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PLACE: AN EXPERIENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

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INTEREST in place and in the meaning of place is universal. The academic discipline that studies place is geography. Geographers have approached the study of place from two main perspectives: place as location, a unit within a hierarchy of units in space; and place as a unique artifact. Thus we have a growing literature on "central-place" theory on the one hand, and on the other a small body of work devoted to depicting the unique character of individual places, mostly towns and cities. Where we gain systematic knowledge it is highly abstract and remote from experience; where we gain complex understanding it is restricted to particular localities. People's largely unformulated desire to know more about place remains not entirely assuaged by the offerings of specialists. In belles-lettres we find indeed eloquent evocations of place, but these evocations add up to a long gallery of individual portraits with no hint as to how they might be related. Is it possible to stay close to experience in the study of place and yet retain the philosophical ideal of systematic knowledge? The answer is yes, and the key to such an approach lies in the nature of experience.

EXPERIENCE

Experience is a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows his world.[1] Some sensory modes are more passive and direct than others. With taste, smell, and touch we feel

[1] In the words of Michael Oakeshott (Experience and Its Modes [Cambridge at the Univ. Press, 1933], p. 10), "Experience is a single whole, within which modifications may be distinguished, but which admits of no final or absolute division; and that experience is everywhere, not merely inseparable from thought, but is itself a form of thought." See also Sir Russell Brain: The Nature of Experience (Oxford Univ. Press, London, 1959).

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as though we are simply registering sensations provoked by external stimuli. With hearing, and particularly with seeing, we seem to be actively exploring the world beyond us and getting to know it objectively. Seeing is thinking, in the sense that it is a discriminating and constructive activity; it creates patterns of reality adapted to human purposes. Even taste, smell, and touch are affected by thought in the above sense: they discriminate among stimuli and are able to articulate gustatory, olfactory, and tactual worlds. A wine taster can be said to "think" with his educated palate; likewise a cloth feeler "thinks" with his sensitive fingers. There is, however, an important distinction between the passive and active modes of experience: the sensations of the passive mode are locked inside individuals and have no public existence. What we see can be presented in pictures and maps, to which all have access. Pictures and maps are public. What we think is capable of embodiment in languages of varying degrees of technicality. But the special quality of a fragrance, taste, or touch cannot be projected onto a public stage other than through pictorial and linguistic means. Artists are admired because, to a degree, they can objectify intimate feelings in a painting, a sculpture, or in words. Few people have this skill. Returning from a vacation we can articulate visual experience with colored slides and incidents with words, but the exhilarating olfactory and tactile experiences remain buried in our private selves. Sensitivity cannot be shared the way thoughts can.

Place is a center of meaning constructed by experience. Place is known not only through the eyes and mind but also through the more passive and direct modes of experience, which resist objectification. To know a place fully means both to understand it in an abstract way and to know it as one person knows another. At a high theoretical level, places are points in a spatial system. At the opposite extreme, they are strong visceral feelings. Places are seldom known at either extreme: the one is too remote from sensory experience to be real, and the other presupposes rootedness in a locality and an emotional commitment to it that are increasingly rare. To most people in the modern world, places lie somewhere in the middle range of experience. In this range places are constructed out of such elements as distinctive odors, textural and visual qualities in the environment, seasonal changes of temperature and color, how they look as they are approached from the highway, their location in the school atlas or road map, and addi-

tional bits of indirect knowledge like population or number and kinds of industries. Within the middle range places are thus known both directly through the senses and indirectly through the mind. A small place can be known through all the modes of experience; a large place, such as a city or nation, depends far more on indirect and abstract knowledge for its experiential construction.

Experience constructs place at different scales. The fireplace and the home are both places. Neighborhood, town, and city are places; a distinctive region is a place, and so is a nation. Common usage sanctions the application of the word "place" to phenomena that differ greatly in size and in physical character. What do the fireplace, the corner drugstore, the city, and the nation-state have in common? They are all centers of meaning to individuals and to groups. As centers of meaning the number of places in the world is enormous and cannot be contained in the largest gazetteer. Moreover, most places are unnamed, for to name a place is to give it explicit recognition, that is, to acknowledge it at the conscious, verbalizing level, whereas much of human experience is subconscious.

