



35 MAKING PLACE IN THE 21ST CENTURY CITY: ACCELERATING THE SEARCH FOR HARMONY BETWEEN EMERGING VALUES OF GLOBAL CONSUMERSHIP AND TIME-HONORED VALUES OF VERNACULAR, FAMILY, AND HUMAN SPIRITUALITY

James Chaffers

Point of Departure: A Shifting Global Terrain

Crafting an enabling language that bridges cross-culturally by highlighting human “commonness” and human “capacity”—rather than perceived *differences* or perceived *deficiencies*—may well emerge as the primary task facing 21st century place makers. Such a language is challenged to accomplish its mission within the context of a changing global order variously defined and described, in part, in the following ways:

Certainly our experiences of the world are in flux. Some changes are perceived as global in nature; others, as changing the nature of experience around the globe. Representations of global change are changing, and the whole of professional discourse is changing. Indeed, discursive analysis would “deconstruct,” in a rather pervasive change, our conceptions of virtually all of the above.¹

The paradox of the current world conjuncture is the increased production of cultural and political boundaries at the very time when the world has become tightly bound together in a single economic system with instantaneous communication between different sectors of the globe. In order to disentangle these contradictory trends, it is necessary to place the construction of cultural demarcations and political boundaries being erected between groupings of people within the context of contention for political power and control of productive resources, including labor power.²

With an eye toward addressing the above paradox, “there is a proliferation of theorizing of how globalization and global change are transforming the construction and negotiation of identities, in a continuous churning and renegotiating of boundaries of difference and “otherness.”³ Flowing from these theoretical debates, some recent observations by Saskia Sassen regarding new orders of global complexity, hierarchy, and differentiation, are central to our discussion. Sassen notes: “A canopy of emergent global cities have become sites—or perhaps frontiers—for a new order of dramatically intensified financial speculation/manipulations that are increasingly transnational and detached from productive manufacturing and industrial activities, as well as from their own respective hinterlands.”⁴ Reflecting on the broader social and political significance of such cities, we are reminded that a curious inversion of classical economic theory is now occurring. “It is ‘capital’—that of global financial (fictitious) capital and transnational corporations—that is mobile and labor that is now immobile and captive behind national boundaries or frontiers. Increasingly, entire nation-states have themselves become instruments of the discipline of the marketplace,

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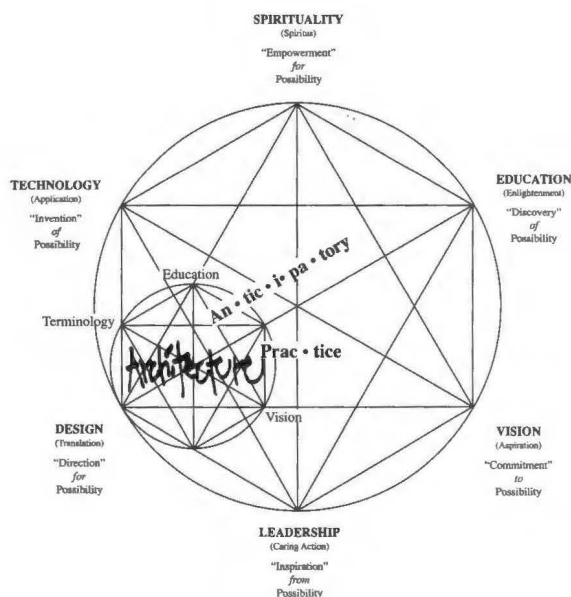
ensuring the quiescence of their populations and institutions to the rigors of free-market capital and the harsh disciplines of global finance.”⁵ Put succinctly, “...current corporate accumulation of capital is increasingly global, de-territorialized, de-spatialized, mobile, and unbound from geopolitical nation-states and geographic communities.”⁶ Boundaries which used to define who were suitable labor and at what, are being dissolved and renegotiated by global capital as it roams the globe in search of low-cost labor. Third-World children and the disenfranchised within the First World are increasingly working under conditions which had been forcibly put outside the pale of human treatment by the struggles of labor unionism.⁷ Simultaneously, processes of global economic change are increasingly rendering enormous numbers of people and vast territories simply “irrelevant” to the process of global accumulation.⁸

(Re) Capturing the ‘Spirit’ of Human Well-Being

A Deep-rooted Ideal for Navigating Present Disjunctures, Dislocations, and Conceptual Divides

Given the brutal and destructive violence reflected in mounting evidence of economic hegemony, human rights abuse, ecological disruption, etc., there is some temptation on my part to highlight the more apparent contradictions of current globalization processes. However, it is important to remember that the overarching motivation for global economic enterprise is sustained by its earlier promise for the ages—i.e., the elimination of wars and the eradication of human poverty. Prevailing contradictions notwithstanding, globalization’s deeper goal of moving humankind from poverty to prosperity can be traced to a life-affirming philosophy of “human well-being.” If “well-being” can yet serve as a worthy ideal, my preference is to focus our professional energies on bringing its essential qualities to fruition. In short, the challenge of developing *performance* criteria for human well-being appropriate to a new millennium serves as an organizing theme and conceptual barometer throughout this essay.

