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 how we can build on our historical grounding.

Chapter 12. Self-identity and Place

How, especially in a world that names itself homeless, are we to create places for ourselves? Should we even try?

Buildings are not neutral containers; they shape the way we stand and move, the way we feel, the way time and space come to us. The dense reality of a building can affect us on more levels than our analyses provide. Often the building only repeats, or narrows, the forms and possibilities we already live. But architecture can offer us new ways to hold ourselves, to move and to be, and so criticize our current life by helping us feel how we might be differently.

The modern movement saw in this a chance for its buildings to focus the energy of a new age. Their masterworks still amaze us with the power they impart. Yet, caught in its own restrictions and in the homogeneity of the modern economy, the modern movement could not keep its promise. More and more, it reproduced everywhere one diminished set of possibilities. Postmodernism wanted to build freer places, but what has often resulted is an affirmation of one ironic meta-place.

In current discussions *place* does not mean merely a location with some functionally convenient structures. Place is where we feel at home in an articulated, legible pattern of locations and buildings that sustain and shape us by opening possibilities, supporting our forms of life, embodying priorities, and perhaps by expressing social ideals or cosmological patterns.

Discussions about place understandably tend to pit modernity against tradition. We imagine the past as filled with intensely local places each with its own unique character:

European villages, small-town regional America. Modernism decreed that architecture would signify the uniform utopian life of the new age, and it continued industrial society's march toward rationalized homogeneity. Mass consumption and the dominance of exchange-value over use-value render it more efficient to make locations similar to one another, reducing their differences to surface decoration.

To reclaim a more human dwelling, perhaps here and there amid the landscape of consumption and efficiency there should be spots for centering and renewal that will keep us in touch with a history that goes beyond functionalism.[begin note] Cf. the bibliography in Seamon 1987.[end note] A traditional home might furnish a refuge from the anonymous world, or a public building might embody communal aspirations and rekindle our idealism (cf. Moore, Allen, Lyndon 1974). Such a prescription stays within the modern project: people have a functional need for some special places, so planning should provide them. This is Weber's strategy of retreat: a rich domestic architecture provides a haven but cannot challenge the anonymous world outside.

Differentiated Places

Habermas notes that everyone in the current debates over place recognizes the problems we face.

[Modernist and postmodernist] agree in the critique of soulless "container" architecture, of the absence of a relationship with the environment and the solitary arrogance of the unarticulated office block, of the monstrous department stores, monumental universities and congress centers, of the lack of urbanity and the misanthropy of the satellite towns, of the heaps of speculative buildings . . . the mass production of pitch-roofed doghouses, the destruction of cities in the name of the automobile. (1985a, 318)«IP»

The postmodernist sees these "atrocities" as consequences of modernism's basic stance; the modernist sees them as betrayals of the avant-garde spirit. Habermas counts himself among those who want to continue the unfinished projects of modern architecture.

He diagnoses the problem using the notions of system and lifeworld that I described in an earlier chapter. The lifeworld is that background of beliefs, values, and practice that provides a horizon of meaning for our actions. It is a cultural construct that must be renewed and handed along to provide community identity. Buildings embody and help form the distinctive practices and values of a community, and so they are one way of

transmitting the lifeworld. But in our day the reproduction of the lifeworld has been dominated by imperatives stemming from the workings of the economic system. Lifeworld meanings are being thinned out, and so places become thinner as well.

In the ideal situation the reproduction of the lifeworld and the workings of the economic system would be distinct but would constrain each other. Community practices and values would put limits on the instrumental considerations of the system, and systemic restrictions would keep community practices truly practical. But in our world the influence has become one-way. The common lifeworld is ever more subject to considerations of instrumental efficiency, while the system is unconstrained by communal values and mutual decision procedures. More and more the act of building becomes determined only by systemic considerations of profit and efficiency.

There is, for Habermas, no architectural or design solution to this problem. It requires new institutions for community decision making, and a form of democratic social control of the economy that keeps the system from overwhelming the lifeworld. But even if we imagine such sweeping changes to have been accomplished, there would still be something different about modern places that would keep them from being equivalent to those old villages and towns.

Recall his emphasis on the differentiation of modern culture into independent spheres where art, law, and science develop free of outside influences. Habermas believes that we must preserve the expert status of art. Architecture "is subject, as is art in general, to the [modern] compulsion of attaining radical autonomy" (1985a, 323). At its best, the modern movement's ideal of functionalism was the coincidence of a shape that developed from the "inner logic" of pure form with a solution that met the building's program.

