Borders and Centers in an Age of Mobility

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A centerless sprawl of development replaces the older opposition of cities to small country towns. In some places the sprawl pulls itself together into Edge Cities; in others it just spreads. Its economic, social, and political difficulties are well known, and while sprawl was encouraged by particular incentives and subsidies in the U. S., it has become an international condition in other regulatory and transit regimes. To many it is a prime example of modern and postmodern "placelessness." In response to formless sprawl, many theorists urge the creation of resistant places. In this essay I contrast and criticize two such strategies, Kenneth Frampton's bounded enclaves, and Karsten Harries' centered communities.

Kenneth Frampton seeks ways to resist the "infinite megalopolis" of sprawl and commodification. He proposes strategies of resistance through the creation of regionally inflected zones. In his influential article, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance" (Frampton 1983), Frampton argued that the modern global economy diminishes human life in order to increase efficient exchange and profit. This shows in the impoverished functions recognized in International Style architecture and modernist planning. It shows in the continual loss of density and texture in places under the pressure of market efficiency, and in the increasing similarity of places and buildings constructed with standardized techniques.

In order to resist the reduction of places and buildings to tokens of exchange that are optimal for their brief function, the same everywhere and gone tomorrow, Frampton urged that we emphasize local particularities of design and construction.

> The universal Megalopolis is patently antipathetic to a dense differentiation of culture. It intends, in fact, the reduction of the environment to nothing but commodity. As an abacus of development, it consists of little more than a hallucinatory landscape in which nature fuses into instrument and vice versa. Critical Regionalism would seem to offer the sole possibility of resisting the rapacity of this tendency. Its salient cultural precept is "place" creation; the general model to be employed in all future development is the enclave, that is to say, the bounded fragment against which the ceaseless inundation of a place-less, alienating consumerism will find itself momentarily checked. (Frampton 1983a, reprinted in Nesbitt 1996, 482)

Frampton is not recommending a simple return to traditional place making. Local modes on their own can be oppressively narrow and exclusive, but when cross-bred with the universal

technical civilization they could create bounded areas that might resist leveling. Local identities can put humane constraints on technical rationalization and optimization -- for instance, local activity patterns might oppose the global reliance on air conditioning or standard wall styles. Nor are local identities easily traded in for newer fads.

It is local identities that will provide the resistant core for bounded enclaves. In his study of the information age's flows and mutations, Manuel Castells remarks that

> Identities are so important, and ultimately so powerful in this ever-changing power structure -- because they build interests, values, and projects, around experience, and refuse to dissolve by establishing a specific connection between nature, history, geography, and culture. (Castells 1997, 360)[1]

Frampton believes that a critical regionalism can work an interplay of local identity and universal system, and so create more livable places, at least as resistant islands within the global flow.

> The fundamental strategy of Critical Regionalism is to mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived indirectly from the peculiarities of a particular place. . . . It may find its governing inspiration in such things as the range and quality of the local light, or in a tectonic derived form a peculiar structural mode, or in the topography of a given site. (Frampton 1983, in Foster 1983, 21)

> Critical Regionalism is a dialectical expression. It self-consciously seeks to deconstruct universal modernism in terms of values and images which are locally cultivated, while at the same time adulterating these autochthonous elements with paradigms drawn from alien sources. After the disjunctive cultural approach practiced by Adolf Loos, Critical Regionalism recognizes that no living tradition remains available to modern man other than the subtle procedures of synthetic contradiction. Any attempt to circumvent the dialectics of this creative process through eclectic procedures of historicism can only result in consumerist iconography masquerading as culture. (Frampton 1983a, reprinted in Nesbitt 1996, 472)

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1. Castells himself despairs of any positive interaction between local and global cultures, and he proposes a quite different architectural strategy than Frampton, namely "the architecture of nudity . . . whose forms are so pure, so diaphanous, that they don't pretend to say anything. And by not saying anything they confront the experience with the solitude of the space of flows. Its message is silence" (Castells 1996, 420). For Castells, architects have a difficult choice to make. "Either the new architecture builds the palaces of the new masters, thus exposing their deformity hidden behind the abstraction of the space of flows; or it roots itself into places, thus into culture, and into people. In both cases, under different forms, architecture may be digging the trenches of resistance for the preservation of meaning in the generation of knowledge. Or, what is the same, for the reconciliation of culture and technology" (Castells 1996, 423). There is no middle or interactive road between the poles of Castells' duality, because he defines places as closed rather than relational unities.