Places within the Home

Within the home the fireplace or the hearth is a place. It is so much a center of meaning for the family that in English usage hearth means home. The dining-room table is a place. Around it the family gathers traditionally for the evening meal. When guests appear dining becomes a secular ritual at which family and friends share food and wine under the glow of candlelight.[2] Places may be private to the individual. My favorite rocking chair, wedged between the fireplace and the curtained window, is my special place within the house. It has a specific location, it has special meaning for me, and this bond between the rocker and me is recognized by other members of the family. I have a prior claim to it, and its location cannot be changed without disturbing, however slightly, the focus of my world.

Above all, the bed is a personal place. "Happiness is to sleep in one's own bed," says the cartoon character Charlie Brown. After a long trip, when do we feel that we are finally home? Is it as we approach the city, as we step inside the house, as we gather

[2] Christian Norberg-Schulz: Existence, Space, and Architecture (Praeger Publishers, New York, 1972), p. 32.

around the family dining table, as we sit down in our favorite armchair — or is it, finally, as we snuggle between the sheets of our own bed? The bed is a center of meaning for reasons beyond familiarity, comfort, and security: each day it is a point of departure and of return. Sleep is a little death; we are daily born and we daily die on the bed.[3] The symbolical significance of the bed is suggested by the fact that the royal bedchamber, rather than the throne room, is the central piece of Versailles Palace. Louis XIV, the Sun King, rises and retires symbolically with the sun.[4]

The hearth, rocking chair, and bed within the home are recognizable places once they are pointed out. The sentiment is there, and we learn how strong it is when these small foci of our world are disturbed or threatened. But the sentiment does not often rise to the surface of our consciousness. An old armchair and a quite ordinary bed are not aesthetic objects that require our admiration and critical judgment. They are known, intimately, through the more passive modes of experience. They can also be appraised by the eye, however, for they are clearly defined objects and their visibility can be enhanced by rituals of the kind that one performs, for instance, around the fireplace and the dining-room table.

Home

The primary meaning of home is nurturing shelter. It is the one place in which we can openly and comfortably admit our frailty and our bodily needs. Home is devoted to the sustenance of the body. In the home we feed, wash, and rest; to it we go when we are tired or sick, that is, when we can no longer maintain a brave front before the world.[5] In the home, not the hospital, we recover from illness. The hospital is perceived to be at best a substitute, which the rich can afford to do without and which the poor cannot afford. Home is the pivot of a daily routine; we leave it to work in the morning and return for sustenance, rest, and the

[3] Otto Bollnow: Mensch und Raum (W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 1971), p. 165. Bollnow's book is a study of the meaning of place at the scale of the house, the rooms, and their components, such as the door, window, and bed. See also Gaston Bachelard: The Poetics of Space (Beacon Press, Boston, 1969).

[4] The bed as architecture, workplace, and center for ritual and ceremony is elegantly explored by Mary Eden and Richard Carrington: The Philosophy of the Bed (G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1961). Cecilia Hill (Versailles: Its Life and History [Little, Brown, and Co., Boston, 1925], p. 59) writes: "The bedroom was not only the centre of the Versailles Palace, it was the symbolical centre of monarchy. Before the great bed, even when empty, princesses of the Royal Blood had to make a reverence."

[5] Bollnow, *op. cit.*, [see footnote 3 above], pp. 129–132.

temporary oblivion of sleep at night. We *go* to all kinds of places but *return* home, or to homelike places. Home is where life begins and ends; and if this rarely happens in modern society it remains an oneiric ideal.

