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place and placelessness

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On the identity of places

There are two major reasons for attempting to understand the phenomenon of place. First, it is interesting in its own right as a fundamental expression of man's involvement in the world; and second, improved knowledge of the nature of place can contribute to the maintenance and manipulation of existing places and the creation of new places. The real difficulty lies, however, not in the justification of the study of place, but in the development of adequate concepts and approaches for this. These must be based on the recognition that, as Wagner (1972, p.49) expresses it: "Place, person, time and act form an indivisible unity. To be oneself one has to be somewhere definite, do certain things at appropriate times." Given this fusion of meaning, act, and context, it has sometimes been suggested that generalisations about places cannot be formulated. "Both region and writer, person and place, are unique", declares Hugh Prince (1961, p.22), "and it is in their distinctive qualities that we find their essential character." From this it follows that to capture, comprehend and communicate 'essential character' depends largely on artistic insight and literary ability. Such an approach is well illustrated in the work of many novelists and other artists, for example Ronald Blythe's *Akenfield* (1969), a study of an English village through the verbatim accounts of its inhabitants, or Lawrence Durrell's essays (1969) about the Greek Islands collected under the title *The Spirit of Place*. An alternative method is that of systematic and objective description and analysis in which places are considered only in terms of their general properties, for instance as gap towns, commuting centres, central places or points in isotropic space. In fact neither approach offers much towards an understanding of places as phenomena of experience: the former is too specific and the latter is too general. What is required is an approach and attendant set of concepts that respond to the unity of 'place, person, and act' and stress the links rather than the division between specific and general features of places.

It is the purpose in this chapter to examine one such set of concepts and methods relating to the notion of 'identity' of place. This examination is based on the recognition that while places and landscapes may be unique in terms of their content they are nevertheless products of common cultural and symbolic elements and processes (Wagner, 1972, p.5). Identity of place is as much a function of intersubjective intentions and experiences as of the appearances of buildings and scenery, and it refers not only to the distinctiveness of individual places but also to the sameness between different places.

4.1 The identity of places

The notion of identity is a fundamental one in everyday life. Heidegger (1969, p.26) has written: "Everywhere, wherever and however we are related to beings of every kind, identity makes its claim upon us." Thus we recognise the identities of people, plants, places, and even nations. Possibly because it is so fundamental, identity is a phenomenon that evades simple definition, although some of its main characteristics are apparent. In particular the difference yet relationship between 'identity of' and 'identity with' should be noted. The identity of something refers to a persistent sameness and unity which allows that thing to be differentiated from others. Such inherent identity is inseparable from identity with other things; Erik Erikson (1959, p.102), in a discussion of ego identity, writes: "The term identity ... connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself ... and a persistent sharing of some kind of characteristic with others." Thus identity is founded both in the individual person or object and in the culture to which they belong. It is not static and unchangeable, but varies as circumstances and attitudes change, and it is not uniform and undifferentiated, but has several components and forms.

Kevin Lynch (1960, p.6) defines the identity of a place simply as that which provides its individuality or distinction from other places and serves as the basis for its recognition as a separable entity. This tells us only that each place has a unique address, that it is identifiable. Ian Nairn (1965, p.78) offers some expansion of this: he recognises that "there are as many identities of place as there are people", for identity is in the experience, eye, mind, and intention of the beholder as much as in the physical appearance of the city or landscape. But while every individual may assign self-consciously or unself-consciously an identity to particular places, these identities are nevertheless combined intersubjectively to form a common identity. Perhaps this occurs because we experience more or less the same objects and activities and because we have been taught to look for certain qualities of place emphasised by our cultural groups. Certainly it is the manner in which these qualities and objects are manifest in our experience of places that governs our impressions of the uniqueness, strength, and genuineness of the identity of those places.

It is clear that rather than being a simple address in a gazetteer or a point on a map, identity is a basic feature of our experience of places which both influences and is influenced by those experiences. What is involved is not merely the recognition of differences and of samenesses between places—but also the much more fundamental act of identifying sameness in difference. And it is not just the identity of a place that is important, but also the identity that a person or group has *with* that place, in particular whether they are experiencing it as an insider or as an outsider.

In the following discussion identity is considered in terms of, first, the constituent components of the identity of places; second, forms and levels of outsideness and insideness, or identity with places; third, the links between individual, group, and mass images of places and the identities of those places; and finally, the ways in which identities develop, are maintained, and change.

4.2 The components of the identity of places

If we consider places only in terms of their specific content, they present a remarkable diversity—one in which common elements are not readily apparent. Furthermore, our experiences of places are direct, complete, and often unselfconscious; if there are component parts, they are experienced in the fullness of their combinations. However, from a rather less immediate perspective one can distinguish elements, bound together but identifiable nevertheless, that form the basic material out of which the identity of places is fashioned and in terms of which our experiences of places are structured. These are like the fundamental components of a painting—the canvas, the paint, the symbols, each irreducible to the other but inseparable. Albert Camus' essays on North Africa are used here to demonstrate the components of the identity of a place, but almost any description or direct observation of a particular place would serve just as well.

