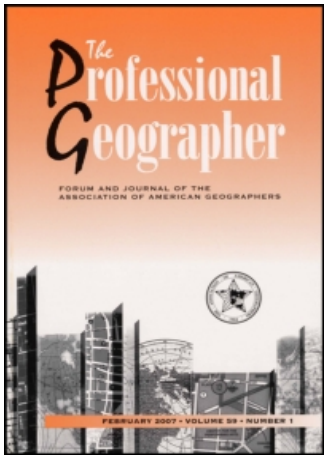

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THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL THEORY: TOWARDS AN ARCHITECTURAL GEOGRAPHY

Jon Goss [a]
[a] JON GOSS is Assistant Professor at the University of Hawaii. His PhD. dissertation (University of Kentucky) is on the urban poor in Manila, Philippines. He is interested in urban space and social movements..

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THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL THEORY: TOWARDS AN ARCHITECTURAL GEOGRAPHY*

Jon Goss

University of Hawaii at Manoa

This paper critiques the narrow empiricist focus and inadequate theoretical development of much architectural geography. The geographer's concern and interest in the built environment is integrated with a more critical and relevant awareness of social theory. Four theoretical categories of building and architectural function are discussed: buildings as cultural artifacts, as objects of value, as signs, and as a spatial system. Directions for research are proposed for the example of historic preservation. **Key Words: built environment, value, semiotics, historical preservation.**

A building is more than it seems. It is an artifact—an object of material culture produced by a society to fulfill particular functions determined by, and thus embodying or reflecting, the social relations and level of development of the productive forces of that society. Buildings can be viewed as structures of purpose—shelter, meeting, making, and marketing—created in an environment of opportunity and constraint and with a given level of technology. They are also physical expressions of a way of life. Buildings reflect not only culture, however, for they are engaged in reproduction of social relations, both as monuments or more prosaic signs and symbols in communication of social meaning, and through their relations of separation and containment. A building is invested with ideology, and the space within, around, and between buildings is both produced and producing.

Geography has generally failed to come to terms with the complexity of architectural form and meaning, and this paper draws together some of the separate and diverse perspectives developed on the "built environment" that promote a closer cooperation of architecture and geography. The aim is not to provide an historical overview of architectural geography, but to establish a theoretical basis for the study of architecture within geography in a manner that incorporates both the traditions of architectural geography and contemporary social theory. Establishing this theoretical basis is particularly urgent, as the built environment is the locus of important contemporary social processes and popular concerns that cannot be effectively addressed within currently practiced architectural geography. Historical preservation is discussed as an example, and a framework is presented for its analysis within a reconstituted architectural geography. This analysis combines themes within the Marxian interpretation of the built environment, semiotics, and structuration theory. It examines buildings conceived as cultural artifacts, as objects of value, as signs, and as a spatial system. These categories are closely related in practice, but their separate treatment allows for greater clarity and helps establish buildings as multifunctional objects rather than reflective facades.

The Building as Cultural Artifact

The treatment of buildings as cultural artifacts has been well developed within cultural and historical geography as indicated by a large number of books and journal

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articles, particularly in the journal *Landscape*. The central assumption is that, although constrained by environmental conditions and available construction materials, form and style in architecture reflect the level of technological development and the values of a culture. The spatial patterning of architectural-type variations is a clue to the areal extent of cultural groups and their historical development, especially through migration and diffusion.

Ford (1984) argues that geographers initially were interested in architecture as part of unique landscapes and their peoples. Cultural geographers followed this tradition under the domination of scholars at Louisiana State University and, to a lesser extent, those at the University of California, Berkeley. They produced typologies of primitive (that is, foreign and exotic) and vernacular (that is, traditional and folk) architecture, describing the domain, evolution and diffusion of everyday styles and forms. Kniffen's (1965) work typified this theme and was extremely influential in cultural geography. In part this focus on vernacular architecture can be seen as counteracting the architects' overemphasis on the monumental, the unique, and the urban. However, the promise of an architectural geography failed to materialize as a result of the particularism of the idiographic regional/historical method. Although some of the work produced was of high quality and historic interest, much of it was narrow in focus and concentrated on relict forms. Articles, for example, on the style and distribution of tobacco barns generally lack theoretical development and social relevance. While elaboration of socially relevant theory was not their aim, they cannot claim to constitute an architectural geography substantively distinct from the subfields of cultural, historical, or regional geography.