Home is given over to the hidden processes of life. It protects life, not only from inclement weather and predators but also from bright sunlight and the glare of the public eye. The Greek and Latin words for the interior of the house, *megaron* and *atrium,* both carry a strong connotation of darkness.[6] Home in classical antiquity was a private and hidden place from which one ventured forth into the light of public life, with all its risks and rewards.[7] Privacy and nurturing shelter persist as the central qualities of home: at a recent forum on women's liberation, Clara Park characterized home, rather wistfully, as that small focus (Latin: "hearth") of order and coherence, cleanliness and even beauty — a refuge or frame for autonomous living and growing.[8]

Privacy, shelter, life processes, darkness: these words suggest that home is experienced uncritically through the passive modes of smell, taste, and touch. What one feels about home can never be made fully explicit and public. Feeling withers under the public glare just as, on the biological plane, embryonic life dies in bright sunlight. The home is, of course, also a visual object. It can have a beauty of form and color that appeals to the eye. Its individuality can be appreciated in a single glance because it is a bounded center of meaning: consider, for example, such framed and isolated units as walled domiciles, farmsteads in open fields, or modern residences located on top of sloping lawns.

The modern house sits on a pedestal; it has high visibility. Indeed, some modern houses are transient shelters appraised through the critical eye and mind, for their surface appeal and real-estate value, rather than through the less deliberative senses of touch and smell. Apartments in high-rise buildings may be even more deficient as intimate homeplaces. Not only are the tactile and olfactory rewards meager, but apartments cannot be seen as bounded units. From the outside one set of rooms looks much like another. The sets are not even separated by spatial

[6] Hannah Arendt: The Human Condition (Doubleday Anchor Books, Garden City, N.Y., 1959), p. 321.

[7] *Ibid.,* p. 33.

[8] Clara Claiborne Park's comment appears in the forum called: Women's Liberation: What Will We Lose? *The American Scholar,* Vol. 42, 1972–1973, pp. 139–147; reference on p. 143.

corridors, as are the indistinguishable dwellings of low-cost housing projects. Only in the mind are the residential subdivisions of a high-rise building bounded worlds or places.

City

Place-names in an atlas are primarily the names of towns, cities and to a lesser extent the names of nations, mountains, rivers, and other natural features. Farmsteads are places, centers of meaning to those who live in them, but they rarely appear in atlases. Beds, rocking chairs, and bay-window sills are places, centers of meaning to individuals, but they do not warrant cartographic representation. Their omission is not dictated solely by scale. On maps depicting areas of continental size small settlements are omitted because space is limited. However, the labels and boundaries of such large units as regions, provinces, and even nation-states may also be sacrificed to make room for the names of major cities. Places are towns and cities to the general public as well as to the geographer. There are geographies of place on the scale of farmsteads, towns, and cities. There cannot be a geography of place on the scale of rocking chairs because relatively few rocking chairs that exist are centers of meaning: many are mere inventories in warehouses and furniture shops; many are simply receptacles for momentarily weary bodies. A map showing the distribution of rocking chairs that are also places for individuals would look little different from a map of urban population; for people and only people can generate meaning, and people (including their fireplaces, beds, and chairs) are to be found mostly in cities.

Cities are places and centers of meaning par excellence. The assertion is obvious and yet may sound surprising, for many well-educated and vocal people of urban background have come to believe that meaning in a place gains almost in proportion to its lack of people. In this view, sparsely settled farmlands are somehow more meaningful than cities, and wilderness areas more meaningful than farmlands. How can such a belief, so contrary to common sense, be maintained? One reason is the available means for making private feelings public. To people of urban background, farms and wildernesses are aesthetic and religious objects. A special verbal and pictorial syntax, the creation of many talented artists, exists to articulate rural and wilderness experiences from the visitor's viewpoint. Nature and countryside offer the visitor peak experiences that can be captured in colored slides and popular verse. Such experiences stay at the forefront of con-

sciousness. As pictorial and verbal clichés they become objects suitable for public display and social exchange. To the millions who live in the city, however, it would seem that frustrations and other negative experiences tend to rise to the surface of consciousness. The satisfactions lead a more ghostly existence. Chatting with neighbors on the stoop, going to the drugstore for a milk shake, emerging into the glare of sunlight from the dark cavern of a movie house or bar, fresh neon color in a wet night, and the thick Sunday newspaper — these experiences are too commonplace to sit for portraits. Nonetheless, people seem to know the central significance of the city, in their bones if not in their minds. The city is the one environment created exclusively for human use: it is kind to the thief as well as the burgher. By common consent, cities are places, worthy of proper names and prominent labeling in school atlases; whereas the neutral terms of space and area apply to the emptier lands.