In his essays on the life and landscape of Algeria Albert Camus (1955, 1959) uses a clearly structured approach in his accounts of places. Both when he is describing his own experiences and when he is describing as an observer he reveals not only what appear to be the basic components of the identity of all places, but also the interweaving of these. Consider for example his account of Oran (1955, pp.130–131):

"Oran has its deserts of sand: its beaches. Those encountered near the gates are deserted only in winter and spring. Then they are plateaus covered with asphodels, peopled with bare little cottages among the flowers ... Each year on these shores there is a new harvest of girls in flower. Apparently they have but one season ... At eleven a.m., coming down from the plateau, all that young flesh, lightly clothed in motley materials, breaks on the sand like a multi-coloured wave ... These are lands of innocence. But innocence needs sand and stones. And man has forgotten how to live among them. At least it seems so, for he has taken refuge in this extraordinary city where boredom sleeps. Nevertheless, that very confrontation constitutes the value of Oran. The capital of boredom besieged by innocence and beauty ..."

Here Camus makes quite clear the major features of the landscape around Oran. First there is the bountiful physical setting of sand, sea, and climate and buildings. This provides the backdrop to the ostensible,

observable activities of the people, yet is complemented by and influences those activities. But embracing and infusing both of these is a set of meanings for Camus—particularly the opposition of innocence and boredom.

These three components of place that are so apparent in Camus' writings—the static physical setting, the activities, and the meanings—constitute the three basic elements of the identity of places. A moment's reflection suggests that this division, although obvious, is a fundamental one. For example it is possible to visualise a town as consisting only of buildings and physical objects, as it is represented in air photographs. A strictly objective observer of the activities of people within this physical context would observe their movements much as an entomologist observes ants, some moving in regular patterns, some carrying objects, some producing objects, some consuming objects, and so on. But a person experiencing these buildings and activities sees them as far more than this—they are beautiful or ugly, useful or hindrances, home, factory, enjoyable, alienating; in short they are meaningful. The first two of these elements can probably be easily appreciated, but the component of significance and meaning is much more difficult to grasp.

The meanings of places may be rooted in the physical setting and objects and activities, but they are not a property of them—rather they are a property of human intentions and experiences. Meanings can change and be transferred from one set of objects to another, and they possess their own qualities of complexity, obscurity, clarity, or whatever. All this is well illustrated in an example quoted by Stephan Strasser (1967, pp.508–509). In 1084 St. Bruno went to the French Alps to establish himself as a hermit there. Before his arrival the environment was quite neutral to him; it was what it was without meaning. But by seeking in those mountains a place to meditate St. Bruno and his followers made them meaningful in terms of this intention—they became 'dangerous' or 'safe', 'useful', or 'inhospitable'. And subsequently as their intentions changed, as they found a suitable site and began to look for land for cultivation, or as his followers now try to get rid of troublesome tourists, so their situation was modified. In other words the meaning of the situation, of the place, was defined by the intentions of St. Bruno and his followers. This is, of course, a very straightforward example; meaning is much more complex than this for intentionality is itself very complicated, involving both individual and cultural variations which reflect particular interests, experiences and viewpoints. But the example of St. Bruno does serve to demonstrate that places can only be known in their meanings.

The three fundamental components of place are irreducible one to the other, yet are inseparably interwoven in our experiences of places. In explicating this experience, however, they can be identified as distinctive poles or focuses, and they can be further subdivided within themselves. Thus the physical component can be understood as comprising earth and sea and sky, and a built or created environment, each of which offers its

own characteristic possibilities for experience (Dardel, 1952). Similarly activities and functions can be distinguished as being creative or destructive or passive, as communal or individual. The relative weighting of each of these subcomponents may be of considerable importance in establishing the identity of particular places—thus we recognise coal-mining towns or mountain villages. Artists, photographers, and novelists may even compress identity into one small feature which somehow captures the essence of a place; Wallace Stegner (1962) found that for him the spirit of his former home town of Whitemud on the Prairies was expressed above all in the smell of wolf-willow.

Such selection or concentration of the identity of a place into one feature depends, of course, on local circumstances and on the purposes and experiences of the author, and is not especially relevant to the present, more general discussion. What is significant here is the way in which physical setting, activities, and meanings are always interrelated. Like the physical, vital, and mental components of behaviour that Merleau-Ponty (1967) identifies, it is probable that they constitute a series of dialectics that form one common structure. Physical context and activities combine to give the human equivalent of locations within the 'functional circle' of animals (see Cassirer, 1970, p.26); setting and meanings combine in the direct and empathetic experience of landscapes or townscapes; activities and meaning combine in many social acts and shared histories that have little reference to physical setting. All of these dialectics are interrelated in a place, and it is their fusion that constitutes the identity of that place. Physical appearance, activities, and meanings are the raw materials of the identity of places, and the dialectical links between them are the elementary structural relations of that identity.

This analysis of the components of identity of place is not, however, complete. There is another important aspect or dimension of identity that is less tangible than these components and dialectics, yet serves to link and embrace them. This is the attribute of identity that has been variously termed 'spirit of place', 'sense of place' or 'genius of place' (*genius loci*)—all terms which refer to character or personality. Obviously the spirit of a place involves topography and appearance, economic functions and social activities, and particular significance deriving from past events and present situations—but it differs from the simple summation of these. Spirit of place can persist in spite of profound changes in the basic components of identity. Rene Dubos (1972, p.7) writes: "Distinctiveness persists despite change. Italy and Switzerland, Paris and London have retained their respective identities through many social, cultural and technological revolutions." The spirit of place that is retained through changes is subtle and nebulous, and not easily analysed in formal and conceptual terms. Yet at the same time it is naively obvious in our experience of places for it constitutes the very individuality

and uniqueness of places. D. H. Lawrence (1964, p.6) wrote:

"Different places on the face of the earth have different vital effluence, different vibration, different chemical exhalation, different polarity with different stars; call it what you like. But the spirit of place is a great reality."

