By way of an Introduction: These pages contain individual chapters from my 1990 book, Postmodern Sophistications. I have obtained the rights to the essays am making them available separately. The entire text of the book is also available on Research Gate.

The underlying aim of this collection of essays was to question the opposition between the Sophists and Plato. That classic dispute has been the model for many discussions of tensions within our society:: on the one hand you have the clever manipulative salesmen who care nothing about truth. On the other hand the rigorous scientific investigation that never quite makes contact with politics. Rootless nihilism vs. naturally grounded values. Anarchy vs. Rules.

In this book I developed a pragmatic middleground, using themes from Heidegger and Dewey; in later writings I rely more on Hegel. But the point remains the same: don't listen to the Straussians and others who try to force on our politics or art or philosophy a simple opposition between truth-loving traditionalists (Socrates) and flaky relativistic postmoderns (the Sophists). It was not so simple in Greece and it's not so simple today.

Part of the book deals with postmodern critiques of rational knowledge, with Lyotard and Habermas on center stage. Their opposition between postmodern and modern views remains relevant, although post-1990 developments in deconstruction and critical theory have widened and deepened the debate. The points made in these essays remain useful, if not complete.

The second part of the book deals with architecture. The word postmodern has gone out of fashion in architecture. But the earlier use of the term for an attempt to bring substantive content into formal modernity retains important.

My conclusions about postmodern architecture's failute to escape modern distance from history also remain true, as does my argument that that proclaimed modern distance from history is itself an illusion, that we are more embedded in history than the moderns wanted to think, although that embodiment is not as total and restrictive as we have imagined true of

our ancestors.

If you find any of these ideas useful, true, provocative, let me know. If you find them absurd or useless airy nothings, I'd still be delighted to learn from your reactions.

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This essay asks what kind of guidance our historical location can offer for our task of building places for ourselves.

Chapter 13. Making Places for Ourselves

If we are to build places for ourselves, we need to know who we are, but there are no magic mirrors. Nor would we offer a single reflection. There is no unique home corresponding to some neatly single self or form of life defining us. And even if we were more unified, we could not make a place that would fully enclose us. Architecture cannot do away with the differences and tensions that make it possible to be in places at all. We will always be inside and outside, complicitous and critical.

But still there remain the ordinary questions. It is good to criticize the search for centered perfect dwelling, but where will the septic system go? Which rooms will face the street? How will the building relate to those next door? Doors must be placed, the roof shaped. The design process is not an infinitely open Socratic discussion. Nor, even if the end result is meant to have many inner tensions and be open to future reinterpretations, can the design itself avoid being definite. Lines must be drawn.

Even today too many buildings succeed too well in making vital places; we cannot deny the possibility that we might draw those lines well. We do not have to embrace the ideal of perfect unity in order to build places that shelter and energize us as they open new possibilities. Our lack of a deep center does not imply that we should not have such places as we can. *If we refuse this middle condition, we remain too controlled by the demand for totality and presence.*

Criticism and Possibilities

When it comes to finding out who we are, we tend to list our individual preferences and choices. For instance, Charles Moore remarks that

Easy travel, books, glossy magazines, films, and television have revealed an almost unlimited array of styles our own houses might embody . . . . Conspicuously absent among most of these images are heartfelt, personal convictions about what a house really should be like. In the absence of dreams all choices are reduced to pseudo-choices, no significant choices at all. (Moore, Allen, Lyndon 1974, 132).

This is stated in terms of the individual. Given the purpose of Moore's book this makes practical sense; clients need to be in touch with their feelings and aspirations. Still, one's aspirations are not so intensely personal as American ideology makes them out to be. Our dreams are in many ways our least individual feature, as the media know, despite what they tell us.

If we put aside the illusion of being the unique source of our unique life plans, we see how much we are set in motion by history and language. Finding the constraints that make choice meaningful is not a process of delving into the depth of individual personality after some unique core. To think of it as an exploration of the secret preferences of the individual still clings to the notion that unlimited possibilities lie before us, to be constrained only by personal whim or natural scarcities.