The main problem with the traditional cultural approach was that in using illustrative examples drawn from the work of structural anthropologists in exotic places (such as Rapoport 1969), most cultural geographers uncritically assumed the correlation of architectural form and a given culture and then proceeded to explain the spatial patterns of one with the other. Lewis (1970, 33) provides an example of the assumption that:

> . . . if the folk architecture of two adjacent regions is fundamentally different, then the folk culture of those regions is also likely to be different in other important ways. It follows that if a people migrate to a new land, they will carry their house-types with them [and] that one can trace the persistence of their culture through time and space by the continuity and discontinuity in the kinds of houses the migrants build. Through his folk house-types man etches his culture into the landscape.

Distinctive forms of building are undoubtedly significant in reconstructing spatial patterns of past cultures. However, few geographical studies of architecture as a cultural artifact succeed in moving beyond this simple correlation to explain why and whereby architecture becomes cultural artifact, how cultural and architectural institutions might be interrelated, and why some forms were reproduced while others remain only as relics. Without such theory architectural geography is merely a component of the geography of artifacts on a par with, say, "ploughshare geography" or the geography of kitchen utensils. In fact, cultural geographers have in general failed to *interpret* culture as a unitary complex of social relations, abstract beliefs, and material or symbolic forms, in the sense advocated by cultural anthropologists (Geertz 1973). To invert Geertz's metaphor, geographical description has been decidedly "thin."

A second problem was that early cultural geography studies, with a few isolated exceptions (James 1931; Jones 1931), were almost exclusively rural. As the urban problematic emerged into the center field of social theory and action in the 1960s, a new social conscience focused on quality of life and social equality. According to Ford (1984, 12), "the time was ripe for environmentally aware, socially concerned, historical urban, and architectural/cultural geographers to establish some common ground." Work in the humanistic tradition, largely inspired by Lynch (1960), uncovered the

meaning and social significance of the built environment, but cultural-architectural geographers persisted in their descriptions of evolutionary phases and the geographical patterns of development, decline, and persistence of architectural styles (Rickert 1967; Rubin 1977). Although chronological studies of spatial patterns in architecture can usefully illuminate urban morphology and issues such as class segregation (Bastian 1975), this "mapping-of-facades" approach reveals a number of shortcomings.

First, the results of the historical and descriptive studies are often ungeneralized and rarely theorized. Second, there is a tendency to "explain" the historical sequence of architectural styles by particular technological and socioeconomic contingencies. For example, Fusch and Ford (1983) explain that the abandonment of Victorian residences in the 1950s and 1960s and their subsequent reoccupation in the 1970s was due to construction innovations (in plumbing, wiring, and central heating) and the changing life-styles of first-time buyers. Consequences of structural change within society are treated as independent causes in the development of housing, and houses are seen only as commodities for consumption by family units making free residential choices. Such post hoc rationalization shows a lack of concern for housing as a process—the way homes are acquired and by whom (Adams 1984)—and as an investment, invested both with capital in the accumulation process and with social meaning.

An architectural geography properly articulated needs to be more than the description of historically contingent patterns if it is to be more than a popular geography for the coffee-table book. It needs to explain architecture as a social product, as the spatial configuration of the built environment incorporating economic, political, and ideological dimensions. The first of these concerns leads to consideration of the building as an object of value.

The Building as an Object of Value

According to Baudrillard, the value of a building, as any material object, can be divided into four components: *use value*, its practical function as shelter or living place; *exchange value*, its value on the market as a commodity embodying labor and capital; *sign value*, its function as a message of difference and status; *symbol value*, its role in prelogical thought (Marchand 1982). These components of value are complex, dialectically related analytic categories which will be a part of, but not identical to, "price."