4.3 Insidiness and outsidiness

The major components of the identity of place do not apply solely to places, but are to be found in some forms in all geographies, landscapes, cities, and homes. The essence of place lies not so much in these as in the experience of an 'inside' that is distinct from an 'outside'; more than anything else this is what sets places apart in space and defines a particular system of physical features, activities, and meanings. To be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is this identity with the place.

Norberg-Schulz (1971, p.25) has written that "to be inside is the primary intention behind the place concept; that is to be somewhere, away from what is outside". In a similar vein Lyndon (1962, pp.34-35) has suggested that basic to place is the creation of an inside that is separate from an outside: "Being inside is knowing where you are." It is the difference between safety and danger, cosmos and chaos, enclosure and exposure, or simply here and there. From the outside you look upon a place as a traveller might look upon a town from a distance; from the inside you experience a place, are surrounded by it and part of it. The inside-outside division thus presents itself as a simple but basic dualism, one that is fundamental in our experiences of lived-space and one that provides the essence of place.

The manifestations of the difference between inside and outside are many and obvious—the walls of buildings and of old cities, town limit signs, national frontiers, phrases such as 'in town' and 'out of town'. In this context the significance of doors, gateways, and thresholds becomes quite clear. Eliade (1959, p.18 and p.25) summarises it: "The threshold concentrates not only the boundary between inside and outside but also the possibility of passage from one to the other." But it is at precisely this point that Bachelard's warning (1969, p.211 and pp.217-218) takes on significance: "Outside and inside form a dialectic of division, the obvious geometry of which blinds us ... Outside and inside are both intimate—they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility." Thus, to take a mundane example, we go out to the city into the countryside, yet return again into the city. In fact the dualism of inside and outside is not quite as clear as it appears at first sight.

In part this reversal of inside and outside occurs because each of us becomes "the centre of a sort of mental space, arranged in concentric zones of decreasing interest and decreasing adherence" (Gabriel Marcel,

cited in Tuan, 1971, p.185). These zones are defined by our intentions; if our interest is focused on our home then everything beyond home is outside, if our concern is with our local district then everything beyond that district is outside, and so on. In short, as our intentions vary, so the boundary between inside and outside moves. In consequence there are many possible levels of insiderness. Furthermore, to some degree we carry these zones around with us as we move, we are always at the centre of our perceptual space and hence in a place. This egocentric structuring of space helps to blur any sharp division between inside and outside that may be presented by physically or culturally defined boundaries. And these physical boundaries may themselves be blurred—medieval city walls were surrounded by *faubourgs*, modern cities fade through suburbia, subtopia, and exurbia into the countryside, and architects and planners offer us, in Cullen's phrase (1971, p.28), "indoor landscapes and outdoor rooms".

The lack of clarity in the distinction between inside and outside can be understood, in part at least, as a function of the different levels of intensity with which we experience outsiderness and insiderness. A number of such levels can be identified, and while these are not discrete and precisely separated they can be recognised as more or less distinctive ways of experiencing places. Peter Berger (1971, pp.20-21) distinguishes three levels of the assimilation of anthropologists into the cultures which they study: (i) behavioural—engaging in the activities of the culture while remaining a dispassionate observer; (ii) empathetic—involving emotional as well as behavioural participation, while retaining an awareness of not being a full member of the culture; (iii) cognitive or 'going native', in which case it ceases to be possible to do cultural anthropology. Although this classification has a specifically methodological context it does suggest the possibility of similar breakdowns of insiderness in places. Thus there is behavioural insiderness—or physical presence in a place; empathetic insiderness which involves emotional participation in and involvement with a place; and existential insiderness⁽⁵⁾, or complete and unself-conscious commitment to a place. These are all modes of experience that are immediate and direct, but there are also other modes that are less immediate: vicarious insiderness refers to the experience of places through novels and other media; through incidental outsiderness places are merely backgrounds for other activities; from the perspective of objective outsiderness places are treated as concepts and locations; and existential outsiderness involves a profound alienation from all places.

(5) The term 'existential insiderness' is used here to avoid confusion with the term 'cognitive space' used elsewhere in this book. Clearly 'cognitive' as employed by Berger has the same sense as 'existential' in this context.

4.3.1 Existential outsiderness

"The new city was still to me as though denied and the unresponsive landscape spread its darkness as though I were not there. The nearest things did not bother to reveal themselves to me. The alley climbed to the street light. I saw how alien it was" (Rilke, cited in Pappenheim, 1959, p.33).

Rilke's poem expresses a rejection of an individual by a place which he is condemned always to observe as though from outside. There is an awareness of meaning withheld and of the inability to participate in those meanings. This is the condition of existential outsiderness that has fascinated so many nineteenth and twentieth century novelists and poets.