I have argued throughout that we should conceive choice as already involved in qualitatively limited projects and possibilities. What I have spoken of as metaphorical transformation of vocabularies is a version of Heidegger's notion of retrieving our possibilities, freed from his concerns for deep unity. Earlier I discussed the differences between the modern slimmed down personal identity (as maximizers of utilities) and the thicker identities Habermas and Lyotard urged (as self-critical communicators, or as creators of language games). If we are to have more than purely functional places, we need a thicker identity with some historical memory.

The modern movement planned to remove history from architecture; ironic postmoderns make history their material. Both of these gestures put the designer up in the balloon. I opposed the equal access to history demanded by these approaches. They

remove from history the purposes for which they would have us use it. If on the contrary history is not something we consult but something we are, if our projects are both opened and limited by the intersections of the multiplicity that is ourselves, then there is no equal access and no free floating. If we are to be pragmatic it is not because, separated from history, we use it for our material.

If we do not try to rise above history with Gropius or Lyotard, we have the task of retrieving the languages and motions we are thrown among, in ways that reveal and change the shape of our possibilities. The multiplicity in which we live does not reduce to a single rational process or structure, and amid that multiplicity there is more that is relatively constant than claims like Lyotard's allow. The aim is not to widen our possibilities toward some impossible maximum but to change them locally. In this process, what I have called metaphor is necessary and irony is not enough.

This means coming to understand ourselves, but self-understanding does not equal assembling a list of preferences. What we need is allegiance, belonging, building this way because it fits, because we are already in that stream, because we inhabit that world. Such inhabitation does not have to be unreflective; one of my major themes has been that self-consciousness need not destroy belonging. To deny this is to confuse all forms of double reference and reflection with superior irony.

Karsten Harries has written movingly about the problems caused by modern self-reflection. It seems to me, however, that he keeps the notion of simple inhabitation, and so overstates the power of reflection, when he says "reflective man is as such displaced" and "just as modern man has fallen out of nature, so he has fallen out of history . . . . Time has been reduced to a coordinate on which we move back and forth with equal facility" (1975, 13-14). This gives too much credence to Heidegger's unitary *Gestell*.

We already speak a language. We are not bodiless wraiths blown about by winds of Sophistic rhetoric; we have measures and identities, and confusing though these may be they are not entirely formless. The consumer society tries to wash out those identities, so that we will purchase endlessly to fill that void. But there is still some *what* to who we are. We have roots, but not foundations. Roots divide and multiply and get thinner as they go lower, but they still can hold even if they grasp no metaphysical rock. Our identities may be themselves plural and excessive, but they have historical shapes that are not infinitely malleable.

Theories (or practices) that detach us from history do so by finding a set of principles (or factors) which can be described (or enacted) in relatively formal terms as a platform from which to view the rest of life. This is not necessary; although we cannot do without some formal descriptions of our situation, they need not be thick enough to form a basis for theoretic or ironic distance. In Hegelian language, the formal conditions need not be capable of being posited as such and making a structural difference for our activity. Our task is not to choose from some detached point of view, but to see what is happening and criticize it as we can. That criticism does not need a unique platform from which to study and make recommendations.

If there is no strong and deeply unified set of conditions defining the location of our lives, then there is no unified central set of principles that can unfold into an unified field of possibilities to be surveyed. *If our selves and our possibilities are constituted by intersections and collocations, by a multiplicity of factors, the variety of their materials will not support indefinitely large spans of possibility.* But with such origins neither will our possibilities make a neat set with a limited shape cut from some larger field.

I am not saying that our possibilities are limited in number; the issue concerns their qualitative limits, and whether they form a set that we can measure with a surveying glance. In the modern conception, whatever the size of our set of possibilities, we are able to survey them because the distanced self floats above it all. Instead, I would maintain that we and our community exist as the intersections of thrown projects and possibilities in multiple ways. While we can say some interesting things about the conditions for being selves and societies that have possibilities, none of that will define a point for a universal language game.

Any activity or language game makes distinctions (the three colors for traffic lights, the pieces in chess) and embodies rules; these define appropriate and inappropriate moves (there are many ways I can move chess pieces; some are good, some bad, some are illegal by the rules of the game, and others simply have no point in the game). But the distinctions and grammars and possible moves for chess games cannot be added together with those for backgammon and soccer to make a unified super-game. At least, there is no floating point of view that could do so. What would be required would be a metaphorical combination or extension that created a practice that gave a point to the new possibilities. But such an extension would be made down on the field, not up in the balloon.