According to Rapoport (1969), primitive and vernacular buildings are designed and built for the use of the inhabitants, either by the inhabitants themselves or, less commonly, by commissioned specialists. Such buildings could be bartered, sold, or used as collateral, and so must embody a potential exchange value, but the realization of this value was not the motive of construction. In contrast, under capitalism (though not exclusively) buildings are designed and built by architectural, financial, and construction interests, and are presented and packaged for exchange at a currently determined rate of profit. They are commodities at the outset. A house, for example, is then not only a center of human meaning and social reproduction (providing means of shelter and the location of feeding, washing, resting, recuperating, and other intimate activities of everyday life), but is also commodified, or given a veneer of surface appeal to become a real estate value (Tuan 1983). Houses may be modified or adapted to as inhabitants' needs are redefined, but are more readily traded-in and replaced, often in response to changing socially-produced "wants." In the words of Raskin (1974), "the idea of 'home' tends to be relegated to sentimental songs and sayings . . . while the actuality is a series of residences built, sold, and occupied as generally replaceable commodities."

The notion of housing as a commodity also extends to the level of the neighborhood, and perhaps to entire communities. They are packaged as generalized objects of

consumption, denying specific and subjective place, and presented as a life-style for the resident or as spectacle for the visitor. The city, for example, markets an image to highly selective, flexible, and increasingly mobile financial and construction capital seeking cheap real estate with the potential to be developed or upgraded into new values.

The political economy perspective over the last decade has theorized specifically the role of the built environment and the nature of the housing market both in terms of production, as a "secondary circuit" in the accumulation process (Harvey 1978), and consumption, as reproduction of labor power and means of state legitimation. The debate in the Marxian literature and its engagement with the neo-Weberians continue, and some of its concerns are relevant here.

The value of a building is determined by its relative location (accessibility), site (physical characteristics, amenity), social setting (neighborhood status), and architecture (size, fashionability, and facilities). A problem for our analysis is that only the last of these refers explicitly, and directly, to the building itself as opposed to the land upon which it stands or to associated externalities. In an attempt to separate the elements, Lamarche (1976) distinguishes between a land market and a property market; and Roweis and Scott (1981) between land as a noncommodity and floor space as a privately produced commodity.

The distinction between the structure and the land upon which it stands is useful but the categories are intrinsically related. The nature of buildings at least partly determines the value of the land beneath and surrounding them as well as of other contiguous buildings. Land value in turn will also determine, in part, the nature of construction upon it. Therefore, geographical variation in land value will be reflected in different architectural styles and forms, and different architectural styles and forms will affect variation in land values. High-rise office blocks are therefore associated with the downtown, and single-story residences with the suburbs; and higher land values might be expected in well-preserved Victorian neighborhoods rather than in inter-wartime residential areas, other things, such as accessibility, being equal. One direction for architectural geography would be the theoretical exposition and empirical study of this relationship.

An especially relevant issue is the rationale and increasing scale of corporate and state planning, and corporate-state planning of the built environment. Development capital, by extending its control over space and purchasing land and/or property, can create the conditions of its own profitability (Lamarche 1976). Thus totally planned real estate developments in the suburbs and urban fringe in which the facilities, amenities, spatial organization, visual aspects, and the chosen name reinforce each other, appeal to particular types of owner-occupier whose status identities are also mutually reinforcing. This process began on a massive scale with Levitt and Sons' Long Island housing projects. It now ranges from the mid-career, middle-income, middle-class condominiums to the all-adult "yuppie" communities and the "mega-communities" of Orange County, California, designed for the consumption of idealized life-styles (Ruddick 1986). In its extreme form, mutual reinforcement of status is preserved by restrictive zoning, covenants, and limited access maintained by security guards. The degree of control exercised by suburbs such as Rolling Hills and Indian Wells, California, or The Island of Lexington, Kentucky, is reminiscent of the defensive posture of Third World elites.