Existential outsiderness involves a self-conscious and reflective uninvolvedness, an alienation from people and places, homelessness, a sense of the unreality of the world, and of not belonging. From such a perspective places cannot be significant centres of existence, but are at best backgrounds to activities that are without sense, mere chimeras, and at worst are voids. Thus Proust's comment (1970, p.288) that "the places we have known belong now only to the little world of space on which we map them for our convenience". And Henry Miller's harsh assessment (1947, p.xv) of America:

"America is full of places. Empty places. And all these empty places are crowded. Just jammed with empty souls. All at loose ends, all seeking diversion. As though the chief objects of existence were to forget. Everyone seeking a nice cosy little joint to be with his fellow man and not with the problems which haunt him. Not ever finding such a place, but pretending that it does exist. If not here then elsewhere."

In existential outsiderness all places assume the same meaningless identity and are distinguishable only by their superficial qualities.

4.3.2 Objective outsiderness

The deliberate adoption of a dispassionate attitude towards places in order to consider them selectively in terms of their locations or as spaces where objects and activities are located, involves a deep separation of person and place. Self-consciously places are changed from facts of immediate experience into things having certain attributes, within systems of locations that can be explained by 'central place theory' or some other theory of location. This attitude of objective outsiderness has a long tradition in academic geography and is particularly apparent in implicit beliefs that geography is some type of integrating super-science or that there is a real objective geography of places that can be described once and for all. "Geographies", says the geographer in St. Exupéry's *The Little Prince* (1943, p.65), "are the books which, of all books, are most concerned with matters of consequence. They never become old-fashioned.... We write

of eternal things." For many geographers such comment is close to the truth, though the objective cataloguing of information satirized by St. Exupery has now been largely replaced by what Bartels (1973, p.25) calls 'instrumental rationality'. This requires the "neutralisation of thought against subjective peripheral influences" in order to explain in a scientific manner the spatial organisation of places.

A similar intellectual posture is adopted by many planners in making studies for proposals for reorganising places. This enables them to separate themselves emotionally from the places which they are planning and to restructure them according to principles of logic, reason, and efficiency. "This may be compared", writes Cullen (1971, p.194), "to God creating the world as someone outside and above the thing created".

4.3.3 Incidental outsidership

While objective outsidership is in essence a deliberately adopted intellectual attitude, incidental outsidership describes a largely unselfconscious attitude in which places are experienced as little more than the background or setting for activities and are quite incidental to those activities. This type of experience is described by Melvin Webber (1964, p.113) in his discussion of "the non-place urban realm": "In his role as a member of a world-wide community of virus researchers, the scientist is not a member of a place community at all. The fact that his laboratory is located in a given town or metropolis may be almost irrelevant to maintaining the crucial links with men in other places." A similar account could be made of businessmen going from city to city merely to attend conferences and meetings, or of flight crews and truck drivers for whom the places visited are of little importance in themselves. Indeed such incidental outsidership is probably a feature of everyone's experience of places, for it is inevitable that what we are doing frequently overshadows where we are doing it, and pushes places into the background. And even the most intense encounters with place are fleeting unless some deliberate effort is made to maintain that encounter (Tuan, 1974, pp.93-94).

Incidental outsidership applies only to those places in which we are visitors and towards which our intentions are limited and partial. In our home places it is, conversely, the case that whatever we do and however our intentions may focus on social events and activities, we are 'incidental insiders'.

4.3.4 Vicarious outsidership

It is possible to experience places in a secondhand or vicarious way, that is, without actually visiting them, yet for this experience to be one of a deeply felt involvement. One purpose of the artist or poet in depicting a place is to convey something of what it is to live there, to give a sense of that place. David McCord (Museum of Fine Arts, 1970, p.11) writes in his introduction to a catalogue of Andrew Wyeth's paintings: "Poets, painters,

and musicians sometimes choose to live, and strictly operate, within a very special world defined by very special boundaries self-imposed. They do not set out to discover these worlds: they appear to be born within them ... When we read, inspect or listen to their work we enter into their domain ..." Through travel accounts or motion pictures or any other medium, we can indeed enter far into other worlds and other places that are sometimes real and sometimes fantasy. Wyeth's paintings take us into the small areas of Pennsylvania and Maine where he lives, while Wright's *Islandia* (1942) can convey us to a wholly imaginary world and make it appear real. The degree to which we are transported and the identity of those places to which we are transported depends presumably both on the artist's skills of description and on our own imaginative and empathetic inclinations. But possibly vicarious outsidership is most pronounced when the depiction of a specific place corresponds with our experiences of familiar places—we know what it is like to be *there* because we know what it is like to be *here*.

4.3.5 Behavioural outsidership

Behavioural outsidership consists of being in a place and seeing it as a set of objects, views, and activities arranged in certain ways and having certain observable qualities. In contrast to incidental outsidership in which a place is experienced as little more than a background to events, behavioural outsidership involves deliberately attending to the appearance of that place. Such outsidership is clearest when it is complemented by surrounding walls, by enclaves or enclosures, or other physically defined boundaries. It is probably in this relatively narrow sense that outsidership is most commonly understood.

In itself behavioural outsidership tells us merely that we are somewhere, but it is the patterns, structures and content of this inside that tell us we are *here* rather than somewhere else. These patterns are, in the first instance, those of our immediate experience, and perhaps the most important element of this is sight. Certainly it is the best understood aspect of place experience, with the other senses reinforcing or being interpreted by reference to visual patterns. It is primarily these visual patterns that are considered here in describing behavioural outsidership and its role in the identity of places.