Further, our practices and possibilities intersect each other. Architectural vocabularies are not pure; their choice and the manner of their use are themselves moves in other games, so they limit and constrain one another. How I build and what I do with the vocabulary of the building are not purely aesthetic questions; they are also political statements, class identifications; they are involved in power relations within the group commissioning the building and within the group designing it, psychological tensions within individuals, and so on. These other games criss-cross in turn, but they do not form a neat hierarchy with a highest game that calls all the moves.

If our possibilities come from no unified origin, there will always be nooks and crannies, leverages, permanent tensions that are not part of any overall structure. There may be large structures, but there will be no overall structure. There will be historical continuities that can help resist the leveling desired by the bureaucracy or worked by the market. And there will be historical discontinuities that have the same effect.

Archetypal Guidance

But where do we start? We start from where we are. We are always moving within and from current conventions, already on the move in projects we did not choose, in languages we did not create. We do not have to choose between architecture and revolution. It is always too late to start from scratch; there is always language and meaning ahead and behind. That is the condition the moderns tried to overcome, but the tabula cannot be razed, and the attempt to do so leaves what was to be denied present as resented.

But if we have no centered overview, if we are extending our languages and forms of life as we build, how do we know which moves to make? Only some new combinations and moves suggest themselves. We work in a disciplined way, judging what is appropriate, and neither the discipline nor the judgment are universally rational. We work within history--but how?

Defenders of place often presume that a true home for us will be easily recognized, because of some inner harmony with our true self-identity and our deepest needs. But why should this be so? We have no equal access to our selves; we are not always aware of our needs, nor are our selves and needs so unified they are capable of being harmoniously expressed. And when architectural languages grow, a sensitive response may take some time, especially if the new place invites changes in our forms of

life.

If, then, there is a question of community and self-discernment, what guides can we find that will help us discover what we have been thrown among?

In a previous chapter I discussed the view of Norberg-Schulz (and related views of Harries) that natural archetypes can guide our building. We are to consult those inevitable constants such as our posture, light and dark, opening and enclosing, gravity and support, and the like. Then we should examine the locale for the language of its natural features, and build in a way which lets us dwell in what is given to us.

There are vital places which seem to have been built in this way; for instance, Norberg-Schulz's presentation of the old quarters of Khartoum is very convincing (1984). But the connection between the design and the environment does not show that only this design could have fit the locale. I argued earlier that the factors Harries cites do not of themselves provide an architectural language. Because they are almost universal, these factors do not by themselves provide guidance for how one might modulate them appropriately to a given project.

Further, the fact that a successful place can be read in this fashion does not show that this is the only way to create places. It might be that abrupt transgression of the natural scene would give us what is needed. Harries and Norberg-Schulz are too influenced by Heidegger's totalizing description of the modern world. While I agree with them that the alternative to modernity is for us to look for the languages and projects that we are thrown among, I question whether this means we should look for a natural or primal language.

Another recourse to archetypes is to guide our place-making by classic building types. These need not be absolutely universal; it is enough if the types are embedded deeply in our tradition and environment. Thus the colonnade, the domed building, the open market could have an almost universal significance, or at least a natural basis for their conventional significance. Some have elaborated this into a defense of classicism as providing a permanent set of types (Krier 1987, Porphyrios 1984).

But reference to types is not a helpful general solution. As I remarked earlier, any system of building types is inherently fragmentary. Because building types receive their significance from ongoing forms of life, they do not fall into systems except in so far as

daily life does. It would be a mistake to presume that we have a clearly articulated system of cultural activities on which we could hang a contemporary or revivalist set of building types. Our building types share the confusion of our social practices.

If we pretended that they formed a unified system, an enforced set of canonical building types might end up replacing the modernist universal pure language with a universal historicist language. Would we be better off? But if we avoid this static trap, then we countenance metaphorical changes in, among other things, building types. But that process of change is what the appeal to archetypes was supposed to control in the first place.