A philosophy of human well-being is sustained by an underlying belief that every human being is valuable and necessary. It follows that this philosophy is sustained by the more explicit belief that any lasting relief from war and poverty on a global scale is best pursued through a fundamental protection of individual human rights and the promotion of individual enterprise. Understandably, a philosophy of “well-being” further suggests that the protection of human “rights” and the promotion of human “enterprise” is key to global prosperity.



Within *market*-driven democracies around the globe,
(America's market democracy in particular . . .)

a
philosophy
of
human
"well-being"

has generally
been translated
into
the following twin goals:

(attaining)
**Material
Sufficiency**

"Financial"
Independence

through

entrepreneurial
relationships
aimed at achieving
rising levels of
"prosperity";

(a)
lifelong goal
crafted from the belief that a sufficient
accumulation of personal *material* wealth is
the key to human happiness—i.e., that
rising material *prosperity* will resolve
all social and political problems

. . . a deep respect for

individual
enterprise

(ensuring)
**Individual
Integrity**

"Rights"
Protection

family
relationships
of
common
"responsibility";

(a)
lifelong goal
crafted from the belief that one's pursuit
of *personal* happiness is the basic law of life—i.e.,
that the *advancement* of one's individual self
within one's family of kin and friends
will advance the whole of society . . .

. . . a deep respect for

individuality
within "family"

Carried
to an extreme,
internal *imbalances*
arising within the
above goals
result in

daily
practices

of:

Material(ism)

an
exaggerated
pursuit
of
material
well-being

i.e.,

"material indulgence"
beyond
requirements for
economic
self-sufficiency
and
financial
integrity

Individualism

(an)
exaggerated
pursuit
of
individual
well-being

i.e.,

"self-indulgence"
beyond
respectful
'individuality'
and
responsible
self-expression

Within the context

of

City

[Middle English *cite*, from Latin *civis*, *civitas*, *citizen*, *citizenry*]

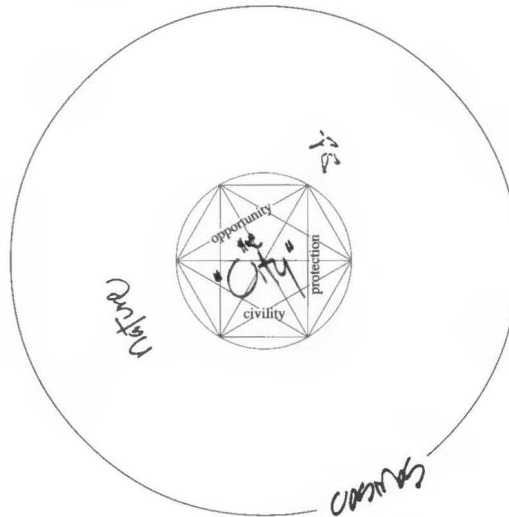
a

people-made
"invention"
of

ideas
(concepts)
and
philosophies)

people
(individuals
and
organizations)

things
(artifacts
and
infrastructure)



a

philosophy
of
human
"well-being"

gains
expression as
(an)
enabling
reservoir
of

resources and **relationships**
historically developed
within

a

yin-yang

of

(evolving)
Human
quests
for
Individual
Initiative
(self-governance)
empowerment



(evolving)
Human
quests
for
Material
Sufficiency
(entrepreneurialship)
enterprise

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Jan '98

MAKING PLACE IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM . . .
En(vision)ing the City as a Balance of Opportunity and Civility

Over the past half-century—essentially, since the end of WW II—the central planning principles guiding globalization processes have been drawn from an uncompromising preoccupation with values of economic logic, material accumulation, perpetual economic growth, etc. This professional preoccupation has served to further sharpen an *either/or* view of

the
 City;

either as a “commodity”
 offering unparalleled
 economic opportunity *or* as a
 primary expression of human
 “community.” Within a given city,
 the extent to which the former view
 prevails is the extent to which a
 fundamental imbalance within
 its collective of resources
 and relationships is
 likely occurring.

Within the context
 of local city space/place
 and a philosophy of human
 “well-being,” such an im-
 balance could be
 described
 as:

an
 overdevelopment
 of
 “material”
 relationships
 sustaining
Finance

linked with

an
 underdevelopment
 of
 “human”
 relationships
 sustaining
Family

Reflecting on our task of *place* making in the 21st century, I have come to describe the above ‘finance/family’ relationship as one of a **consumership/citizenship** imbalance—as shown below. To achieve greater harmony and balance between our dual obligation as citizen-consumer, I am suggesting that activities of place making in the new millennium will need to facilitate a more resourceful and creative exercise of our collective citizenship powers.

consumership
 win / lose
 competition
 “survival of the *fittest*”
 (consumers defined by their material/
 commercial relationships and what
 each owns)

Finance



citizenship
 win / win
 competition
 “everyone advancing”
 (citizens defined by their *human*/
spiritual relationships and what
 each shares)

Family

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Seeking

to

Craft

"Performance"

Criteria

for

H u m a n

W e l l - b e i n g:

we start with the premise that
every human being is
valuable and necessary
and the belief that
each of us is universally
deserving of equitable
access to fundamental
'resources of opportunity'...