In his investigation of townscape Gordon Cullen (1971, pp.193-194) examines the places of our immediate experience, and seeks "to chart the structure of the subjective world" and to explore "the art of the environment". He attempts this by investigating our reactions to the relationships between buildings, spaces, objects, and activities, and by classifying and illustrating various modes of these relationships. There are, Cullen believes, essentially three elements in our experiences of environment: first is 'place', by which he means something broadly equivalent to the French term '*place*', our immediate position defined visually as an enclave

or enclosure; second is 'content', appearance in all its facets, including the nature of this and that, colour, texture, scale, style, and character; and third is 'serial vision', the sequence of views as we move into, out of, and between 'places', a constant interplay of the anticipated and the revealed view that binds together the various static 'places' and their content. The patterns formed by these elements are infinitely varied though structured into relations of here and there, and this and that. The essential point in all this is the simple one that "the items of the environment cannot be dissociated one from the other" (Cullen, 1971, p.189), though of perhaps more importance here is the fact that it is the manner of the association of these items and the physical qualities of appearance that give particular places unique identities in our experiences of them as behavioural insiders.

4.3.6 Empathetic insiderness

There is no abrupt distinction between empathetic and behavioural insiderness, rather there is a fading from the concern with the qualities of appearance to emotional and empathetic involvement in a place. This is not inevitable for, as Tuan (1971, p.190) observes, "bodily presence may be necessary, but it is not sufficient to guarantee experience". In short, empathetic insiderness demands some deliberate effort of perception.

Steen Rasmussen (1964, p.40) has described the difference between seeing a picture of a place and then visiting it, but his description could apply just as well to the difference between just being in a place and being in a place and opening one's senses to all that place has to offer:

"Anyone who has seen a place in a picture and then visited it knows how different the reality is. You sense the atmosphere all around you and are no longer dependent on the angle from which the picture was made. You breathe the air of the place, hear its sounds, notice how they are reechoed by the unseen houses behind you."

Empathetic insiderness demands a willingness to be open to significances of a place, to feel it, to know and respect its symbols—much as a person might experience a holy place as sacred without necessarily believing in that particular religion. This involves not merely looking at a place, but *seeing* into and appreciating the essential elements of its identity⁽⁶⁾. Such empathetic insiderness is possible for anyone not constricted by rigid patterns of thought and who possesses some awareness of environment.

To be inside a place empathetically is to understand that place as rich in meaning, and hence to identify with it, for these meanings are not only

(6) The distinction between 'looking' and 'seeing' (i.e. between behavioural and empathetic insiderness) is made by Adolf Portmann (1959) and by Paul Shepard (1967). This distinction should not be interpreted as one between science and art; 'seeing' is just as important for the scientist as for the artist, and 'looking' is simply the superficial form of observing that characterises standardised and institutional science or glib and commercialised art.

linked to the experiences and symbols of those whose place it is, but also stem from one's own experiences. Thus the identity of places experienced through empathetic insiderness is much deeper and richer than that known only through behavioural insiderness. Identity is not just an address or set of appearances, but a complete personality with which the insider is intimately associated. Such identity of place does not present itself automatically, but must be sought by training ourselves to see and understand places in themselves; to paraphrase a statement about architecture made by Rasmussen (1964, p.236): "... if we ourselves are open to impression and sympathetically inclined the place will open up and reveal its true essence."

4.3.7 Existential insiderness

To be inside a place and to experience it as completely as we can does not mean that existentially we are insiders. The most fundamental form of insiderness is that in which a place is experienced without deliberate and self-conscious reflection yet is full with significances. It is the insiderness that most people experience when they are at home and in their own town or region, when they know the place and its people and are known and accepted there. Existential insiderness characterises belonging to a place and the deep and complete identity with a place that is the very foundation of the place concept.

Existential insiderness is part of knowing implicitly that *this* place is where you belong—in all other places we are existential outsiders no matter how open we are to their symbols and significances. Thus Bruce Hutchison (1943, p.36) writes of Quebec City: "It is the houses, not the monuments, squares, and public buildings that hold the life of Quebec ... But it must forever escape the stranger, so that looking at the shuttered window, the bolted door, he can only sense it, like a distant perfume, like the sound of voices behind a garden gate, forever closed to him." The person who has no place with which he identifies is in effect homeless, without roots. But someone who does experience a place from the attitude of existential insiderness is part of that place and it is part of him. Then there exists between place and person a strong and profound bond like the tie between farmer and property expressed by the dirt farmer in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1969, p.39):

"Funny thing how it is. If a man owns a little property, that property is him, it's part of him, and it's like him. If he owns property only so he can walk on it and handle and be sad when it isn't doing well and feel fine when the rain falls on it, that property is him, and in some way he's bigger because he owns it. Even if he isn't successful he's big with his property. That is so."

4.4 Images and identities of places

Although it is possible to gain considerable insights into the nature of identity of places by considering its main components, it is nonetheless clear that identity is not a product of such components alone, but is socially structured. In other words, identity varies with the individual, group, or consensus image of that place. Indeed, for most purposes it appears that the image of a place is its identity and that to understand something of the social structure of images is an essential prerequisite for understanding identity.