Regional Guidance

A more promising guide is regionalism. Consider first a simple criterion that dictates adherence to the region's particular shapes (or types or vocabularies). Something seems right about this idea, for it highlights the historical nature of real possibilities for concrete communities. But there are many problems; foremost is the lack of homogeneous regions. While the natural context may be constant in New England or in the Southwest (to name two regions that do maintain some architectural distinctiveness), even there the social and cultural scenes multiply and change. Maine natives and those "from away" who moved to Maine may not agree on the appropriate shape and amount of development, yet each claims a vision of the region. Recently Phoenix, Arizona, held a design competition for a civic center that would express the city's regional essence; there turned out to be no agreement on what that essence was, except general references to the desert and the Spanish heritage (Attoe 1987). Simple regionalism takes its regions too simply.

Our ideal of regionalism comes from Europe, where nations and cities have long histories with distinctive building traditions. But America lacks such convenient separations. No place today here or anywhere can rest serenely within a unique central tradition. This does not mean that there are no regions, only that we must not expect tight internal unity.

Kenneth Frampton urges regionalism as a strategy of resistance, because a regional identity is not something that can be exchanged for a more up-to-date model. Regional identities can hold out at least for a time against the maximization of profit and efficiency. This resembles Weber's retreat to humanistic enclaves. However, Frampton's regionalism provides more than refuge.

Everything will depend on the capacity of rooted culture to recreate its own tradition while appropriating foreign influences at the level of both culture and civilization. . . . Regionalism is a dialectical expression. It self-consciously seeks to deconstruct universal Modernism, in terms of values and images which are quintessentially rooted, and at the same time to adulterate these basic references with paradigms drawn from alien sources. . . . Any attempt to circumvent this dialectical synthesis through a recourse to superficial historicism can only result in consumerist iconography masquerading as culture. (Frampton 1982, 77; cf. Kurokawa 1988, 31)

Such regions would not be tight static unities. Frampton does not want regional identities to block the flow of change and capital, but to call on local resources that can shape the flow. He seems to me correct in his claim that "the model of the hegemonic center surrounded by dependent satellites is an inadequate description of our cultural possibilities." Those who deny that there is any such regional energy to qualify the universal flow are still too mesmerized by images of totality; they mistake claims about the universal dominance for an achieved total mastery of the local scene. Frampton himself sometimes talks in this manner, and envisions his regions more as hard blocks resisting a universal solvent. In the next chapter I will have more to say about this picture. Still, the general point made in the above citation seems right, that we must find some dialectic that allows historical identities and larger processes to interact in a way which qualifies both sides. But those historical identities seldom if ever sort themselves out into neat regions.

Regionalism as a strategy then becomes the broader task of finding our native languages and vocabularies in their messiness and intersection. Instead of presuming that there is some core identity to be preserved, we should rather seek to extend those languages, taking advantage of what we find already in action. A regional tone is partly found, partly created, always changing. But, again, just because it is historical and multiple does not mean that it is totally malleable. Judgments about such identities and their changes call for discerning appropriateness, for which there can be no rules, but which is not arbitrary or groundless.

Precedent and Rereading

We can gain some insight about ways of dealing with our multiple history by

considering the process of reaching decisions in the common law, which tries to maintain connection with the past while introducing changes as they seem appropriate. Peter Collins (1971) discusses the role of precedent in law and architecture, arguing that professional competence in architecture is joined with creative innovation in ways akin to innovation in the law. Collins tries to show that architectural judgment, like legal judgment, "must have a rational basis which can be intelligibly explained" (179). "Rational" here does not mean reliance on universal principles but on precedent and on the details of the problem set by the commission. It is the problem-solving aspect of architecture that distinguishes it, for Collins, from the "fine arts" (whatever the validity of that category, about which Collins has his doubts). Architecture will work best when it keeps continuity with the past in a manner similar to the flexible way precedent functions in the law.

William Hubbard (1980) analyzes a classic series of eleven common law liability cases dating from 1816 to 1932. The judges in each case "made their opinions plausible by showing how they submitted to the wisdom of their predecessors, but they made their opinions convincing by showing how they exceeded their predecessors" (121). The judges explained what they took to be essential in the precedents; their explanations go beyond the intent of the earlier cases, as far as that can be determined. The later cases reread the earlier and create a kind of continuity that expands the definition of liability. Continuity is not identity.