So, any cure for the problems of place today must preserve autonomy on several levels. We need to overcome the dominance of systemic forces on the lifeworld, so that the autonomy of community values and practices will be preserved, and places can reproduce a richer lifeworld. But we should avoid anti-modernists who ask for "a de-differentiation of the architectural culture" (1985a, 318). We must allow the artist to have the autonomy to generate forms according to the independent logic of the art. (How this will result in connection with lifeworld values and practices Habermas does not say; here as elsewhere he is unclear about the way the expert spheres connect to everyday life.)

We also must safeguard the autonomy of the community in evaluating and changing its values and practices. This means that no place should impose a past upon us.

Tradition cannot simply dictate how we build. Habermas has no use for nostalgic programs that prescribe covert returns to un-liberated modes of life.

Habermas poses the problem as a choice between undoing differentiation (and so moving back from modernity into a traditional culture) or accepting differentiation and working within it to complete the modern project. One reason it is crucial to maintain the independence of the expert spheres is that they provide a haven from which criticism can be launched against the systemic homogenization of life. But is it necessary to provide the spheres with their own independent inner logics for this to be possible? Especially in architecture it seems that many languages and games cross and intersect, and there is no process working under its own radically autonomous logic.

Earlier I argued that Habermas's notion of the lifeworld, which is meant to put us back into history, fails to do so because of the way the lifeworld is related to the universal project of self-criticism in his Socratic three-world story. Our inhabitation of our history is more spacious than his picture of traditional society, and we can criticize from within rather than invoke universal formal goals. But does this avoid the nostalgia he rightly criticizes?

Heidegger's Deep Places

Many thinkers influenced by Heidegger think of place not as an occasional refreshing center amid the wider world, but as itself a world. Heidegger pictures a net of places that support forms of life; these places "open a domain in gathering things which here belong together" (cf. Risser 1987). These are "things" (in Heidegger's special sense of that word) that call us to activities and open up modes of relating within a world or meaningful context of significance. He writes of the wine jug that in its use brings together a whole way of life with its practices, its past, its ideals, and its projects. He speaks of the place gathered by the bridge over the river that supports and calls together a differentiated world of town and country ways of living. He writes of the Greek temple that centers the life of the people while also allowing the natural environment to appear within a that context as something that transcends our human worlds. The jug, the bridge, and the temple are not neutral facts onto which meanings are projected. Rather they are encountered as gathering together a life that has no distanced standpoint outside the world called forth.

Rejecting the modern subject/object picture of meaning and activity, Heidegger argues that we should not conceive of the self as the source of some activity that reaches

out to a world of neutral objects. Rather the self always already finds itself out amid a world of meaningful things, already in motion with goals amid a network of relations to other goals. There is no center from which a pure projection of meaning and value (or self-criticism) could issue.

In his post-war "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger claims that if we think of projects as posited by the individual subject (as a *vorstellendes Setzen*), we miss the point that it is being itself which "throws" our existence. ("*Das Werfende im Entwerfen ist nicht der Mensch, sondern das Sein selbst, das den Menschen in die Ek-sistenz des Da-seins als sein Wesen Schickt. Dieses Geschick ereignet sich als die Lichtung des Seins, als welche es ist*" [Heidegger 1946, 17, 25]). This precludes any Sartrean freedom in giving meaning to the world. But it also precludes the kind of self-active critical process described by Habermas. Heidegger acknowledges that it also affects his own critical project, and he makes complex maneuvers around this point, which prefigure the attempts of deconstructive writers to be both critical of and complicitous with the tradition.)Cf. Vattimo (1988) for a development of Heidegger's idea of *Verwindung* as a mode of critical relationship).

This includes purposes as well as meanings. In rejecting the subject/object picture Heidegger also rejects the fact/value distinction. We do not encounter bland objects to which the self then attaches a value. There is no self except in the encounter with a world that already contains paths we are in the process of treading and tasks we are in the midst of doing. Heidegger says that our projection of goals is neither prior to nor subsequent upon the projection of the world as a meaningful whole; these two are equally original (*ebenso gleichursprünglich*, Heidegger 1962, 141).

We can never get behind the thrownness of the self to some purely individual project of meaning and purpose whose determination is totally the work of the self. Nor can we get behind such projects to pure neutral events set loose from all involvement in the network of meanings and purposes (Heidegger 1962, 284). The space (*Spielraum*) within which we move already has its own harmonies and structures.[begin note] On this point Heidegger plays with the distinction between *bestimmen* and *gestimmen*. Our projects are given a determinate shape (*bestimmt*) as they are harmonized (*gestimmt*) with our world and with the meaning of being that provides the underlying theme of that world. [end note] There is no moment of original constitution, no state of nature free of meaning and purpose, in which the naked individual or society chooses how to limit its original possibilities down to those of one culture or language.