An image has been defined by Boulding (1961) as a mental picture that is the product of experiences, attitudes, memories, and immediate sensations. It is used to interpret information and to guide behaviour, for it offers a relatively stable ordering of relationships between meaningful objects and concepts. Images are not just selective abstractions of an objective reality but are intentional interpretations of what is or what is believed to be. The image of a place consists of all the elements associated with the experiences of individuals or groups and their intentions toward that place. Insofar as these intentions are focused and are specific, such images may be considered by others to be narrow and biased, but for those who hold them they are complete and constitute the reality of that place.

Images of places have both a vertical and a horizontal structuring. The vertical structure is one of intensity and depth of experience and has layers corresponding basically to those of the various levels of outsidership and insidership. The horizontal structure is that of the social distribution of knowledge of places within and between individuals, groups, and the mass.

4.4.1 Individual images of place

Within one person the mixing of experience, emotion, memory, imagination, present situation, and intention can be so variable that he can see a particular place in several quite distinct ways. A street is a very different place to a pedestrian and to a car driver—they do not even attend to the same objects and signs and they certainly have quite different experiences and purposes—yet at different times one person may both walk and drive down that street (see Luijpen, 1966, pp.67-68; Kockelmans, 1966, pp.81-84). In fact for one person a place can have many different identities. How, or whether, such differences are reconciled is not clear, but it is possible that the relatively enduring and socially agreed upon features of a place are used as some form of reference point.

Between individuals even sharper distinctions of attitudes to place exist. James Boswell (cited in Briggs, 1968, p.83) once declared that "I have often amused myself with thinking how different the same place is to different people", and indeed every individual does have a more or less distinctive image of a particular place. This is not only because each individual experiences a place from his own unique set of moments of

space-time, but more especially because everyone has his own mix of personality, memories, emotions, and intentions which colours his image of that place and gives it a distinctive identity for him. Ernst Cassirer (1970, pp.160-161) gives the example of the painter Ludwig Richter who set out with three of his friends to paint the identical landscape in Tuscany while staying as close to its reality as possible: "Nevertheless the result was four totally different pictures, as different from one another as the personalities of the artists." In the same way the identity of a place varies with the intentions, personalities, and circumstances of those who are experiencing it.

4.4.2 Group or community images of place

It has been suggested (Lowenthal, 1961, p.248) that "a consummate piece of combinatorial mathematics" enables these diverse personal images to be brought together into a common social image of place. But this is misleading for it assumes that all individual images are independent. This is not the case—individual images have been and are being constantly socialised through the use of common languages, symbols, and experiences (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, pp.130-132 and pp.32-36). Furthermore the identities of places are founded, like all images, on the interaction of what Gurwitsch (1971, p.xiv) calls the three opposing poles of the *I*, the *Other*, and the *We*: "The *I*'s communicate with the *Other* principally through the medium of signs and symbols of which the only possible basis is the *We*, which gives them effective validity. To wish to separate the *I*, the *Other* and the *We*, is to desire to dissolve or to destroy consciousness itself ..." The common basis of the *We* is not, however, constant, but varies in intensity and depth. The most intense degree of union is attained when images are completely combined through a profound intersubjective linking; this is sociality in communion, and it gives to places an identity like that given by existential insidership or the sacred experience of holy places—deeply personal yet shared. Where there is a lesser penetration of images but "an essential part of the aspirations and acts of personality is integrated into the *We*", sociality is community; and when the fusion of images is weak and superficial it is sociality in mass giving mass identities to places.

The level of community lies between the scales of the individual and the mass at the stage of what Berger and Luckmann (1967, pp.163-173) term "secondary socialisation"—that of group attitudes, interests, and experiences. Communities and groups are not, however, the same; communities may adopt the structure of groups, but are spontaneous and fluctuating social forms of knowledge, whereas groups are formal and organised. Yet through interest groups such communities can develop and an image be projected in which the identities of places of significance to that group are a reflection of group interests and biases. Thus a particular city presents a different identity to those living in its slums, its ghettos,

its suburbs; and to developers, planners, and citizens' action groups. Such differences in identity are never more apparent than in confrontations between different groups. Thus, in an archetypal development-preservation conflict, the valley of Hetch-Hetchy was, for the water engineers of San Francisco, an excellent potential source of water that could only be enhanced by damming and flooding; but for the Sierra Club this was a wild place of spiritual significance, a sanctuary and a temple, that could only be destroyed by development (Nash, 1967).

In short, for different groups and communities of interest and knowledge, places have different identities. Personal eccentricities and attitudes are subsumed to the dominant image of the groups, perhaps to gain either the functional and political benefits or the sense of personal security of group membership.

4.4.3 Consensus and mass images of place

Although one particular place may have quite different identities for different groups, there is nevertheless some common ground of agreement about the identity of that place. This is the consensus identity of a place, in effect its lowest common denominator. It appears to take two forms, and, following the terms of C. W. Mills (1956, pp.298-324), these are the public and the mass identities.

The public identity is that which is common to the various communities of knowledge in a particular society, and comprises the more or less agreed on physical features and other verifiable components of places. It is a consensus because it has developed out of the free opinion and experience of groups and individuals, although descriptive regional geography in providing facts about places may constitute much of the basis of such a consensus identity. But in essence the public identity of place is merely a particularly pervasive form of sociality in community at a rather superficial level of integration of interest, and one which ties together group images of places.