Neighborhood and Region

Neighborhood is smaller and region bigger than the city. Neither has the city's perceptual and conceptual visibility. Ancient and medieval cities were often visually prominent; they were walled, and from the outside they looked like architectural monuments that rose dramatically above farmlands or craggy hills. Modern cities are denigrated for their lack of shape and definition; yet some have highly distinctive silhouettes. The Manhattan skyline is unmistakable and can be taken in at a glance. Cities, moreover, are prominent as concepts. It is easy to think about them because they have names, they are often in the news, and they are imprinted in people's minds as the circles, dots, and yellow patches of road maps and atlases. By contrast, neighborhoods and regions lack visual and conceptual prominence. Relatively few neighborhoods in the United States are known by name both to the local residents and to the nation. The obvious exceptions that come to mind — Watts, Greenwich Village, or Beacon Hill, for example — prove the rule. Neighborhoods lack sharp, physically defined boundaries, and they have no distinctive skylines that can be seen from vantage points outside them. Regions have even lower perceptual prominence than neighborhoods. The trained eye of a geographer is required to tell where the East ends and the Middle West begins. Conceptually, however, regions appear to have taken a stronger hold on the public's imagination than have neighborhoods, at least in the United

States. The West, the Middle West, and the South are widely accepted regional labels even though their boundaries and significative traits are not clearly known.

As definable spatial and social units, neighborhoods have existed primarily in the minds of urban sociologists and planners. Professional people, coming in to survey a city, can readily see that it is made up of distinctive parts, the neighborhoods. A neighborhood may be distinguished by its ethnic composition, its socioeconomic status, and by the look of its houses and streets. It is given a name which acquires currency among planners and city politicians. Yet the long-term residents in such a neighborhood may not be aware of it, as social scientists have discovered.[9] To people of Boston's working-class West End, for example, neighborhood is not the West End but a small part of it, a segment of the street or a street corner in which they live and carry on their neighboring activities.[10] Experiences that make a corner of the street an intimately known neighborhood are not those that can be made visible and public with ease. They resist objectification as verbal tracts, maps, or pictures. Such experiences of place grow imperceptibly with each subconscious imprint of taste, smell, and touch, and with unheralded acts, like lending or borrowing sugar, daily compounded. To recognize the larger neighborhood requires the use of the eye and, especially, the mind's eye, for the larger neighborhood stretches beyond an individual's direct experience.

A region like the Paris basin or the Middle West is far larger than any city. It is far too big to be directly experienced by most of its people. The region is therefore primarily a construct of thought, the most active mode of human experiencing.[11] Even

[9] Suzanne Keller: The Urban Neighborhood (Random House, New York, 1968), p. 98.

[10] Herbert J. Gans: The Urban Villagers (Free Press, New York, 1962), pp. 11 and 104.

[11] Geographers have constructed many regions, although relatively few are recognized by the people who live in them as distinctive spatial units. The American Great Plains, for example, is a well-known physiographic region. Its common cultural as well as physical traits give it a certain coherence. However, "In the vernacular language, the Great Plains as a region remains unarticulated. Sectionalism rather than regionalism appears to have dominated the layman's framework for subdividing the land into large blocks. A recent study of American vernacular regionalization indicated no category which approximated the Great Plains in either name or use . . ." (E. Cotton Mather: The American Great Plains, *Annals Assn. of Amer. Geogrs.*, Vol. 62, 1972, p. 237). The recent study referred to by Mather is that of Ruth F. Hale: A Map of Vernacular Regions in America (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of Geography, Univ. of Minnesota, 1971).

vision, which can embrace the skyline of Manhattan or Minneapolis with a glance, is of little use in experiencing the region as an entity, for the region lacks a signal profile and has no sharp border that can be pointed to in the field. Regional consciousness begins as shared inchoate feelings. Shared feelings may develop spontaneously into, or can be deliberately made into, shared lore and a shared body of explicit knowledge. How does the change occur? In a large unit of space people may have common experiences of nature and work, feel the same cycles of heat and cold, see the same dusk, and smell the same air. A geographer, noticing the similarities of environment and livelihood, calls it a formal region. Further study shows him that it is also a functional region, in which the parts are tied to the central place of a market system. A geographer would feel justified in drawing a boundary around the area and in giving it a name: it is for him a region, a bounded area of meaning differentiable from its environs, a place. But, as in the case of the externally defined neighborhood, it does not follow that the people who live in the area recognize it as an entity, a focus of meaning, a place. Individuals and families will recognize their own farms and villages, and perhaps also the central city in which they do business, as places. Settlements are places because they are not only experienced passively but also can be seen: they are visual objects in the landscape that can be pointed out. The region, by contrast, is far too large to be known directly. It has to be constructed by symbolic means.