Heidegger used the term "project" (*Entwurf*) in an attempt to describe the situation of the self as always flung out among things. The term is ambiguous because it could also signify that we fling out onto the world our subjective nets of meaning and values; this is just the opposite of what Heidegger intended. To emphasize that our projects are not completely our own he speaks of us as "thrown projects" (*geworfene Entwürfe*).[begin note] "Any project -- and therefore also any 'creative' action of a human being -- is *thrown*, that is, determined by a un-controllable delivering of Dasein over to what already is as a whole." We can never get behind this "thrownness" to some pure construction of meaning and purpose whose determination is totally the work of the individual self or society.

This notion of a thrown project clarifies Heidegger claim that a real *place* would gather the world as a network of meanings and goals within which we find ourselves. It also helps us understand that when Heidegger speaks about "authenticity" he does not propose a return to a mythical state of subjective naked choice, but rather a resolute taking up for ourselves of the finite meanings and paths we find ourselves among.

Heidegger does not see the limitation inherent in authentic place as frustrating some drive towards unlimited possibilities. That would be to repeat the modern mistake. He speaks rather of the power of the rooted life that "thrives in the fertile ground of a homeland and mounts into the ether, into the far reaches of the heavens and the spirit," and he worries that everything will now "fall into the clutches of planning and calculation, of organization and automation" (1966, 49) as the ruthless efficiency of modern technological society levels all regions to a bland availability and devours their traditions.

We could not build just a few locations that would meet Heidegger's definition of place; we would have to change our whole life. But Heidegger thinks we cannot make that change. The overall meaning of our world is not something we can plan or manipulate, even though our modern world's meaning itself centers around the revelation of all things as available for planning and manipulation. Indeed, this is what has destroyed real places, but it is more our destiny than it is some error we can correct.

Heidegger dearly loved the rural culture of his region. Though he proposes no romantic escape from our technological world, he imagines that things might be different. In the past there were local places and gathered ways of life. In the future, when the technological world has run its course and new ways of life have been granted to us, real place may once again be possible. In dreaming of such a world Heidegger suggests that there would be little travel and no tourism there, because people would be at home in a

sense no one can achieve today (Heidegger 1977, 127). Modern life's travel and media level all places out to a mute availability that makes everywhere equally distant while destroying real nearness. In true places our explorations would be in depth rather than wide travel. Such assertions come in part from Heidegger's provincial suspicion of the cosmopolitan world of the more established German intellectuals. But they also stem from Heidegger's claim that all possibilities are intrinsically limited.

The places Heidegger describes are intensely local; his examples are all contained within mountain valleys that provide natural limits and centers. Yet they encompass the whole life of their inhabitants. They are not domestic enclaves but whole, though qualitatively distinct, worlds.

Heidegger misses a crucial aspect of the modern problem of place and roots. It is wrong to contrast the rooted life with modern anonymity as if our options were either finding a single unified world in an Alpine valley or else losing all true place in a featureless spread of calculated locations. Ours is a world of many places that interpenetrate and shift and influence one another. We who talk about these things will never find a quiet deep-rooted valley with strong enough walls to make us forget that the world is wide. There may be people in actual valleys who do not think much about that wider world, but if we are partaking in the present conversation then we no longer live in such valleys. Too often today we encounter the ersatz valleys of narrow belief walled in by anger. The key to our escaping the non-place Heidegger fears is not a retreat to the lovely valleys but *a pluralism without resentmen*t.

*The issue is multiplicity, even within single place*s, and what it would mean to make places in a multiple world. Meditation, not dialogue, marks the way of Heidegger's thinking. He always distrusted those who spoke too easily and broadly; for him dialogue was a sign of shallow thought. It was best to meditate silently, then pronounce authoritatively. Heidegger did not understand the need for travel and dialogue across places because his philosophical commitments forced him to evaluate the contemporary multiplicity of discourses as a degenerative rather than a creative condition. It could only mean that real places and things have been reduced to the status of objects to be manipulated. If we had things and places in his strong senses of those words, we would have a tradition and a world. Other things and other traditions there would be, and we would relate to them in various ways, but our own identity would remain firm.