Frampton insists that we must resist the leveling effects of global optimization toward technically similar but superficially localized places. As a remedy his critical regionalism has much to recommend it, yet however perceptive Frampton's attacks may have seemed, the diagnoses and prescriptions in the original essays feel insufficient now. Less often these days do we see the blandly functional universal architecture Frampton originally attacked. Those boxes are now dressed up in local symbols and allusions. The mall has gable fronts, and regional touches in its kiosks and decorations. The local is emphasized in themed marketing streets and affirmed in themed villages selling a history to passersby on Interstate 80. Local identities and forms have become tools of the universal economy. The dominant means-end rationality Frampton resisted has developed a stronger marketing component. Far from enabling resistance to the universal system, local place characters have become a way to further integrate us into a system of fads and fashions and purchased identities that can be endlessly exchanged for one another.

In response, and without backing down from his critical regionalism, Frampton has increasingly emphasized the component of tectonic honesty that was always present in his theory. He insists that we should design and build so as to dramatize the act of construction and the building's standing amid physical forces, "the presentation and representation of the built as a constructed thing." In revealing its tectonic character as a built and standing thing, the building will need to take account of local differences in climate and materials and construction techniques. This will produce something more than a standard box covered with a local scenographic scrim. Frampton now states his general goal as "A 'transavantgardist' desire to return to the timelessness of a prehistoric past . . . as a potential ground from which to resist the commodification of culture." (Frampton 1990, reprinted in Nesbitt 1966, 527)[2]

Frampton's has a worthy goal of creating places where global and local interact in complex ways, but his emphasis on tectonics causes problems. First, if one claims that expressing tectonics is the fundamental architectural strategy, then there is a strong temptation to go on to the claim that "The sense of gravity is the essence of all architectonic structures and great architecture makes us aware of gravity and the earth" (Pallasmaa 1996, 47). This is overly restrictive. Not all past tectonic effects have dramatized the building's relation to gravity, and future techniques are likely to make that an optional effect. There will be new

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2. An emphasis on tectonics is not a modernist desire for naked expression of construction. Frampton says that "We are not alluding here to mechanical revelation of construction but rather to a potentially poetic manifestation of structure in the original Greek sense" (Frampton 1990, reprinted in Nesbitt 1996, 519). Frampton accepts that many tectonic expressions, from Renaissance pilasters to Miesien I-beams, are really applied decoration rather than "honest" self-presentation of construction. But he insists that we must build so that the building shows its act of standing and its interaction with the forces of nature, rather than primarily showing itself as a fungible token amid the flows of the economy.

building materials -- fiber composites, self-modifying smart materials, and the like -- which will allow effects different from what we now expect. Such strong or self-adaptive materials can minimize the physical presence of the act of resisting gravity. Recall what iron construction did to the height/width ratios of Corinthian columns in late nineteenth century buildings. The new materials can do again and more what iron and steel once did, namely support a building in one way while allowing the illusion of a different mode of support, or of none at all:

> The widespread treatment of facades as computer screens . . . only goes to show that tectonics in its classic sense can no longer be claimed as the fulcrum of architecture. On the contrary, structural mechanics become either invisible (just as typewriters shed their mechanical clap-trap and transmogrified into laptops) or transformed into mere rigs on which to suspend the equipment for atmospheric effects. (Forster 1999, 29)

Frampton wants a building to dramatize its tectonic acts so that it has more presence than a mere token of commodity forces. On the other hand, linkage and self-conscious inhabitation might want to build so as to emphasize those economic and cultural effects. "Architects are no longer content to articulate symbols of utility or the mechanics of construction. Other forces, chiefly invisible ones, have begun to manifest themselves through the physical properties and the experiential effects of buildings" (Forster 1999, 29).

Tectonics will be very different, too, when we build stations in space. It may be important to emphasize the built quality of such structures, as a sign of reassurance and control in a threatening environment. But there is no base for the structures to rise from.[3] They will instead deal with centrifugal forces from rotation and air pressure. Space buildings may seem extraneous to a discussion of terrestrial sprawl, but they are signs of new construction techniques and ideals, showing "an environment where even gravity holds no sway, a place that requires no corners, no orthogonality, no directionality. . . . and our concept of space back on earth can hardly be unaffected" (Giovannini 2000, 119).