In contrast are mass identities of places. Rather than developing out of group and individual experiences, mass identities are assigned by 'opinion-makers', provided ready-made for the people, disseminated through the mass-media and especially by advertising. They are the most superficial identities of place, offering no scope for empathetic insideness and eroding existential insideness by destroying the bases for identity with places. This is so because mass identities are based not on symbols and significances, and agreed on values, but on glib and contrived stereotypes created arbitrarily and even synthetically.

Mass media conveniently provide simplified and selective identities for places beyond the realm of immediate experience of the audience, and hence tend to fabricate a pseudo-world of pseudo-places. And someone exposed to these synthetic identities and stereotypes will almost inevitably be inclined to experience actual places in terms of them—a fact not missed by the developers of such real-life pseudo-places as Waikiki or Disneyland.

Jeremy Sandford and Roger Law (1967, p.89) observe that "package-trip British tourists see nothing strange in the fact that hundreds and hundreds of miles of the Mediterranean seaboard have been built up in the image of their dreams ...", and the same could be said of innumerable tourist centres, shopping districts and even residential areas. In effect both the image and the actual physical setting have been manipulated and manufactured so that they correspond, and the result is a superficial and trivial identity for places which increasingly pervades all our experiences of places and which can only be transcended by a considerable intellectual or social effort.

4.5 The development and maintenance of identities of places

It is easy to visualise a person who visits a town for the first time developing an image of that town which comprises a number of centres of varying significance linked by particular routes. But this is misleading, for it implies that he begins with something akin to a *tabula rasa* and that the identity of that place for him develops solely out of observation and experience. In fact the process of identity construction appears to consist of a complex and progressive ordering and balancing of observations with expectations, a *priori* ideas with direct experiences, until a stable image is developed.

This process of structuring our knowledge of the world has been especially well described by Jean Piaget (1968, 1971). He suggests (1968, pp.7-8) that all human action consists of a balancing of the processes of assimilation and accommodation.

"... All needs tend first of all to incorporate things and people into the subject's own activity, i.e. to 'assimilate' the external world into the mental structures that have already been constructed; and secondly to readjust these structures as a function of subtle transformations, i.e. to 'accommodate' them to external objects."

He argues that knowledge does not begin with a knowledge of the self or of things as such, but with a knowledge of their interactions. It is by progressing simultaneously towards both poles of assimilation and accommodation, by reconciling new knowledge with the old and old knowledge with the new, that intelligence organises the world.

In the context of place the most obvious implication of this is that identities of places cannot be understood simply in terms of patterns of physical and observable features, nor just as products of attitudes, but as an indissociable combination of these. The identity of a place is an expression of the adaptation of assimilation, accommodation, and the socialisation of knowledge to each other. And for most purposes it is 'ultrastable', that is to say that, no matter how these three factors may vary, the identity will continue to provide at least a minimally adequate guide for physical survival and social acceptability (Ashby, 1965, chapter 7). In other words there are no places that have no identity.

For the existential insider this process of balancing assimilation and accommodation is, of course, quite unconscious, for there is a gradual and subtle development of an identity with and of his place that begins in childhood and continues throughout life. For the person who is "prepared to expose himself to the new experience of a place and ask himself what that place is doing to him and how it is doing it" (Gauldie, 1969, p.184), that is for the empathetic insider, the balance of assimilation and accommodation is the self-conscious purpose. The extent to which it can be achieved depends both on his ability to step outside his own cultural and personal values, and on his sensitivity of observation. But for outsiders, those who experience a place only in terms of a crass level of behavioural insiderness and who know only its mass identity, preconceptions and established attitudes always outweigh direct experience. Observations are fitted into the ready-made identities that have been provided by mass media or into *a priori* mental schemata, and inconsistencies with these are either ignored or explained away.

Once it has been developed, whether by an individual, a group, or the mass, an identity of a place will be maintained so long as it allows acceptable social interaction and has plausibility—that is, so long as it can be legitimated within the society (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, pp.92-108). Where an identity has developed through experience in communion or in community it will endure for as long as the symbols and significances of that place retain their meanings. In primitive societies, those without history, this is effectively for ever; and even in vernacular societies identities of places change but slowly, over generations rather than years. But the mass identity is legitimated less by appeal to effective symbols than to 'objective' reality in the form of photographs and factual descriptions. Insofar as this objective reality can be manipulated to suit the interests of the identity-makers, the mass identity itself can be changed.

There are two main ways in which an identity of a place can cease to be plausible. First, changing environmental conditions can render it inadequate for the purposes of social interaction and individual behaviour, just as a scientist who clings to a disproved theory may eventually find it impossible to continue his research as conflicting evidence builds up. And second, changes in attitude, fashion, or other aspects of belief systems, can render an image implausible; thus an industrial town with factories and smoke stacks might have once been seen as a centre of progress and production, but following the awakening of an 'environmental consciousness' is now more likely to be considered a centre of pollution and ecological destruction. There appear to be no fixed points of implausibility, nor is the change from one identity to another usually abrupt—rather there is a gradual and variable change.