It may sound strange to speak of Heidegger as defending "firm" identity. He is, after all, one of the originators of deconstruction, and for him there is no calm center to the self.

We are never totally "in" any world or identity. But the disruption Heidegger finds within any identity lies in the way that identity is revealed; the "content" of the identity can be still quite unified. Heidegger felt quite able to make remarks about the deep identity and destiny of the Germans, or the national character and fate of the Americans or French. Heidegger's move is always to explore our roots in depth rather than encounter the Other.

According to the early Heidegger, to become authentic we must face up to our mortality and limits. When we become authentically resolved we take up our *whole* thrownness (our *ganz Geworfenheit* [Heidegger 1962, 382]). But this presupposes that our thrownness has enough unity to be taken up as a whole.

The simplest way of interpreting what Heidegger means would be to say that in becoming authentic we take up and ratify the whole *formal* structure of our thrownness. That is, we admit and resolutely accept the groundless historicity of our projects, whatever content they may have. Resolute authenticity would in this interpretation refer to *how* our thrown projects exist, not to their content.

But for Heidegger our thrownness includes something that is not purely formal, a particular understanding of being (Heidegger 1962, 221). Heidegger emphasizes the content of our projects. What we take up, says Heidegger, comes to us as a "heritage" (*Erbe*). Our past comes to us as a path for the future. Heidegger speaks of the world of meaning and projects already in motion as our "fate" (*Schicksal*). And it is clear that this heritage or fate has some unity. Indeed, he says it is only an aspect of the larger "destiny" (*Geshick*) of our time and generation; there is some task for our generation to do (cf. the reference to Dilthey in Heidegger 1962, 385, and the remarks in Heidegger 1971 about inheritance and task).

This is not a simple historical determinism, for in authentic resolve we take up that destiny in a way that finds new meaning in its depths. That is the activity Heidegger calls "retrieve" (*Wiederholung*), whereby our thrown possibilities are taken up *as* possibilities for creative renewal.

Still, with such talk Heidegger moves very far from modern notions of free subjectivity. The problem has been highlighted by (but is not limited to) Heidegger's Nazi activities in the 1930s, which have been continuously controversial down to the present day. (Among recent publications, cf. Victor Farias, *Heidegger et le nazisme* (Paris: Verdier, 1987); and the more definitive examination by Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: Unterwegs zur seiner Biographie* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1988). Cf. also the suite of articles assembled in

Critical Inquiry, Winter 1989 (vol. 15, no. 2), and the discussion by Thomas Sheehan, "Heidegger and the Nazis," *New York Review of Books*, vol. xxv, no. 10 (June 16, 1988), pp. 38-48.)

Does Heidegger's idea of destiny mean that the individual is fated to take up the cause of his *Volk*? Is the emphasis on the thrownness of our projects an affirmation of blood and soil? It certainly sounds that way in some of Heidegger's pronouncements in the 1930's, where he describes the task of his generation and of the German people in terms resonant with National Socialist ideology. And in his silence afterward he seems to suggest that there is no way to judge that destiny. Later, Heidegger talked about the technological world as a fate that surrounds and directs all our projects.

To my mind Heidegger's notion of "thrown projects" is an important contribution to the overcoming of modern illusions. Heidegger's difficulties stem not from the notion itself but from the fact that he mistakes the unity appropriate to our projects. Talk of our *Volk* and our generation suggests a whole unified world already enfolding us. But need the world be so unified?

Heidegger would argue that our thrownness must be in some way a totality. He is willing to grant that our reflective conceptual account of the world does not need to be unified into some systematic whole such as philosophers have sought. But he demands that our pre-reflective active world have the unity of a single meaning of being. Any such understanding must be of "beings in totality" or "beings as a whole."

He would claim as an understanding of the being of beings as a whole, our thrown project must affect all beings it discloses, and it must be unified, since a disclosed plurality of understandings of being would be contradictory; in which sense of being would they "be" a totality, or "be" at all? But even granting that a project includes an understanding of the being of the entities that it lets stand revealed to us, why must we presume that those entities must include beings in totality?

Heidegger is making the Kantian presumption that all local languages and practices must have an inner skeleton of fully general categories and principles. But need this be the case? Perhaps language and practice are, as Wittgenstein would claim, a motley assemblage of local activities without any deep unity or general reach. Could not our pre-reflective world be an interpenetration of many different understandings and projects, in the way that our ordinary language is a jumble of local theories and ontologies and projects? Nor need this multiplicity be gathered together in the background. To demand

that it be so encountered is to demand too much unity from the self. Any presentation of the multiplicity *as a whole* would be in a subsequent act of reflection.