Frampton's insistence on the creation of bounded enclaves is problematic in another way. Frampton has been concerned about what happens when local meanings and tectonic effects are picked up by the *universal* flow and turned into commodities. Against that he urges bounded enclaves. But there are problems with boundaries when we consider what might happen when particular local tectonic effects, symbols, and meanings are picked up by *other particular* localities. Suppose we create a place using our ethnic or religious

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3. It might seem that a space station without a base to rise from would not be a building. But this begs the question, for it would still be a place, and the issue concerns what constructional effects can do to offset the commodification of places as well as of buildings narrowly defined. It would also be possible to build a space station as a chaotic assemblage of units stuck together with no constructional unity; this may well happen if space stations develop the equivalent of suburban strips.

symbols and local construction techniques, producing tectonic and meaning effects that affirm our local identity just as Frampton would wish. Then some other people over there in another enclave use our symbols and build our tectonic effects, but with quite different purposes in the service of different identities. Perhaps they parody ours as a way of affirming themselves. That is bad enough. Their earnest use would be even more threatening, since parody keeps a reference to our original usages while serious use suggests that our symbols and tectonics aren't really ours, that they can also appear with quite different histories and connections. Should we let those others appropriate "our" symbols and ways of building? How much local ownership is possible or desirable here?

Strictly speaking, any symbol and any constructional technique or tectonic effect can be borrowed and used in new contexts. We cannot stop that without resorting to legal maneuvers or deadly fatwas. Surely Frampton does not mean that each locality should violently assert restrictions on foreign use of its tectonics and symbols. If we reject the notion that each group has a right to forbid the reuse of what it considers local essentials, is local identity weakened by this potentially unrestricted circulation? What happens to the boundaries of the enclaves? Local regions could become blurred or compromised.

The simplest way to deal with such conflicts would be to embrace total mobility: everyone is free to use any symbols and tectonics they wish. Anything goes, anywhere. A strategy of non-ownership would avoid hostile localities battling over who had the right to build onion domes or use a given decorative symbol. But the environment could then become a jumble where everything goes, everywhere. We would then have the bland homogeneous mixture that Alexander worries about in his discussion of the mosaic of subcultures (Alexander 1977, 42-50 -- see the discussion of Alexander below). This would produce a more jumbled version of what Frampton opposes as a commodified monoculture. Thus the issue of the ownership of symbols and tectonics does strike at Frampton's program.

These problems can also arise within a single enclave. Does a majority have the right to forbid or restrain a minority from building in a way the majority finds offensive? Or could a minority in one area forbid or use violence to keep the majority from building in ways that the minority found excluding or oppressive? Could Boston Irish prevent the construction of a Hindu temple in "their" suburbs? Could Turkish immigrants protest the Greek columns on the post office, or Native Americans protest Colonial houses? Again a liberal solution might dictate that the majority can build in its way but not so as to exclude. But who decides what counts as exclusion? What if nomads arrive who find any fixed building excluding? As with current debates over speech codes, one group would attain veto power over another's design possibilities, resulting in a universal banality lacking regional character. In other words, does Frampton's hope for distinctively local bounded areas depend on the existence

of exclusive populations?

Frampton's reply might be to disengage locality from ethnic or cultural identity, and emphasize the natural environment. In the American southwest, for instance, whatever your ethnic identity you have to deal with the sun and the desert. Techniques and building forms that succeed in meeting those challenges give an identity to the place as a natural region rather than as the home of a particular cultural group, even if these techniques and building forms may have originated with one or another particular group. Obviously the success of this reply presumes that rights of ownership are not asserted over tectonic and constructional effects. Also, this reply does not deal with borrowings across similar climatic zones, such as New England, Scandinavia, and northern Japan. Also, the "natural response" to a region's environment depends on the current state of technology, and there is no reason that responses must be the historical ones with earlier materials and techniques. Alterations in construction technology or ecological balances might force the adoption of non-local practices (for instance, if ceramic construction materials were perfected that made wood construction ecologically less desirable).[4]