Similarly, shopping centers and malls, office complexes, and conference centers create totally designed environments; concentrating particular clienteles to their mutual advantages enables the developer to increase sale prices or rents, and thus profits, above income determined by the land and floor space alone. Examples include the classic megastructures of Chicago's Renaissance Center, the West Edmonton Mall, and

the proposed British Columbia Place renewal project (Ley 1987). One cannot predict just how many projects of this scale could be accommodated, but the built environment in North America clearly is undergoing a transformation toward rational corporate planning for specialized self-containment.

These transformations, however, are not processes dictated solely by the requirements of the various fractions of capital. The state intervenes in the property market both at the local and national levels through the operation of fiscal measures (property taxation, rent controls, grants, and subsidies), legal restrictions (land-use zoning, building codes, and regulations), and direct construction (of infrastructure, public housing, and buildings, and in urban renewal). These interventions profoundly affect both the nature of use and the form of the built environment. Federal Housing Authority (FHA) funds have influenced suburbanization on a national scale. More recently, federal and local funding, and local government planners have promoted public–private partnerships for revitalization of inner cities such as Boston's Quincy Market and Baltimore's Waterfront.

The ideology of state intervention is the maintenance of community and the conditions of capital accumulation. These often contradictory goals can generate conflict between various interest groups, such as the "growth machine coalition" associated with boosterism (Molotch 1980) and the counter-coalitions promoting community values, environmental amenity, and conservation. Outcomes are conjectural, depending on the relative strengths of the respective coalitions and the nature of the political/bureaucratic administrations. Definite terrains of coalition activity, however, shape the contemporary built environment. Suburban zoning laws and resident organizations operate in practice effectively to prevent the "deterioration" of neighborhood, or more specifically, the decrease in property values of the predominantly middle or "new" class homes. The central city continues to build upwards as finance and property capital concentrate in space. Land values subsequently increase and eventually, the land uses and architectural forms which do not fit the image of the downtown as a marketable commodity (the clean, hygienic, and efficient look of smooth concrete, dark glass, and polished steel) disappear along with the people who do not fit this image. As an example of the latter, developers in Lexington, Kentucky, recommended the removal of the Salvation Army hostel and the city's street people to a rural location, the motive thinly disguised as a concern for their welfare in an urban environment.

The local state also intervenes in the process of gentrification. Particular areas around the downtown are preserved as historic districts of high residential and commercial value as developers, middle-class consumers, and the local state seek to realize profits or amenity benefits from conversion. Other areas decline, perhaps later to be selectively renewed or preserved according to the logic of the accumulation process. The rate of these processes increases as capital seeks and states plan for profits by redefining use of the built environment. Often enabled by local state legislation, capital creates or captures environmental externalities realized in increased value of property, increasing in turn the real property tax base of the local government and the marketability of the city.

The crucial question, then, is how the look of the city and suburbs, the spatial variation in architectural form and style, is determined by economic processes and by the conflict or cooperation of different politico-economic groups. These include the fractions of capital, the residential classes (owners and renters), and the financial/fiscal interests of the state as subject to the political demands made by these groups.

Architecture as Sign

As any member of a growth coalition and any realtor would reveal, the look of the city and of each building is important to a structure's commercial value. But appearance

is not merely reducible to a price, for each building conveys a meaning as a sign, a function which confers upon it a sign value—its value as a message of social difference or of status.

Particular buildings or forms of building are invested in ideological meaning. The suburban residence, for instance, may legitimize domestic property, private accumulation of wealth, the nuclear family, and class/age group segregation. Similarly, skyscrapers and housing complexes are symbols of modernism (Adams 1984; Clay 1973; Gottman 1966). Skyscrapers stand as monuments to a Machine Age (Relph 1987), minimalist in style, efficient in function, and embodying a cool (steel, glass, blue) power. Lefebvre (1976, 88) states, "These are the places of official Power, the places where Power is concentrated, where it reflects itself, looks down from above—and is transparent. The Phallic unites with the political, verticality symbolizes Power." Corbusien multistory residential blocks for lower-income families similarly symbolize machine age order, efficiency, and anonymity, though they explicitly deny power of and to the inhabitants. These "concrete cages" (Relph 1987) represent faith in a technological solution (social engineering) to social problems in a mass society whose optimism died in the despair of the Grandes Ensembles of Paris and the iconoclastic dynamiting of Pruitt Igoe in St. Louis.