We can relate this to an earlier point. It is tempting to think of modern individuals as exemplifying a process that has its own build-in goals independent of all contingent content. Thus we might define individuals as preference or interest maximizers. The interests are the contingent material, while the process of maximizing is defined in a formal way that does not include any particular content.

But there is a hidden substantive commitment even here. Why maximizing? Why not minimizing our interests? Or satisficing? Or spurning them for creativity?

Maximizing is chosen because it is presumed that the organism has needs and desires it wants to fulfill, not frustrate. This seemingly innocent biological or psychological presupposition hides the real issue. For wants and desires come already coded, and maximizing is just one operator within such codes. By the time we are sufficiently developed to be individuals, to be able to say our desires or choose our projects, we are already strung on language and culture. There are no naked desires; it is always too late for that. But does not mean that there is one deep language that structures all our desires.

If there is no final language before or behind the multiplicity, then we should not be seeking with Heidegger for some unified secret sense of our age, or for nostalgic places where we can finally be at home. Our task is, as Nietzsche says, to "give style" to our character and to our places, style that does not come from some necessary deep unity so much as from openness and a willingness to take up the possibilities we are thrown among in a way more multiple than Heidegger would approve.

This would mean toning down the seductive "history of being" in Heidegger's later thought. The descriptions of the various epochs of that history become at most heuristic guides to tangled situations. In particular we should mistrust Heidegger's seductive analysis of technology and *Gestell* as "the essence" of modernity.

The question about modernity's universal perspective becomes the question whether we can have a formal and universal language that can embody a set of pure goals above any historical project. Originally this pure language was proposed to house metaphysical systems; lately it has been proposed (especially by Habermas) for self-criticism. Critiques of the ideal of a pure language abound today; I will not rehearse them here. What I want to stress is that these critiques have as a consequence that all our projects, even our projects for self-criticism, are "thrown projects" rather than pure self-

activity.

Empirical Places

Thinkers influenced by Marx share Heidegger's distrust of contemporary culture, but diagnose the problem in a much more empirical way. They argue that the postmodern world has a material base that Heidegger and his followers need to take more seriously (cf. Foster 1983 and Jameson 1983 and 1985). Place is not being destroyed by a destiny of being, nor by the metaphysical search for security and selfhood, but by the socio-economic facts of life. The international flow of capital, the loss of control over national and regional markets, the commoditization of architectural use-value, these are what doom any attempt to stabilize places today.

At its most pessimistic, with Manfredo Tafuri (1976; 1987), this line of thought leads to the conclusion that the architect can do nothing to influence the overall system. While Le Corbusier could offer architecture as a way to accomplish the goals of revolution, for Tafuri there will be no architecture until after the revolution. A slightly less pessimistic Frederic Jameson and Kenneth Frampton see the possibility for architects to keep alive the ideal of place as a sign of resistance.

Lyotard deals very differently than Frampton or Jameson with the problem of local places (1984; 1986). He certainly opposes the rule of flowing capital that turns all our language games into strategies of exchange. But the postmodern condition is not just due to the flow of capital erasing local places. It is a semiotic condition, a universal circulation of signifiers released from the myth of a direct relation to the signified. Chains of signifiers float and interpenetrate; firm identities are myths; neither the self nor society has enough consistency to build a stable place. Any attempt to hold on to a rigid system of signification can be a form of terrorism.

For Lyotard the flow of capital actually restricts postmodern flexibility. Capital introduces its own terror as it reduces the flow of signs to the simple exchange of performance and profit. The cure is not to further restrict the flow by making solid local places, but to widen it with new language games that challenge what has been established and present new forms and phrases that cannot be translated into the common coin of information exchange, at least for a time. In doing so we reinvent ourselves. This is similar to and follows the same stages as the metaphorical transformation of language that I described earlier, though Lyotard stresses discontinuity and independence where I stress affiliation and intersection.

I argued above that Heidegger burdens his discussion of place with undue emphasis on unity and totality. There is a similar danger when critics speak about our being dominated by the system and flow of late capitalism. This can sound like modernism's universal force of rationalization that was to have overwhelmed all historical styles. We are no longer so convinced that modernism made history vanish; perhaps we should be slow to believe that capital is already universally dominant. Is this the only way we are to describe our situation? Must we characterize everything in terms of its subservience or resistance to that flow? Why should we assume that the deepest description of our lives is that of the financial or cognitive masters? Why not assume that the natives might be in touch with their own situation? Certainly, we cannot deny the pressure on local places. That it completely dominates may be a fantasy of totality, a fantasy which has been strengthened by the modernist concepts we tend to use to describe our situation.

