

The Elements of Home

Towards Community and Privacy



The Elements of Home

Towards Community and Privacy

by

Christopher Brandon Davis

Thesis submitted to the faculty of
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and
State University in partial fulfill-
ment for the degree of:

Master of Architecture

Committee Chairperson
William Galloway

Committee Member
Mike O'Brien

Committee Member
Hunter Pittman

Blacksburg, Virginia
3 May 1999



Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank my family and friends for thier unwavering support and understanding throughout the years.

I would also like to thank the members of my committee for helping me to refine my ideas and beliefs.

In Memory of Rob Kovack

Abstract

Today it we live in a society where almost everything is or has been reduced to the quantitative state of being a commodity of some kind.

“ During the last decades it has become increasingly clear that this pragmatic approach leads to a schematic and characterless environment, with insufficient possibilities for human dwelling.”¹

We find ourselves searching for something within architecture that is not necessarily tangible or quantifiable. Searching for something more implicit to human experience.

“A psychoanalyst should, therefore turn his attention to the simple localization of our memories. I should like to give the name Topoanalysis to this auxiliary of psychoanalysis. Topoanalysis, then, would be the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives.”²

This thesis is an attempt to explore and document the fundamental idea of dwelling.

Contents

Introduction	iv
Society	v
Context	7
Order & Projection	25
Sequence & Experience	39
Distinction & Continuity	61
Tradition	95
Appendix	117

Introduction

What should a house be like? This question is both complex and simple at the same time. Complex in the particular nature of individual requirements and simple in the fundamental qualities that we all desire.

Each individual has specific requirements for their house. These specifics are too often wrapped up in pragmatic concerns or some stylized imagery. As architects we must first learn to find what is primary and necessary to the client.

*“This being the case, if I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace. Thought and experience are not the only things that sanction human values. The values that belong to the daydreamer mark humanity in its depths. Daydreaming even has a privilege of autovalorization. It derives direct pleasure from its own being. Therefore, The places in which we have experienced daydreaming reconstitute themselves in a new daydream, and it is because our memories of former dwelling-places are relived as daydreams that these dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time.”*³

Most houses built today are the result of economic circumstances. To think of our houses as a commodity is to make the distinction between building and architecture. Building is more the result of a commodity mentality where there is a quantitative measure involved. Architecture, on the other hand, is more about making intangible qualities present that cannot be measured quantitatively, but are experienced.

*“A work of art is a reality only when it is experienced, and experiencing a work of art means recreating its dimension of feeling.”*⁴

The goal of this thesis is to study the relationship between the house and the inhabitant within the context of the community.

Society

Style & Sustenance

The creation of “community” has been complicated by the popularity of the automobile. The automobile is no doubt here to stay. As designers we must find a way to accommodate the car without sacrificing our physical environment to it.

The mobile nature of our society has led to increased distances between the places that we live, work, shop, eat, and play. The popularity of the automobile has made it possible to travel long distances in relatively short times while minimizing any pedestrian contact. It is possible to drive into the garage and enter the house directly having no contact with the street at a pedestrian level.



Our houses have begun to appear more from the street as garages with living spaces behind.

“When buildings are limited to deriving practical convenience and are merely temporary attractions, the community suffers a spiritual loss.”⁵

This “convenience” creates an isolation of the individual daily experiences and habits leaving little if any contribution to community.

The accommodation of the automobile dictates the articulation of the face of the house. This articulation compounded with some attempt to capture nostalgia or tradition through style only contributes to the growing homogeneity of the places in which we live.

The vast majority of modern suburbs offer no real solution to our current dilemma. Disconnection may be seen at many different levels from the individual to the house to the community.

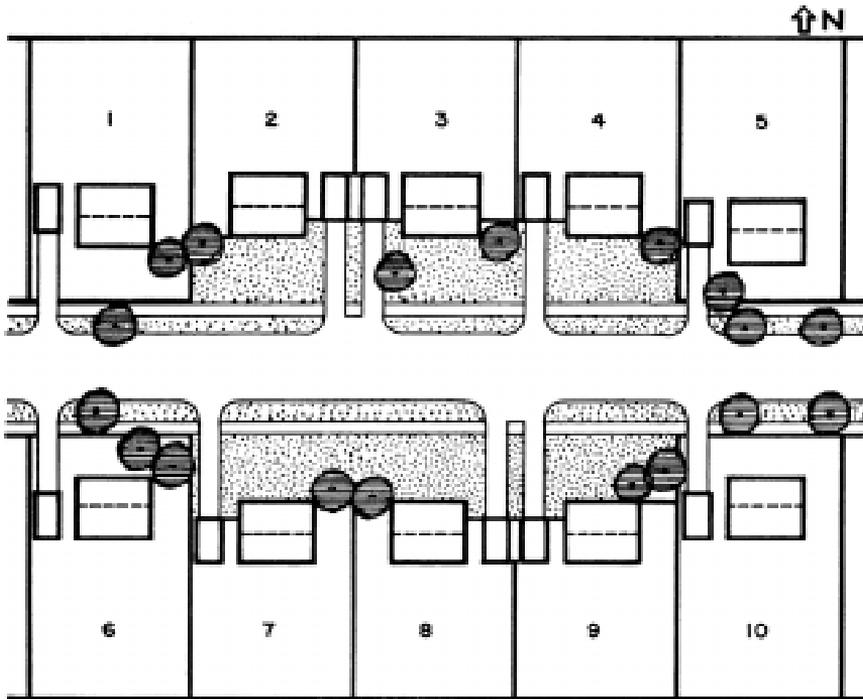
Current zoning conditions result from city legislation that dictates the minimum physical requirements for communities. These requirements appear partially as street widths, building use, and building setbacks.

Any greenspace around the house seems to be more a consequence of buffering than an attempt to claim the space for direct use. The front yard is used primarily as a display area for the house to sit. Most of the outside activity that occurs happens within the fenced in rear yard.

While there is some attempt to associate oneself with a style or form, this superficial programming ultimately fails to meet the most fundamental needs of the inhabitant.

When we think of the idea of home,

"It must become more primitive and more refined at the same time: Primitive in terms of meeting the most fundamental human needs with an economy of expression and mediating mans relation to the world in an equally fundamental way, and more sophisticated in the sense of adapting to the cyclic systems of nature in terms of both matter and energy." ⁶





From the primitive hut, as described by Laugier, man has had a strong desire to control his environment through building. Early dwellings simply accommodated the most basic requirements for survival, the need for shelter and protection from the weather.

Through time, houses have become more and more complex often moving towards the machine. Functions that they provide, such as heating/cooling, electricity, plumbing, etc., dominate their development.

The more fundamental idea of the primitive house has become secondary if it is present at all. For all of its primitive qualities our first dwellings had something very essential to human comfort, the quality of protection.

We learn from the writings of Christian Norberg-Schulz that:

*"He interprets dwelling as being at peace in a protected place."*⁷

Out of this sense of protection man has found the freedom to explore individual expression. This expression took the form of such things as language and hut construction (*architecture*).

This newfound freedom was incorporated within the context of the whole community providing the group with a cultural identity.