Krampen (1979) and others attempted to develop a semiotics, or semiology, of the built environment. The assumption underlying these complex and jargon-ridden expositions of a self-proclaimed new science is a linguistic analogy—that the architectural object is a signifier which has as its object an ideology, concept, or social relation. Architecture thus constitutes a language which communicates social meaning. The urban environment in particular can be read as a text which builds up from spatial/relational semantemes or urbemes (paths, edges, nodes, districts, and landmarks) (Lynch 1960). Even when buildings are stripped of their "verbal crust" (Krampen 1979) or the written messages which adorn them, they have "imageability" (Lynch 1960).

Even if architecture is a system of signs which have a linguistic function and constitute a text through spatial combinations and patterning, pursuit of this linguistic analogy may be problematical. First, architectural semiotics might place too great an emphasis on the sign and symbol as opposed to the functional value of a building. Krampen (1979) argues that meaning may be conveyed by function rather than form, and that an architectural artifact only attains a level of signification when it is used to convey meaning over and above its immediate material function. For example, the office block signifies wealth and power primarily through its function as the location of powerful economic interests in an area of high land rent. The symbolism of verticality, the skin of opaque glass, the anonymous and disorienting lobby, and the impossibility of penetrating the interior, might then be interpreted as symbolic subsystems of signification determined in the last instance by the material function. According to Prak (1968, 25):

> The function of a building determines its form in a double sense. In a purely rational sense by requiring of it that it will be practical and will work; in an aesthetic sense by demanding that the felt emotional importance of the function finds some expression in architecture.

A wide range of forms is practical, however, for any function. Only in the most ideal and extreme of modernist architecture will form be reducible to function. Furthermore, preexisting forms can be adapted to suit very different functions, as in the conversion of Elvis Presley's airplane into a restaurant, and of Soho textile warehouses into artists' studios. In these cases it is difficult to assess whether the previous function, the form, or the apparent disjunction of form and present function is the source of meaning. The relationship is not deterministic and is rather complex. Teasing out this complexity may reveal how architecture really functions as sign.

The second question concerns intent and interpretation, of semiotics by who and for whom—hence Gottdiener's (1983) concept of a socio-semiotics. There is a distinction between the sender's message and message received. The towering office block, for example, has a very different meaning for the various groups who view it (Domosh 1988): from those who own it (representatives of fractions of finance capital, construction capital, and corporate capital); to those who produce it (architects, engineers, and construction workers); from those who run it (maintenance managers and staff); to those who use it (office managers, secretaries, clerks, and visitors); and to those who look up at it (passers-by and the street people) or glance it on the urban skyline (highway travelers, suburbanites, and ruralites). The interpretation of meanings depends upon position in the production-consumption hierarchies and is, of course, highly problematical. Do we rely on the insight of the privileged semiotician indulging in Barthes' "jousiance," who claims to penetrate or transcend such hierarchies, or elicit and interpret discourse of the producers and consumers themselves?

To understand the meaning of the built environment is not to retreat into obscure analyses of the deep structural grammar of architecture. We must realize the complexity of a multicoded space and study it in its everyday usage (through interviews, literary and historic texts, or events) by everyday people who may be "reading" or "writing" different languages in the built environment. Geographers and architects might relate architectural forms of buildings and their spatial configurations as a whole through study of image and activity in the mental and material life of the inhabitants or users, rather than focusing on the individual building and the complex interpretation of the semiotic content of its facade.