Nation–State

If the region is too big and sprawling to be known in the course of day-to-day living, the nation-state covers a much greater area and hence is even less capable of being directly experienced. Yet to its citizens the nation is certainly a place, a center of meaning, a focus of loyalty and deep attachment. The nation, rather than the region, is commonly spoken of as home, the home country. "We're from the States," American tourists might say when asked by their foreign host. "The States" is home, their place. The expression comes naturally enough even though it is applied to a country of continental size, and the Americans who say it may be residents of New Jersey who have never ventured west of the Pocono Mountains.

The nation-state, with its sacred boundaries and compelling demands on loyalty, is a relatively modern political invention. It displaced the personal fealty and local attachment of the medieval

period. Teaching the ideals of nationhood and citizenship through the ramifying school system (another modern invention) has been so successful that good citizens have come to accept the nation-state as a permanent and deeply rooted human institution like the city. The belief is manifestly false. The unified nation-states of Germany and Italy were created in the nineteenth century and are thus younger than the United States; their cities, Cologne and Rome, are of course much older. It is curious that the fabricated and parvenu character of statehood is not more at the forefront of awareness, for since the end of World War II newspapers have announced the birth of new nations in Africa and Asia with bewildering rapidity. New nation-states aspire to supplant the older loyalties to village and tribe; state boundaries, though the arbitrary creations of former colonial powers, overnight become inviolate.[12] National consciousness, however, does not emerge overnight. The means to raise it are all symbolic. The nation, too large to be known personally by a majority of its citizens, is known conceptually through the flag, national anthem, army uniform and ceremonial parades, ethnocentric history, and geography. Even where the people share a common culture, national consciousness develops slowly, long after the leaders have trumpeted a new state. As Philip Converse puts it,

> The nation as a bounded, integral group object is difficult to experience in any direct way, and its psychological existence for the individual depends upon the social transmission of certain kinds of information. What is deceptive here, as elsewhere, is that decades or even centuries after the *literati* have come to take a nation concept for granted, there may be substantial proportions of the member population who have never heard of such a thing.[13]

The political state is an unstable entity compared with its own major cities. One reason is that, compared with the city, the nation-state's existence depends more on maintaining the potency of shared symbols and concepts, and less on direct experience with objects and people. Cities existed as places long before nation-states were conceived, and they remain long after nation-states have become quaint anachronisms. The colorful patterns of a historical atlas shift kaleidoscopically as nations expand and con-

[12] David Court and Kenneth Prewitt: Nation versus Region in Kenya: a Note on Political Learning, *British Journ. Political Science,* Vol. 4, 1974, pp. 109–120; and Joseph W. Elder: National Loyalties in a Newly Independent Nation, *in* Ideology and Discontent (edited by David E. Apter, Free Press, New York, 1964), pp. 77–92.

[13] Philip E. Converse: The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics, *in* Ideology and Discontent [see footnote 12 above], pp. 206–261; reference on p. 237.

tract, appear and disappear, through the centuries. In comparison cities are almost immortal; they cling to locality despite revolutionary changes in the political and economic system; they are reborn even as they die and in time they drape picturesquely over mounds of their own debris.

VISIBILITY

Passive experiences are deeply felt but difficult to articulate. The small pleasures and irritations of day-to-day living, the barely registered but omnipresent ambience of sound and smell, the feel of air, soft soil, and hard ground, the happy accidents and the occasional blows of fate — these are the common experiences of life that may add up to a profound sense of place. But to know a place in the full sense of knowing requires participation by the discerning eye and mind. Passive experience and inchoate feelings must be given shape and made visible; and that is the function of art, education, and politics.