These problems stem from the mobility of persons, symbols and tectonic effects across the porous boundaries of enclaves. My own suggestion would be to break down the closure of bounded areas. Use linkage to open up the locality so that not everything here refers to here, so we experience here as within a multiplicity of places and grammars. With today's communications we will know that in China or Botswana they are using our styles or symbols in odd ways and odd combinations. We can accept the backwash effects on our own identity, as we see our symbols and tectonic effects in new contexts, which open new possibilities for us, too. This does not, however, mean that all places need to become the same. We can celebrate the particularities of linkage interpenetration and encourage place characters to vary in their complex mixtures, rather than in fixed single identities. We are all in the symbolic flow together, without owning fixed identities, but the flow varies, and we still find ourselves within the density of history and natural location, with all their links and complexities. As places and identities get more complex, strategies of thinning can have less hold on them.

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4. There can be another turn to the issue of ownership: "Authenticity has also been used by [native peoples] in their struggles to regain power over their own lives. While postcolonial theorists embrace hybridity and heterogeneity as the characteristic postcolonial mode, some native writers in Canada resist what they see as a violating appropriation to insist on their ownership of their stories and their exclusive claim to an authenticity that should not be ventriloquized or parodied. . . . Ironically, such tactics encourage native peoples to isolate themselves from contemporary life and full citizenhood" (Brydon 1991).

Like Frampton, Karsten Harries hopes for places that provide a shared community dwelling, but he emphasizes centers more than borders. This will provide more flexibility in dealing with the mobility characteristic of our age. Also, Harries appeals to what he calls the natural language of space, which is both universal and particular in a way parallel to Frampton's dialectical mixture of the two, but more open to change and mixture.

Harries reworks the old distinction between humdrum everyday buildings and special decorated architecture. He argues that it is the precise task of architecture to provide a central marker for affirmations of unified community. Such a central building "re-presents itself in the image of an ideal, thus creating a fiction about itself. By its choice of what to represent and the form of representation, it communicates a particular understanding of what is taken to matter in architecture, signifying a particular ideal of building and thus of dwelling" (Harries 1997, 120).

A "particular ideal of dwelling" affirms what it means to be people in this community, here, with its customs and values, in a tradition that defines its members. "Sacred and public architecture provides the community with a center or centers. Individuals gain their sense of place in a history, in a community, by relating their dwelling to that center" (Harries 1997, 287).[5] Today we need such centering because "Instead of genuine proximity we are increasingly offered only its perverted analogue: the equidistance and thus the homogeneity, the indifference, of place. . . . there is a sense in which most of us today live in mobile homes" (Harries 1997, 172). In the midst of modern mobility we need "a tradition that determines our place and destiny, in which we stand and to which we belong" (Harries 1997, 210). Harries concludes that "architecture will have a future only if the place once occupied by temple and church can in some sense be reoccupied" (Harries 1997, 324).

That reoccupation is no easy task. We cannot simply return to building churches and temples. Furthermore, Harries agrees with Frampton that simple celebrations of locality run the danger of becoming oppressive. Harries warns against "the ideal of a completely integrated dwelling, a dwelling that leaves behind the fragmentation of atomic individuals

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5. Harries's claim that communities need to be structured by a dialogue between everyday buildings and special edifices is similar to the New Urbanist principle of differentiating everyday from civic buildings, though Harries puts more spiritual-political demands on the central edifices (Harries 1997, 362). On the other hand, when he speaks about what building types might carry on the community-defining legacy of temple and church, Harries does not stop with the suburban holy trinity of church, school, and city hall. He suggests many other building types that could center a community: monuments, theaters, museums, landscape parks, open festival spaces, and architectural follies. Values do not have to be literally monumentalized; they can be made present through modest architectural events that become important to a community. Throughout, however, Harries argues that our need for some ongoing connection with the past and tradition demands centered modes of spatial and community unity.

and returns them to the community . . . [erasing] the boundaries between aesthetic, ethical, and technological considerations" (Harries 1997, 330). He sees more clearly than many critics that we should mistrust the "dangerous dreams of an architecture strong enough to return us to what has been lost" (Harries 1997, 12). While Harries urges that we must be part of something larger than ourselves, his experiences in war-torn Germany demonstrated the risks of such recommendations. Nonetheless he insists that some centering around shared ideals will be demanded for any community that is to be more than a temporary utilitarian alliance.