An architectural geography might concern itself with the way in which architectural signs build up to produce an image of particular localities, neighborhoods, districts, and even cities. These images are produced and reproduced within the context of their own logic and the social relations and ideology of society. For example, suburban dwellings reflect the Arcadian mythology; the factory symbolizes work discipline; the tenement is associated with social pathology; shopping centers glorify consumer ideology and personal mobility. Even Chinatowns suggest social construction of race (Anderson 1987). Simple identification of the architectural correlates of culture is not enough, however. Of vital significance is how function and form interrelate to communicate meaning. How, for example, are the images of the downtown and the suburb created by their material functions and the producers' manipulation of those images? Such manipulation is becoming increasingly calculated and explicit as post-modernist architecture seeks to temper technology, manufacturing illusions of nature or tradition. Examples are the landscaping of interiors and exteriors of shopping malls or office complexes, and the "Bavarianization" of mountain resorts such as Kimberly, British Columbia (Relph 1987). Relph (1987) adopts Disney's term "imagineering" to describe this "imaginative engineering of deception," but the question is where the deception lies. Such illusions obscure the economic calculus, presenting as cozy community or fun-park what is fundamentally a profit-making machine. But the image-builders are surely equally susceptible to delusion, the source of which ultimately lies in dominant ideology.

Studies of the meaning of monumental architecture (Harvey 1979; Rowntree and Conkey 1980) have indicated elite ideologies and the role of symbols in domination. Geographers need to examine the signs read and actively interpreted in everyday buildings. Perhaps most vital of all is how we might utilize this understanding actively to challenge the produced text to rewrite the meanings and functions of architectural-spatial configurations.

Architecture as a Spatial System

The built environment reproduces symbolic meanings which the consumer interprets according to social position and can read to anticipate life-style and dominant social relations. But buildings are also physical objects that present environments of opportunity and constraints that serve to reproduce these meanings, life-styles, and relations. The space within a building, and the space external to it, is given character by its spatial relations with other buildings, and is formed by and formative of social relations. The segmentation of space manifests and at the same time recreates the separation of inhabitants (Tuan 1983) and their activities along a multiplicity of lines such as public/private, sacred/profane, work/leisure, adult/child, and day/night. The distinction of the public and private realms of knowledge and interaction, for example, is not merely reflected in the configuration of the built environment (inner and outer spaces). To a significant degree the distinction is actually created through its realization in spatial relations of accessibility or permeability. In an innovative attempt to theorize this characteristic of buildings, Hillier and Hanson (1984) argue that the function of interior and exterior spaces varies with the nature of the social system. Under a local-to-global system where the interrelations of basic social units construct the whole:

> Interiors tend to define more of an ideological space, in the sense of a fixed system of categories and relations that is constantly reaffirmed by use, whereas exteriors define a transactional or even a political space, in that it constructs a more fluid system of encounters which is constantly negotiated by use (Hillier and Hanson 1984, 20).

Under this configuration, in sociological terms, interiors are the spaces of mechanical solidarity and exteriors spaces of organic solidarity. In contrast, under the global-to-local system where the state acts to project ideology over society and its territory, exteriors are dominated by ideological structures and interiors by transactions, or exteriors become symbolic in the "space of power," and interiors become political in the "space of control."

This preliminary discussion does not clarify how these ideal-type constructs may form a continuum, and how, if at all, there may be transition from one to the other. The argument suggests that under capitalism, for example, the exterior symbolizes power and the interior functions to control. The concept rather than dualistic typologies is useful, for interior and exterior can only be seen as positional terms which vary according to perspective, most especially in complex spaces. For example, streets in private subdivisions are interior relative to the outsider's position but are exterior relative to the residence. In the case of a hospital, which is only at the level of a single building, interior-exterior relationships are hierarchically ordered and vary according to class of user, from visitor to patient, from medical to maintenance or administrative staff, each of whom is privileged in a different space within the structure. The interfaces of the various user spaces are the key elements of ideological meaning and social control through their images and the degrees of separation they (re)present.