For architecture, Hubbard cites the six strategies of "misreading" from Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*. Bloom shows how poets redescribe past works to make them fit with new ones, how they emphasize those aspects of the structure of old works that prefigure the new, how they present the new as doing more fully what they say the old was trying to achieve. Such claims need not be made by theoretical pronouncements; they can be enacted in the new work itself.

It would be a mistake to take Bloom's term "misreading" as saying that the poets depart from a strictly historical reading of the past. What they are doing is what a historical reading always does when it is involved in new production.

I am bypassing the question whether critical commentary, as opposed to artistic production, can "get at" the historical precedent and preserve a notion of totally objective scholarship. Ultimately, I agree that it cannot do so, but commentary needs to be analyzed

differently than artistic production. Not that these form two utterly distinct genres, but there are different stances toward time and unity. I argued earlier that we could copy the past by duplicating old buildings, but that a copied Notre Dame, like a copied Don Quixote, does not have the same form as the original.

Hubbard avoids the Freudian themes that for Bloom define the poet's situation, and so he bypasses much of what Bloom is trying to say. Still, Hubbard applies Bloom's strategies to architecture in interesting ways. For instance, he compares Jefferson's University of Virginia campus and Moore's Kresge College, using Bloom's rubrics to show the mixture of continuity and criticism by which Moore asserts himself.

It seems right that what Bloom calls "strong misreadings" bring a rewarding sense of continuity and difference. But even with all the nuances Bloom suggests, continuity is only one way of relating to the past. Abrupt contestation or the appearance of a radical break are other ways that have been employed in architecture.

Hubbard, however, has reasons to desire at least the appearance of continuity. He contends that a crucial function of any organized activity (a game, the law, architecture) is to keep at bay our sense of the lack of ultimate grounds for what we do. We hide the void by a screen of conventions that, if we lend them our complicity, keep us finding new reasons to do things their way. A good building rewards our complicity by seeming inevitable; it continually provides new reasons for cooperating with the design, new aspects and meanings, and new relations to the past. A bad building gives us no reasons why it is designed this way rather than another, and so it reveals the dangerous void behind all design.

Hubbard states as a problem for the architect "how to create a configuration of forms that has such appeal, that feels so right, that an audience wouldn't want it to be any other way" (12). Whereas, "looking at postmodern buildings, we become so aware of how easily the arrangement could have been otherwise that we feel imposed upon; the arrangement feels capricious and we are dissatisfied" (7), "the best modernist buildings have at least the appeal of a quasi-inevitability" (8).

This presupposes that we will be damaged if we must face frontally our lack of absolute grounds. It is true that when we confront the limitation and mortality that make us what we are, we do not lose the desire for absolute grounds, but that confrontation may make us more, not less, accepting of the historical givens amid which we find ourselves

(cf. Krell 1986).

Hubbard's detailed analyses move in what seems to me the right direction: a forceful hermeneutic that questions accepted continuity but does not pretend to ascend above its own history even when changing or opposing it. But historical continuities and reinterpretations are more satisfying than he supposes. Nietzsche wanted us to own up to the death of God; but at least in his less resentful moments Nietzsche did not want us to keep our teeth clenched in disappointment. Hubbard's claim that we have to hide the groundlessness of conventions continues the metaphysical tradition's avoidance of the partial grounds and reasons that we do have. We need appropriateness, not necessity.

In the end Hubbard remains too much a disappointed modernist. Which is not to say that many postmodern buildings are not empty bombast. But critics who insist that postmodernism has departed from rational (or traditional) fixed principles into a no-man's land of arbitrary show are themselves still in thrall of the modernist desire for the inevitable design (cp. Kimball 1988). We cannot build places for ourselves if we remain under that severe rule, because that rule defines us as creatures of no place.