Like Frampton's, Harries' ideas are affected by the issues I raised earlier concerning the ownership of symbols and tectonic effects. Which centers are to be celebrated in an age of mobile and multiple groups, some of them non-geographical? However, because he emphasizes centers rather than resistant borders, Harries recommendations are more flexible than Frampton's. An area with multiple populations could possess multiple centers that re-present different or overlapping community ideals of dwelling. Harries' own recommendations aim at a stronger and more uniform community, but his ideas are more readily adaptable than Frampton's to an age of multiplicity and mobility.

However, that multiplicity and mobility tend to damage a fragile aura of non-arbitrariness that Harries feels we need in our traditions. Harries' insistence on the importance of tradition and centering parallels Frampton's attempt to create a dialectical relation between the local and the universal. Although he celebrates local centering, Harries insists that we moderns have won a long battle against the restrictions of place (Harries 1997, 168). Traditional places have closed horizons: "Inseparable from a strong sense of place is a lack of freedom" (Harries 1997, 163). After describing an eighteenth century German farmhouse such as Heidegger invoked so fondly, Harries continues, "I suspect that most of us would find having to live in such a house spiritually confining, even as we are likely to feel twinges of nostalgia when we now visit. But we have learned to demand more freedom, more openness." Our needs for freedom and openness stem, Harries thinks, from the modern need to reflect on the particularity of our social and place norms. We cannot abandon this modern freedom and self-awareness. As a result we are caught between the need for freedom and the need for some foundation that will give weight to our choices. "Where do we find a ground or measure in the infinite realms opened up by reflection? How can we justify the way we live?" (Harries 1997, 68).

Multiple coexisting traditions and mobile symbols pose a problem, because they undermine the naturalness of accepted traditions, as I suggested earlier when discussing Frampton's borders. But without that naturalness how can we accept the authority of any central ideal

of dwelling? Harries claims that we cannot simply decree meaning and weight into some ideal of dwelling. "Any center that we know to derive its authority only from our own free will has to strike us as arbitrary. Meanings must be discovered; they cannot be willed without self-deception" (Harries 1997, 291). To live fully we need a shared dream that allows us to measure our life in terms of some ideal of dwelling. Yet such projections will seem arbitrary unless they are experienced as responses to an obscurely glimpsed essence. "Values or meanings cannot finally be made or invented. . . . To carry authority they must be experienced as creative responses to a more primordial and still inarticulate understanding of what it is to dwell" (Harries 1997, 212)[6]

For Harries, we are thus caught in an unresolvable tension, but to some extent he has manufactured our dilemma because he is not willing to accept justifications that are not based on ultimate grounds, and he cannot accept ultimate grounds, yet he demands justifications. The dilemma also depends on a questionably sharp division between critical reflection and simple unreflective living. The older modes of life were secure but unreflective; ours are reflective but unjustified. He sees nothing in the middle and no other dimensionality to the processes of reflection.[7]

Harries' way of limiting the multiplicity and mobility of modern symbols and peoples is a sophisticated version of the return to nature. He argues that there are meanings implicit in

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6. "We moderns have become too reflective, too critical, simply to entrust ourselves to what has been. . . . We have no choice but to attempt to articulate what is essential and natural. . . . our confusion leaves us no reasonable alternative to reappropriating the lessons of the Enlightenment. We, too, have to try to recover origins"(Harries 1997, 114). There is a natural order to be glimpsed, not created; yet our glimpses provide only a precarious interpretation of "the transcendent and thus never quite comprehended and shifting ground of all our valuations" (Harries 1997, 298). At times, Harries also claims that communal values need to be established by artistic creation. "Pure reason has shown itself incapable of discovering the true ends of human actions. Such discovery requires the aid of myth . . . the mythopoeic function of art remains indispensable" (Harries 1997, 282). I would argue that reason can provide more in the way of goals, though they need particular schematizations that may be provided by art. Sometimes Harries also seems to intend such a view, when he speaks in a more Habermasian vein: we pursue "unending attempts to defeat arbitrariness by grounding (or criticizing) the established and accepted. And here 'reason' and 'nature', even if never 'pure,' remain as the only still available authorities" (Harries 1997, 382-3n1). For more on how Harries understands the genesis of modernity, see Harries 2001.