ART

Art does not aim to duplicate reality. It does not aspire to reproduce in its beholder the pleasant or lacerating emotions of people in the real world. Art provides an image of feeling; it gives objectified form and visibility to feeling so that what is powerful but inchoate can lead a semipublic life. Picasso's *Guernica*, for example, enables people to see the horrors of destroying a historic town and its citizens, not how it really feels to be killed.

Literature and painting induce an awareness of place by holding up mirrors to our own experience; what had been felt can now be seen, what was formless and vacillating is now framed and still. Literary descriptions and landscape paintings are not, of course, themselves places. A work of sculptural art or architecture, on the other hand, creates place materially as well as in the imagination. Put a Henry Moore figure on a stretch of untended grass or an empty lot and mere space is transformed into place. The sculpture creates a place, a center of meaning, by creating an apt image of human feeling; a stone figure takes on the illusory power of life and draws the surrounding space to itself.[14] Successful architecture generates a strong sense of place in two ways. The building is a place because people work, live, or worship in it: experiences

[14] Susanne K. Langer: Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1953), p. 91.

accumulate under its shelter. But a great building is also an image of communal life and values: it is communal experience made into a tangible and commanding presence.[15]

EDUCATION

A major function of education is to articulate experience. Literature serves this purpose and likewise propaganda. Literature often attends to the commonplace, the obscure, and the elusive. The places that it highlights are not the Tetons and Grand Canyons of landscape—these are visible enough through sheer size—but the homestead in Nebraska, a Mississippi county, a New England town, Nottinghamshire, and Wessex. Propaganda is too crude to illuminate the elusive and the complex: it makes its appeal to the simple but strong emotions of pride, vanity, love, and hate. Art and propaganda both extrapolate beyond direct experience. Art trains attention and educates sensibility; it prepares one to respond to the character of alien places and situations. Propaganda fans the simpler emotions so that they conflagrate in areas and situations that are no part of one's direct experience.

In school children learn to love the nation. Elementary history books and atlases teach incessantly that the nation is a tangible place, like one's home, to which citizens owe their ultimate allegiance. The state uses its vast arsenal of symbols to impress its integral presence on citizens. Thus France is the sacred motherland in the rhetoric of the Revolution,[16] and the United States *is*, not are. Regions, by contrast, receive short shrift in the educational syllabi. It is not surprising that regions, though closer to direct experience than is the nation-state, often seem less real.[17]

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[15] Langer writes: "Architecture articulates the 'ethnic domain,' or virtual 'place,' by treatment of an actual place" (*ibid.*, p. 95). And, "The architect creates a culture's image: a physically present human environment that expresses the characteristic rhythmic functional patterns which constitute a culture. . . .Architecture creates the semblance of that World which is the counterpart of a Self. It is a total environment made visible" (*ibid.*, pp. 96 and 98).

[16] Albert Mathiez: Les Origines des cultes révolutionnaires: 1789–1792 (Georges Bellars, Paris, 1904).

[17] For a discussion of the growth of nationalism at the expense of regionalism in Germany, see Louis L. Snyder: The Dynamics of Nationalism: Readings in Its Meaning and Development (Van Nostrand, Princeton, N.J., 1964). An influential pamphleteer and poet, Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769–1860) wrote a popular song, "Where is the German's Fatherland?" which is revealing of a mood of the time. The theme of the song is that people should abandon their attachment to local places like Swabia, Prussia, and the Rhine country in favor of a "more great, more grand. . .German's fatherland." Quoted by Snyder, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

Regionalists try to make the local region the primary focus of loyalty, but they can succeed only if they have political power and if the region has political as well as sentimental identity.