The identities linked to the superficial qualities of place, that is mass identities, are rendered implausible more easily than those associated with

existential and empathetic insiderness. This is simply because the manipulation of mass knowledge and attitude through the mass media is more possible than shifts in the symbolic and significant properties of places. Mass identity is indeed little more than a superficial cloak of arbitrarily fabricated and merely acceptable sets of signs. It provides no roots, no sense of belonging to a place. It is in marked contrast to those place-identities which have developed through profound individual and social experiences and which constitute enduring and recognisable 'territories of symbols' (Klapp, 1969, p.28).

4.6 Types of identities of places

The identity of a place is comprised of three interrelated components, each irreducible to the other—physical features or appearance, observable activities and functions, and meanings or symbols. There is an infinite range of content within each of these and numberless ways in which they can combine. Hence there is no discernible limit to the diversity of identities of places, and every identifiable place has unique content and patterns of relationship that are expressed and endure in the spirit of that place.

But it is not feasible to argue that uniqueness and the individuality of identity are the only important facts in our experiences of places. While each place is unique and has a persistent sameness within itself, at the same time it shares various characteristics with other places. In terms of our experiences this sharing does display certain consistencies that make it possible to distinguish a number of types of identities of places.

1. From the individual perspective or sociality in communion of existential insiderness places are lived and dynamic, full with meanings for us that are known and experienced without reflection.
2. For empathetic insiders, knowing places through sociality in community, places are records and expressions of the cultural values and experiences of those who create and live in them.
3. From the standpoint of behavioural insiderness place is ambient environment, possessing qualities of landscape or townscape that constitute a primary basis for public or consensus knowledge of that place.
4. In terms of incidental outsidership it is usually selected functions of a place that are important and the identity of that place is little more than that of a background for those functions.
5. The attitude of the objective outsider effectively reduces places either to the single dimension of location or to a space of located objects and activities.
6. The mass identity of place is a consensus identity that is remote from direct experience for it is provided more or less ready-made by the mass media. It is a superficial identity, for it can be changed and manipulated like some trivial disguise so long as it maintains some minimum level of credibility. It is also pervasive, for it enters into and undermines individual experiences and the symbolic properties of the identities of places.

7. For existential outsiders the identity of places represents a lost and now unattainable involvement. Places are all and always incidental, for existence itself is incidental.

With the exception of existential outsiders which replaces all the others, these various types of identity are not discrete, nor mutually exclusive, nor unchanging. Thus we may know our home town as dynamic and full of meaning, yet be quite capable of also viewing it as professional planners or geographers from the perspective of objective outsiders, and also participate in its mass identity. For each setting and for each person there are a multiplicity of place identities reflecting different experiences and attitudes; these are moulded out of the common elements of appearance and activities and the borrowed images of the media through the changing interactions of direct observation with preconceptions.

The identity of place is not a simple tag that can be summarised and presented in a brief factual description. Nor can it be argued that there is a real or true identity of a place that relates to existential insideness. Indeed an outsider can in some senses see more of a place than an insider—just as an observer of argument gains a perspective not available to those arguing, even though he misses the intensity of being involved in that argument. Identity is, in short, neither an easily reducible, nor a separable quality of places—it is neither constant and absolute, nor is it constantly changing and variable. The identity of place takes many forms, but it is always the very basis of our experience of *this* place as opposed to any other.

A sense of place and authentic place-making

Ian Nairn (1965, p.6) has written:

“It seems a commonplace that almost everyone is born with the need for identification with his surroundings and a relationship to them—with the need to be in a recognisable place. So sense of place is not a fine art extra, it is something we cannot afford to do without.”

The most meagre meaning of ‘sense of place’ is the ability to recognise different places and different identities of a place. But while this is important for orientation and even survival, Nairn is clearly referring to something more complex and profound than the capacity to differentiate localities. He is suggesting the importance of a sense of identity with a place and what Harvey Cox (1968, p.423) has described as “the sense of continuity of place necessary to people’s sense of reality”. In fact there exists a full range of possible awareness, from simple recognition for orientation, through the capacity to respond empathetically to the identities of different places, to a profound association with places as cornerstones of human existence and individual identity.

It is the intention in this and the following chapter to examine some of the forms of sense of place and ‘placelessness’, and to describe some of the manifestations of these in landscapes. Sense of place may be authentic and genuine, or it can be inauthentic and contrived or artificial. These notions of authenticity and inauthenticity are taken from phenomenology, but they are ideas which have, under a variety of slightly different guises, had long currency. In particular, former notions of ‘sincerity’ bear a close resemblance to authenticity (Trilling, 1971); and John Ruskin’s conception (n.d., p.143) of the ‘true life’ and the ‘false life’ serves very well to convey the meaning of authenticity and inauthenticity:

“Man’s true life ... is the independent force by which he moulds and governs external things; it is a force of assimilation which converts everything around him into food, or into instruments; and which ... never forfeits its own authority as a judging principle. His false life is, indeed, but one of the conditions of death or stupor, but it acts, even when it cannot be said to animate, and it is not always easily known from the true; it is that life of custom and accident in which many of us pass much of our time in the world ... that life which is overlaid by the weight of things external to it, and is moulded by them instead of assimilating them ...”

This authentic–inauthentic division provides the basis for the following discussion, but it does not necessarily offer a complete framework for the description of all experiences of places, nor is intended that these categories are absolute. Rather it is the foundation for an interpretation,