7. Harries' sharp dualism between lived experience and reflection follows Heidegger's reading of modernity as Cartesian. I have argued elsewhere that Heidegger moved beyond that reading to the theory of modernity in terms of das Gestell, and that neither one of Heidegger's analyses does justice to the more intricate mediations and mutual constitutions involved in modern consciousness and society. Likewise, we should not be so quick to presume that our ancestors did not possess modes of critical self-reflection, though they may not have been institutionalized as firmly and centrally as they have become today (see Kolb 1986 and 1990).

certain spatial arrangements and movements.[8]

> That this particular configuration of verticals and horizontals [in a Greek temple] moves and speaks to us presupposes what I shall call the natural language of space. This natural language has its foundation in the way human beings exist in the world, embodied and mortal, under the sky and on the earth; it is bound up with experiences of rising and falling, of getting up and lying down, of height and depth. Buildings speak to us because our experience of space and therefore of particular spatial configurations cannot but be charged with meaning." (Harries 1997, 125)

> [This language] can be called natural in that [it has its] foundation in the nature of human being in the world, in experiences of lying down and getting up, of climbing and descending, of lifting, raising, and supporting: experiences of the opposition of earth and sky, darkness and light, matter and spirit. (Harries 1997, 187)

These species-wide responses cannot be simply transcribed into buildings or city plans, yet they can still guide our constructions. Although any appropriation of these natural responses will be an interpretation, not a transcription, of the natural meaning-effects, it will not be an arbitrary choice. Harries suggestion, then, is to seek out these natural meanings and build so as to reveal and work with them in re-presenting local ideals of dwelling.

This appeal to a natural language of spatial effects gives Harries conceptual resources that Frampton lacks. The natural meanings are universal yet they do not reduce to the language of world-wide technology which Frampton sees as today's only universal idiom. Furthermore, Harries' natural meanings are both universal and local, since they are incorporated into local modes of building to express local ideals of dwelling. They also include more than the tectonic effects that Frampton appeals to. So Harries' reference to local building practices offers more substance than Frampton's similar appeal.

However, this appeal to a natural language of space does have its problems. Even granting that such species-wide architectural effects exist as something to be taken into account in the creation of architectural and civic places, Harries' prescription is phrased in terms of tight dualities between revealing and ignoring the natural meanings, between necessity and arbitrariness, and between reflection and simple living. Just as with his prescription for centers, a more relaxed approach to these dualities might suggest different ways of taking them into account.

It might be important to some local ideal to flamboyantly build against such meanings.

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8. A full discussion of Harries' proposals concerning the natural language of space would have to consider the extent to which the effects he cites exist as always already interpreted, and whether or not this "language" includes any "syntax."

Communities can overlap; the same area can "be" multiple centers. This situation, which is very common today, poses problems because it demands an ideal of openness and tolerance that seems to create a larger shared ideal of dwelling, but one that Harries would rightly claim is too weak to do the work of community-building he requires. This can be seen in today's monuments. Many of our more impressive monuments, such as the Grande Arche in Paris, or the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, do deploy natural meanings and effects such as Harries describes, but these effects do not strongly identify with a particular historical community or ideal of dwelling. They touch our human situation without affirming a particular community. The danger, then, is that in a time of pluralism and mobility the recommendation to use natural meanings may provide only a high seriousness without clear direction.[9]

Harries' centered communities are more flexible than Frampton's bordered enclaves, but Harries still needs to consider other modes of community and the interaction of multiple centers. Harries' understanding of centered community is very acute, but he does not sufficiently consider what new kinds of unity and cohesion might be coming along in our new modes of embodiment and spatial dispersion. He, like Frampton, appeals to a set of "traditional" definitions of institutions and community that presuppose a relatively homogeneous population sharing a single ideal of dwelling. This grows less common in a world of linkages and connections creating multiple, often non-geographic unities.