POLITICS

Politics creates place by making it visible. Home is a place. The family is the smallest political unit. Its form of government is traditionally authoritarian. Home has boundaries that need to be defended against the intrusion of outsiders. Home is a place because it encloses space and thereby creates an "inside" and an "outside." The more the storm rages outside the more cozy the home feels inside, the more the family is united, and the more the home itself is a unit, not an arrangement of separate rooms. Neighborhood is an arrangement of individual houses, streets, and blocks until it becomes politically organized; then the entire neighborhood is a place to its members, a place with a boundary and with values that may be threatened by outside forces.[18] The city is a politically organized place. A function of city government is to enhance the city's image, that is, its visibility. Striking architecture helps, but other means exist, such as promoting a sense of rivalry with a sister city or inventing festivals for which the city functions as genial, self-advertising host and physical stage. Regions, to the extent that they lack a solid political base, lack visibility. A few writers and artists have vigorously promoted regionalism, but their efforts are likely to impress only the literary and the artistic unless the qualities they perceive assume political importance, to be defended by political means against outside forces.

The nation is a very real place to citizens. Its visibility is promoted by the vast educational and propaganda machinery of the national government. Different methods are used to sustain a sense of national unity: one that is especially effective is to draw attention to the threat of external enemies, real or imagined. Under external threat the nation is not only a place but a holy place. Will the earth be a homeplace for humankind? The earth is a speck of fertile dust in lifeless space; it is our only possible home. Like the home and the walled city, the earth is a bounded unit; indeed, space flights allow us to see it as the only bounded unit since all the man-made efforts to delimit space are invisible from a

[18] Neighborhood as defended community is a major theme in Gerald D. Suttles: The Social Construction of Communities (Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1972).

certain height. Yet the earth is not a place to humankind; earth gods and goddesses are invariably local divinities. No political organization effectively exists to give the whole globe visibility, for unlike nation-states the earth has no external enemy.

Experience and Time

Experience takes time. Sense of place is rarely acquired in passing. To know a place well requires long residence and deep involvement. It is possible to appreciate the visual qualities of a place with one short visit, but not how it smells on a frosty morning, how city sounds reverberate across narrow streets to expire over the broad square, or how the pavement burns through gym-shoe soles and melts bicycle tires in August. To know a place is also to know the past: one's own past preserved in schoolhouse, corner drugstore, swimming pool, and first home; the city's past enshrined in its architectural landmarks. At the personal level a coffee shop is "1963," a year in which one lunched regularly with colleagues; at the public level the antique store is "1878," the year when worthy citizens convened there to draw up the city charter. Abstract knowledge of the past is quickly learned; historical facts are no more difficult to memorize than geographical ones. But the communal past is not truly one's own past unless history extends without break into personal memories; and neither is vividly present unless objectified in things that can be seen and touched, that is, directly experienced.

If it takes time to know a place, the passage of time itself does not guarantee a sense of place. If experience takes time, the passage of time itself does not ensure experience. One person may know a place intimately after a five-year sojourn; another has lived there all his life and it is to him as unreal as the unread books on his shelf. The contrast is not between abstract knowledge and a personal knowledge that cannot be expressed, for it is possible to live and yet not be alive, so that the years melt away with no impress on either mind or sensibility. A long life does not guarantee wisdom. A long chronological past does not make a historical city. Marseilles was founded in 600 B.C., San Francisco in A.D. 1776. Is San Francisco, therefore, so much less a place?

Epilogue

Space, not place, tantalized Americans when the frontiers were open and resources appeared limitless. Space is abstract. It lacks

content; it is broad, open, and empty, inviting the imagination to fill it with substance and illusion; it is possibility and beckoning future. Place, by contrast, is the past and the present, stability and achievement. A major consequence of the ecological movement and the energy crisis is to make us realize that space is no longer an apt image of our crowded earth; place is. Earth is not just a launching pad for space, or for dreams of interminable expansion. It is the human home in the cosmic scheme of things. The study of place attracts increasing attention, which ought to mean that geography is gaining new followers, for a primary focus of geography is place. To the geometrical and ideographic perspectives that already exist in the discipline, a third is here added: the experiential perspective. Place is created by human beings for human purposes. Every row of trees or of houses originally existed as an idea, which was then made into tangible reality. A building, a park, or a street corner does not, however, remain a place simply because it is tangible reality and was originally designed as a place. To remain a place it has to be lived in. This is a platitude unless we examine what "lived in" means. To live in a place is to experience it, to be aware of it in the bones as well as with the head. Place, at all scales from the armchair to the nation, is a construct of experience; it is sustained not only by timber, concrete, and highways, but also by the quality of human awareness.