Adorno and Horkheimer's apocalyptic despair has become popular again today, but Habermas seems to me correct in his conclusion that our problems stem from a pressure upon the lifeworld rather than a complete victory for the impersonal imperatives of system flow and efficiency. I criticized Habermas for the purely formal goals contained in his three-world story, and tried to suggest ways in which his attempt to broaden the notion of rationality could be widened even further, but his overall picture of system and lifeworld seems more useful than the dramatic totalizations in much postmodern thought. I take up these issues again in the section on consumer culture in the final chapter.

Deconstructed Places

If we are not imperial rationalists, nor Heidegger's rooted peasants, nor easy ironists, what kind of place can we make for ourselves? Neither the moderns nor most postmoderns challenge the goal of making places that express our identity. But should we even try to be "at home"?

For Derrida and others the desire to be at home in a place is an attempt to close the gap between us and some centering values and ways of life, as if we could overcome the distantiations and divergencies that make it possible for us to have a way of life at all. There is no way to embody the center, which is always deferred; the indwelling center has always no longer been where it was supposed to be. The unity of dwelling always escapes us; like any structure of thought or language, a built place contains the movement of its own deconstruction. Architecture should make this manifest by using the local language to show how it never fully comes together.

We should, in this view, give up the picture of buildings as something in which an individual or a community can represent itself to itself. Our attempts to be at home are made possible, and ultimately frustrated, by the labile non-presence of the building "in itself." Peter Eisenman attempted to design a house that showed this. His House X dealt with problems of centering and multiple readings as he deconstructed the purist language of his own earlier plans. The line between this and the ironic postmodern mode can be hard to find, but House X, which is full of complex inner relations and references that frustrate one another as they allow multiple readings and pit standard unities against one another while none of them achieve totality, is not an exercise in ironic historicism.

Eisenman's task was made simpler because the purist language he chose to deconstruct already contained explicit centering principles that made wonderful targets. It is less clear how the deconstructive gesture would be accomplished with a fuller and more ambiguous historical vocabulary, but there is no reason to think it could not be done.

Yet if it were done, such buildings would lose their point if there were very many of them. They need contrast with an accepted language; if a deconstructive mode itself became the accepted language, the buildings would lose their inner tension. Turned into architectural vernaculars that could fill the fabric of our cities, such buildings would no longer work as they were intended(!) to do. Deconstruction does not allow us to make places but only to dance on the borders of the almost-places we have. All places have borders even in their centers, and the deconstructive task is to find those borders and the ways in which our constructions cross them while denying that they do.

If all unified places maintain their limits because in marginal ways they enact their own decentering and self-transgression, this is a permanent condition of all places. But it does not mean that we cannot have effective places to the extent that they are possible. And for the play of deconstruction to work, they have to be possible. Marginality demands pages. If there were no text to deconstruct then either the deconstructive architecture would become empty irony or it would collapse into a new orthodoxy. In either case there would be a new metaphysical text and the deconstructive task would begin anew.

But if they remain deliberately marginal and play against the mass of others, deconstructive buildings could have a pivotal role. Instead of extending architectural vocabularies, as I have urged for ordinary buildings, deconstructive architecture could demonstrate the limits of any vocabulary and the ways our vocabularies are implicated in wider codes and systems. There is a sense in which every building does this, but the city would be helped if some did it explicitly.

There is a tendency to run together deconstructive criticism with the critique of late capitalist society. This is useful but dangerous, for it can turn the delicacy of deconstructive operations into a blunt instrument of totality. Homelessness, transgression, decenterdness and the like become reified as tools with which to oppose current trends. Deconstruction is not a theory which reveals some hidden level of forces waiting to be enlisted on our behalf. It can free us for more creative gestures and resistances, but it does not by itself take a stand on the issues of the day. To think it does is to change it into haughty irony and hidden totality.

Too much discussion about place presumes a single identity for each self or community. That identity is to be expressed in a place, or to be overwhelmed by some universal flow. But if our identities are not single-ply, if tradition is not a simple immediate given, then a livable place may not be a matter of dogged resistance. Frampton is right when he says that our universal civilization and our local cultures must qualify each other (1983). But how are we to find in the local culture projects and forms of life that can help define places? The next chapter discusses what we might find in ourselves and our communities to guide our building.