But that is not to say that every place should resemble every other in some mixture of links and allusions to everywhere else. In discussing the "mosaic of subcultures," Christopher Alexander worries about the way in which too much intermixing could reduce a city's built environment to a bland homogeneity where the same elements are present everywhere (Alexander 1977, 42-50). He urges that intermediate sized regions in the city need to feature different building styles and include different types of retail and restaurants. His model seems to be the old ethnic neighborhoods, though he is thinking more of life style than ethnic or class differences. He argues that such diversity benefits the city population as a whole, but can be maintained only by a degree of residential specialization in local base populations supporting the mosaic's atmospheres and commercial areas (and keeping such areas from becoming only spectacles and themed places for visitors). The interplay of different place norms and characters within and across such a city mosaic could be quite complex, though there are obvious potentials for conflict and oppression. On the other

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9. Henri Lefebvre points out that "a particular institution may have a variety of functions which are different -- and sometimes opposed -- to its apparent forms and avowed structures. . . . The same abstract form may have opposing functions and give rise to diverse structures" (Lefebvre 1991, 149, 152).

hand, without some such specialization everyone's life might be impoverished.[10]

Alexander is right that a city or a suburban region[11] would benefit from areas of differing character. But the desire for architectural and spatial distinctiveness seems to conflict with today's less neatly compartmentalized populations. Multiple and mobile populations will not be necessarily confined to "their own" areas in city or suburbs, and today's places overlap in non-centered and non-hierarchical ways.

City blocks would indeed lose their distinctiveness if each contained a mix of the same twenty different styles of building and retail. Exclusions and choices need to be made without being "owned" by any one population. Restricted local uniformity at an intermediate scale seems needed to support variety at larger scales. Will the uniformity within these areas then be oppressive? Not necessarily, for two reasons. First, architecturally, there is no minimum size for links. An overall architectural character need not correspond to one single overarching place norm, or if it does, that norm can be inflected by the small-scale presence of links and niches where other sets of norms and expectations show through. An area of the city or the sprawl could maintain an overall unified character while being porous at smaller scales, with a variety of links and signs of variety and its insertion into differing larger contexts.

Second, intermediate sized regions that maintain some distinctive architectural character do not have to be culturally homogeneous. Alexander, like Frampton and Harries, presupposes more homogeneity within an area than is needed. N. John Habraken points out that loyalty to an area and its style can stem from diversity as well as homogeneity.

> Inhabitants of the local -- and all inhabitation is local -- function in networks, too. A
> single person may constitute a node in more than one active network (religion, hobby,
> work, relatives). This may not only reduce the time that person actually spends at
> home, but also divert her attention from local affairs when there. . . . Moreover, my

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10. Kevin Lynch argues that "The values that impel so many people toward segregation (such as security or easy primary relations) argue that within any mix there must be clusters of similarity which are relatively homogeneous and 'pure' so that people may be at ease among their own. At the same time, for reasons of equity, the mix within large areas should be more balanced, and regional access should be high. There should also be zones of transition ('blurs'), within which status is more ambiguous, so that people may 'cross over' if they choose." (Lynch 1981, 267)

11. Large cities may provide an exciting interplay between specialized districts and overlapping place norms. Suburbs, however, provoke special criticism for lack of architectural and cultural diversity. Insofar as the sprawl contains the kind of mosaic Alexander speaks of -- usually segregated by class -- its pieces are much larger than those in cities. But mostly the different regions of the sprawl tend towards the bland homogeneous mixture that Alexander condemns, with the same units (scattered residences, residential enclaves, malls, retail strips, office buildings, golf courses, etc.) mixed in more or less the same ways everywhere.

neighbor and I may find no overlap comparing the networks into which we are locked. We may share neither religion, nor race, nor work, nor hobbies. If sociocultural coherence is low, what does that mean for the environment we share? Must our homes express such differences as true nodes in different networks? Perhaps, on the contrary, formal coherence may be even more important because environmental preference is what brings us together. Just because we can easily relocate, sharing environmental coherence may be more important than ever. But then again, such coherence does not signify shared experience and need not be rooted in local formal tradition. Our common preference may be for an imported or recently (designer) invented environment. (Habraken 1999, 31)

In our complex world, preference for living in a certain area no longer automatically means agreement in a set of standard values and affiliations. Nor can any single formal strategy, no matter how traditional or anti-traditional, sum up today's places and their multiple social norms.

Both Frampton's dialectic of universal and local, and Harries' combination of natural meanings and local centerings, can help us deal with our mobile situation, but only when these ideas are used more flexibly than their authors may have intended. Harries and Frampton both urge more distinctive architectural characters for different regions. But it is dangerous to equate distinctive architectural character with single and bounded sets of local norms and social codes. Not only are such unities often unavailable, but when taken as goals they are too easily commodified and themed. Places today need more complex unities, in order to resist systemic pressures toward easy consumability.

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