The problem of the role of floorscape or, at a larger scale, of a settlement plan composed of buildings and the spaces between them, might usefully be approached through time-geography and the theory of structuration (the process whereby agency and structure are dialectically reproduced). The question is how accessibility, permeability, and the nature of the interfaces condition the separation of actions and activities of inhabitants or visitors. For example, we might examine how arrangement of space, or in space, materially realizes moral or social constraints by affecting movement and interaction of individuals. How does floor plan effect regionalization, or the zoning of social practices in time and space (Giddens 1985)? How do these functions

literally frame the places where dominant institutional projects (the ideology and practice of a given mode of production) intersect most subtly and routinely with everyday individual life paths or local practice (Pred 1984)?

A second likely research theme is the nature of the ideological content of architectural configurations and the relationship between physical and social space, and between physical and socio-psychic space within buildings (Carlisle 1983). Of particular significance is the genealogy of architectural planning, of interior design and exterior styles, related to social control. Foucault (1977) discussed the form of architecture in penal institutions as part of a strategy of power/knowledge, and this kind of analysis might be extended to other institutional structures such as schools, hospitals, residential homes for the elderly, infirm or insane, and government offices. If particular architectural forms have political and ideological functions, we might examine, for example: the home in control of women and children (Wright 1981), development of attitudes of privacy, sexuality (Tuan 1983), eating (Rapoport 1969), individuality and territoriality; the factory in control of workers' time and space, and in legitimizing the social division of labor; the prison in disciplining inmates and in "total" control; and the school in social discipline (Giddens 1985). The interior architectural arrangement and, to a lesser extent, the spatial configurations of buildings have not been the subject of much social science, nor especially geographical research. An architectural geography might investigate the moral significance of interior spaces (Tuan 1983) and the ideological significance of the architectural landscape at various levels in the reproduction of relations of power.

The Changing Nature of the Architecture of the Built Environment: An Example

Architectural form and style are not simply the concretization of cultural values and ideology, nor simply the reflection of material function and social relations of production, nor equally matters of individual perception and interpretation. Human life is multiple-sided and complex, and the meaning of a building cannot simply be read without considering the interaction of the subjects who are ultimately the sources of all its functions and meanings. Analysis must focus on both the intent (conscious and unconscious) of the producer; the requirements, demands, and limitations of production; the process of consumption; and the perceptions, satisfactions, and criticisms of the consumers.

One example of a changing architectural configuration is the recent concern for historical preservation or conservation in which architecturally pleasing older buildings are renovated and/or preserved through both private and local state activity (Ford 1979, 1984). This development is a selective process because only certain buildings in particular locations will be subject to concern. It is also a complex process for it involves the articulation of various class interests together with the political and legal apparatus of the local state. It is also intimately connected with the complex processes of urban renewal, gentrification, and inner city revitalization in post-modern capitalist society. Here I will only suggest how historical preservation could be studied within the framework of an architectural geography.

Viewing the building as cultural artifact, the chronological development of buildings and neighborhoods, and their relative decline and persistence, can be mapped and described as in conventional cultural architectural geography (Fusch and Ford 1983). Examination of the character of their uses and occupants, particularly ethnicity, social class, life-cycle stage, life-style, and value systems, will illuminate the historical process of neighborhood change. However, we need go beyond the descriptive to articulate the conception of cultural artifact with a theory of architecture.

Geographic research should seek to understand the "production" of older buildings

by capital; and, in particular, the role of finance and property capital in opening up, developing, and exploiting the opportunities presented by revitalization of old buildings and neighborhoods. How does historical preservation facilitate the accumulation of capital by development corporations, realtors, and the individual owner or household? The local state promotes, regulates, and restricts this process both through direct and indirect intervention. The local government weighs the actual and opportunity costs of preservation and renovation versus the benefits of increased marketability of the built environment, potential gains in tourism, retail sales, and popularity with the voting public. Similarly, the means by which certain groups and individuals influence and benefit from this process should be analyzed. How, for example, do architects create profit through their monopoly of design and managerial function (Knox 1987)? How are the new inhabitants motivated by psychological, social, or economic imperatives?

