Ireland and an apartment complex on Main Street, Worcester, USA (fig. 14). The aim was to really to stand (as objectively as possible) inside my own experience and through sharing an enquiry with those who lived in the same apartment complex to arrive at some understanding of the "insiders" world.

Again the details of this study may be less important than the potential implications.

From an analytical perspective, it was virtually impossible to assemble data on the various relevant categories of the environment which were in any way comparable or



easily relatable to the human experience of milieu. Secondly, although a good number of my fellow residents were elderly and retired they scarcely even thought about place at all. For them the processes of home and reach had primarily a social meaning: telephone, taxi and mail kept them happily involved in their non-place-based networks. There was only a small range of activities which could be affected by the local physical environment: waiting for the bus, going to shop, church, or library. They had become much better adapted to placelessness and individualism than I. This is probably prototypical of the apartment complex which sits on a main thoroughfare within the contemporary city.

Yet when we probed to the roots of our recurrent complaints and feelings of unease we all discovered a set of "common enemies". Chief among these was the principal "gatekeeper" to our immediate milieu - the landlord - in whose hands rested all discretion over details like electricity, gas, water, plumbing and protection from vandalism. He was inaccessible most of the time even by telephone. Other gatekeepers on our immediate environment like police and fire departments were similarly unpredictable in the time distance of access. Most of what actually went on within the zone of immediate reach was a function of remote interests for whom our street was but a thoroughfare. But, most seriously of all, we were denied opportunity to express any responsibility for the upkeep of our place or for creating there any sense of community through mutual sharing. We were forced to adopt an attitude of surviving as individuals and thinking only of our own horizons of social reach and to blunting our sensitivities to other dimensions of reach within our own experience or being sensitive to those of others. It is hard to think about the city as a whole or of engaging in civic life if one's everyday *genre de vie* becomes so preoccupied with individual survival.

Perhaps this is the most serious long term consequence of



the demise of *place*: if one cannot practice a giving and receiving in one's normal everyday routines, is society as a whole not denied the precious input which only individuals *in situ* could contribute? Jane Jacobs' account of Hudson Street would suggest that indeed it is (Jacobs 1961). In a very detailed study of crime patterns along that stretch of Main Street we found that there was a dramatic spatial correspondence between incidence of crime and the presence of resident owners. Oscar Newman's "Defensible Space" certainly supports the thesis that place-based round-the-clock activities are a better deterrent to crime than police surveillance (Newman 1973).

To consider the demise of place and its consequences for personal and community life as the result of fascist decisions to centralize everything may make attractive rhetoric but not the most helpful explanation in the long run. Rather it may be pedagogically more provocative and practically more feasible to design exercises which could help "insiders" within their everyday milieux to become aware of the longterm implications of an individualistic and fragmented life style both for the quality of their own lives and the general character of their residential and work environments. Such "consciousness raising" efforts would be of little avail, however, if there were not a simultaneous attempt on the part of managerial interests to become educated themselves: to sort out subjective bias and role-constrained decision making from whatever *reason* would require for the good of the whole. A geographer, sensitized to "insider" and "outsider" experiences of place, and aware of the reciprocity of home and reach within his/her own life experience, could surely offer some help on such a pedagogical venture.

Returning to my home place now I feel strongly about the kind of education we need. We need an ongoing attitude of self-awareness which would help us assess the meaning of our vastly expanded horizons of reach. The old rules of thumb on "housekeeping" may be appropriate in some

realms but they are hopelessly inadequate in others. What seems technologically desirable in some realms can be socially and ecologically disastrous in other areas. Let me illustrate.

Many of the early leaders in Irish agricultural development have come from farms like ours where livelihood success demanded independent enterprise and hard work. Barriers to be overcome in the wake of World War II were those classical conditions of West European agriculture: inefficiencies of production technology and fertilizers, fluctuations in produce markets, inadequate size or level of specialization to permit economies of scale, etc... Having suffered through these constraints in their youth and having learned the values of self-sacrifice and unrelenting effort they naturally construed utopia in terms of economic rationality. The best service they could render society was to work toward a national development plan for agriculture which would enable every farmer to be free from these constraints. The past 25 years has seen dramatic changes: local creameries have been rationalized, markets and fairs regionalized, transport horizons expanded and commodity prices guaranteed and children no longer walk to school. (Now they will never have to long for something they never had.) As each individual entrepreneur and his family become more emancipated from former constraints they are also deprived of former opportunities to contribute toward the collective sense of place. A bag of mixed blessings - the now familiar tension between rationality and reason - have fallen on each aspect of local life. Many rejoice in the disappearance of drudgery and poverty but many also wonder why we no longer see many "local characters" or hear any famous story tellers. To translate the story into the language of home and reach one could say that the horizons of technological and economic reach have expanded so quickly and so individualistically that one can no longer find support or centeredness from the older commonly-held

conceptions of shared reach. Even within the lives of individual families there is often dissonance between the "reach" capacities of members and an increasing social distance between neighbors. From an ecological viewpoint also (the housekeeping aspect of place) there is little thought for the long term consequences of the growing dependence on supermarket food and fertilizers on largescale production for distant markets. Plastic bags, tin containers, and empty bottles are becoming a real eyesore around many of our homes. If one were to ask what the meaning and potential significance of *place* would be for us, or for places similar to ours, we need to redefine what we mean by "community" and "place". One has to see both in dynamic terms, as horizons for basic life processes, rather than as artefacts or nouns.

The creation of community cannot today rely on former props like sharing limited resources and confronting together some common challenges at harvest time. Today our common challenge - still implicit rather than explicit - is of a different kind: the psychological and emotional consequences of fragmented *genres de vie* juxtaposed in physical space but strangers in social space. Catalysts for community creation still survive: football teams, local newspapers, common occasions of worship and recreation; and the ubiquitous pub still provide the bases for contact between people and nurturing the sense of local identity. The creeping paralysis which we share with many rural regions in Western Europe - for a *place* point of view - is the general penetration of Eurocratic policy in agriculture which not only fosters ecological and social scandals in land speculation but fills the countryside with a motorized caste of development interests seeking to enlist each individual family in remote-controlled nets of consumerism. By the accents we use, the jokes we share, the songs we sing, you can still differentiate South, West and East, but in overt "geographical" terms there is little difference any more.

Let me conclude with just a few points which may have particular relevance to the Swedish situation today.

Personal identity and health require an ongoing process of centering - a reciprocity between dwelling and reaching - which can find its external symbolic expression in the sense of place or regional identity. Decentralization efforts from "top down" need to take account of this fundamental feature of lived experience both for individuals and for society. There is a need for would-be consultants to such planning efforts to take cognisance of their taken-for-granted assumptions about the relationships between people and place. Ultimately centralization blueprints can only touch the externalities of local life and their long term efficacy depends upon the re-awakening of creative energies from local communities.

A viable style of life for local areas cannot cling to old Newtonian conceptions of community and region or adopt a competitive "ghetto" attitude toward society and national spatial organization. A style of community life oriented toward self-education regarding the constantly changing horizons of reach for people, activity systems, and technology, could be a powerful catalyst for developing civic habits of sharing rather than competing and discovering how much the health and happiness of individuals and communities can be enhanced by allowing people to contribute to the whole.

To a society whose central concerns have tended to overlook the importance of place and regional identity a line from another popular song may be worth an ear: "You'll never know what you're missing 'til you try!"



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