The Presence of the Past

Bloom's strategies bring the past into the present. Once there, it is submitted to our contrasts and meanings even as its rereading helps establish those contrasts. Earlier I pointed out how the architect's original intention, and architectural citations, irony, and parody, all decay when the building comes to be lived without reference to its original context. In such cases the past disappears; in Bloom's strategies the past remains but is overcome. In both cases the present dominates.

Can this process be generalized? Can we say that all our relations to the past are acts of Nietzschean reappropriation that take it into contemporary schemes of contrast and meaning? The past would be causally related to the present, but there would be no depth to its inclusion in the present. It is not clear if Nietzsche himself believes exactly this, given the ambiguities of his notion of genealogy. But modern Nietzscheans do; most boisterously in Baudrillard (1985) we hear the claim that the past has no presence save as elements reappropriated into a net of signifiers defined by current conditions of interchangeability. The past lingers as a simulacrum of itself inside our networks of exchange, to which it contributes nothing but one more token. So the past provides no deep roots; there is only the rhizome that crawls along making synchronic connections.

In one sense it is obviously true that the sets of contrasts which provide meaning are all contemporary. The modern horse evolved from the ancient Eohippus, but that does not mean that we have to learn about Eohippus in order to deal with modern horses. The relation is only causal, and does not affect the contemporary networks of meaning and practice in which horses appear. But not all relations to the past are of this type. Modern democratic institutions have evolved from a variety of older practices and theories. In this case, however, that background allows one to find tensions and repressed possibilities in the modern arrangements which may not be noticed by one who takes them as present immediacy. (For instance, the tensions between democracy as the general will, democracy as compromise, and democracy as dialogue.) The past provides an encounter with otherness and unfulfilled possibilities that have not been totally leveled out within the modern practices; they are not tokens in circulation but partial projects under way.

The Nietzschean claim about our relation to the past is quite general, and it does not try to restrict the form our appropriation of the past will take. In current discussions, however, the reduction of the past usually ends up with the claim that all our activities and language games become variants of one game of exchange, whether this is defined in semiotic or in capitalist terms (which I argued earlier are not equivalent).

What is it that is supposed to have so reduced the apparent variety of activities we engage in? What has happened to love and cooking and running for office? They are all involved in exchange, but they are not the same. Just because all languages link noun phrases to verb phrases does not make French the same as Japanese.

One could claim that the reduction is due to a universal condition for the possibility of any symbolic system, a condition that we have finally noticed for what it is. This claim can be read two ways. The unobjectionable reading points out that the slide of signifiers, self-transgression, and lack of a center conditions and afflicts *all* the games we play. This is important and true, and a source of what I have called humble irony. The objectionable reading is that self-transgression and exchange of signifiers is the *only* game we play. This is either trivial or false. It is trivially true in the sense that everything we speak is a language. It is false as a historical claim (and as a claim that invokes two suspect principles, essentialism, and the standard modernist story of final self-discovery).

Second, one could argue with Heidegger that some quasi-transcendental condition of modern existence, something like the essence of technology, reduces all human

activities to such flattened play. If this does not reduce to the ambiguous claim in the previous paragraph, it begs the question by postulating as a condition of possibility of today's culture the very unity of culture which is at issue.

Heidegger inserts a level of determination more pervasive than this or that philosophical school or scientific theory, but still determinate vis a vis other epochs in the history of being, *and* this determinate level is to be a condition of the possibility of individual propositions and practices.

Finally, one could claim more empirically that there is something currently active, perhaps the new technology or the media or the systemic imperatives of late capitalism, that has overpowered or undermined historical activities, reducing them to simulacra or commoditized versions of their former selves. While this claim again presupposes the kind of total dominance that is in question, it opens the door for discussion about the actual reach of the influences cited. This returns us to discussing ordinary processes and history, where we should mistrust such totalizing analyses.

We have complex historical identities that do not dissolve into total play. In designing places for ourselves we need to find ways to discern the languages and projects we find ourselves among. There are no infallible guides for such discernment. We need to read the multiple texts of our lives, to reread and write again. This will not lead to an inevitable place where we will be fully at home. Abandoning that metaphysical goal frees us to work from where we are. I have repeated too often that this work does not have to be ironic, though it cannot help being reflective. But can it be self-critical? The last chapter deals with the problems of self-criticism and wholeness in the multiple city.