In terms of sign value of the built environment, what is the social meaning of historic preservation, such that it gives rise to thousands of activist neighborhood groups and elicits support from those with little material connection to the process? What is the nature of this collective nostalgia and to what extent is it manipulated or even selectively manufactured? Are old buildings symbols of traditional values? For example, are Victorian residences symbols of family, class, and social status, even though (or because) the residents may not constitute a family in the traditional sense and their status may be ambivalent? Do buildings effect imaginary ties to the past, screening rapid social change and rooting those most affected by this change in an environment representing the stability of tradition? The process may serve a particular ideological function of cementing a collective past, creating a nostalgia even for those, the majority, who never saw the buildings in their original function or spatial context.

The relationship between values is of particular significance. Why is the commitment to preserve the historical so constantly redefined, and why is it such a selective process? Aside from preservation of symbolic buildings, the search for opportunities to accumulate wealth or ensure electoral success apparently underlie this selectivity—preservation for profit and politics rather than for posterity. In the case of gentrification, the older run-down buildings which provide low-standard rental housing or business premises have meaning for present inhabitants very different from that for the incoming gentrifiers. This difference has an exchange value which then becomes the mechanism for displacement. Those who cannot afford the luxury of symbolic rental, or are unwilling or unable to pay for a neighborhood's positive externalities, are bought out by the gentrifiers (a term more reflective of the newcomers' cultural values than the more conventionally emphasized economic and household characteristics). Historical preservation may also create a symbolic capital which has the ideological function of mystifying economic relations and real differences in wealth and social class as distinctions in taste or culture (Harvey 1987). The relationship between exchange and sign values is obviously subtle and variable and needs to be more fully explicated.

Historical preservation, as part of a spatial system, includes adaptation of old structures to new uses and new occupants (the possibility of a "resemantization" of the built environment), and the effect of preexisting structures on the inhabitants in perpetuating traditional values and relations. Geographers might study at the neighborhood, urban, and regional scales, the control and restriction of individual or group activities through the symbolic and physically constraining power of the preserved environment. How, for example, are spaces within the renovated structures necessarily redefined, to what extent is redefinition practically possible, and how does it affect control and relations of power? On the other hand, how do new inhabitants adapt to spaces defined by different social relations or power structures? What, for example,

is the significance in terms of permeability, or public/private segmentation of spaces, of the removal of porches on residences in gentrified neighborhoods (Relph 1987)?

Conclusion

Surprisingly few cultural geographers have been concerned more than superficially with architectural form. Most architectural geographies have focused on the rural and the quaint. Cultural geography would be improved by a more critical conception of culture and by the injection of some theories, particularly of sign value and building(s) as a spatial system, into the study of architecture.

What is more surprising, and less defensible, is the neglect of architecture by many geographers studying the urban where the third dimension of the built environment is particularly significant. This gap is symptomatic of a narrow, two-dimensional conception of space and a desocializing of spatial relations. Space can no longer be conceived as merely material, nor social relations as merely abstract. An invigorated architectural geography would have as its basis the realization that all architectural forms must be located in space, and that buildings are at the same time commodities embodying social values and meaning which impart character to that space. Buildings cannot be studied or theorized out of their spatial context, nor can space be studied in two dimensions, reducing the built environment to a functional pattern on the land. "Space [must] be fleshed out with architecture if we are to develop meaningful models of the real world" (Ford 1984, 24).

Architecture has profound socio-spatial significance deserving of more rigorous theoretical concern. Architecture should be treated as a complex function: as a cultural artifact, as an object of economic value, as a sign, and as a spatial system. The interrelationships among these categories deserve greater theoretical and empirical research. Recognizing such separate categories in the complex functions of the built environment nevertheless allows us to frame research questions within social theory which might be the first step toward a relevant and critical architectural geography.

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JON GOSS is Assistant Professor at the University of Hawaii. His PhD. dissertation (University of Kentucky) is on the urban poor in Manila, Philippines. He is interested in urban space and social movements.