... for:
active
participation

in the
exercise
of

Personal

Em(power)ment

Our
Capacity
for

"individual initiative"
and
self-expression

... for:
active
participation

in the
development
of

Human

Enterprise

Creating
Opportunity
for

"Individual Initiative"
and
financial reward

via
partnerships
of

rooted in ... and informed by ...
our our

Spirituality

Education

achieved
(through)
designs
respecting
of
intuition,
and
personal
faith

achieved
(through)
designs
of
intellect,
and
factual
knowledge

Governance and **Industry**
Stewardship **Entrepreneurship**

in
pursuit
respecting
human
dignity
and
justice

in
pursuit
of
prosperity
and
purposeful
work

Public Family

(a)

pioneering cornerstone
for
common empowerment and enterprise

p r o v i d i n g

"Physical and Psychological Security"

a a a
global/
personal global/
(sense of identity • sense of belonging • sense of ground)
personal personal personal

p l a c e

Spiritualship • Personalship • kinship • Friendship • Citizenship • Stewardship

a preeminent expression of **community**—i.e., a unique bond of human 'spiritus';
specifically, a primary medium for one's lifelong development as a more human, human being—i.e.,
the medium through which each of us grows to understand that our (individual) well-being
is impossible apart from the well-being of others and of nature; as well, the
medium through which each of us grows to understand that our (individual)
well-being is further enriched as we engage ourselves in ever-more
challenging thresholds of caring, sharing, and trusting:

1

... as in
relations
of

Spiritualsh(i)p:

(the)

lifelong rewards gained
from seeking harmony with
one's universal Self; rooted in
one's spirituality and one's
relations with the
universe

Self / Universe

2

... as in
relations
of

Personalsh(i)p:

(the)

lifelong rewards gained
from seeking harmony with
one's individual Self; rooted
in the concept of Selfhood
and one's relations
with Self

Self / Self

3

... as in
relations
of

Kinsh(i)p:

(the)

lifelong rewards gained from
exercising one's individual capacity
to care, share, and trust within a
human network of Kin; rooted in
the idea of 'kin family' and
one's relations with
other Kin

Self / Kin

4

... as in
relations
of

Friendsh(i)p:

(the)

lifelong rewards gained from
exercising one's individual capacity
to care, share, and trust beyond one's
universal/individual self and one's ties
of kin(ship), across a broadened
human network of Friends;

Self / Friend(s)

5

... as in
relations
of

Citizensh(i)p:

(the)

lifelong rewards gained from
exercising one's individual capacity
to care, share, and trust beyond one's
universal/individual self and one's ties
of kin(ship) and friend(ship) into an
arena of self-governing Citizens;
rooted in the idea of individual
citizens working collabora-
tively to achieve a
bond of "civic
family"

Self / fellow Citizen(s)

6

... as in
relations
of

Stewardsh(i)p:

(the)

lifelong rewards gained from
exercising one's individual capacity
to care, share, and trust beyond one's
universal/individual self and one's ties of
kin(ship) / friend(ship) / citizen(ship)
into an arena of planetary Stewards;
rooted in the idea of "human family"
and a conscious quest for
global harmony

Self / fellow Steward(s)

Development Cycle of Primary Family Relationships

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MAKING PLACE IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM . . .

*Weaving Textures of "Well-being" from Fabrics of Public Family, Designed Space,
and Contextual Vernacular*

C
r
e
a
t
(i)
on:
the
source,
wellspring,
fountainhead
of all existence and capacity;
specifically, the *source* of all
regenerative / recycling
processes . . .

Env(i)ronment:

a way of perceiving and comprehending
Creation
such that its totality can be selectively engaged and
organized as a *resource* for human activity; that whole of Creation
(evolving independent of human perception and human tools of assessment)
within which life—in all of its forms—is sustained . . . or diminished,
depending upon the "quality" of human intervention.

Space:

a human conception of "environment" as a quantifiable totality—i.e.,
as the infinite extension or deformation of a three-dimensional
(geometric) field upon which life's daily experiences unfold;*
a way of perceiving and comprehending "environment"
such that its totality can be selectively engaged
as a *resource* for human activity.

Designed

Space:

a human conception of "space" as a manipulatable
resource; specifically, as a *resource* capable
of being selectively engaged and (re)-
organized such that it sustains
human activity.

Place:

{a}
volumetric
composite of
spatial/spiritual
relationships
drawn from:

(explicit)
Elements
of
Spat(i)al
Definition
and
Comprehension:

'Paths

'Edges

'Districts

'Nodes

'Landmarks

'Parks

(K. Lynch)

(implicit)
Thresholds
and of
Fam(i)ly
Engagement
and
Accountability:

Spiritualsh(i)p

Personalsh(i)p

Kinsh(i)p

Friendsh(i)p

Citizensh(i)p

Stewardsh(i)p

(J. Chaffers)

in such way
as to achieve a
"designed space"

of
spiritual, cultural,
and
environmental
harmony

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* Greider, 1997.

MAKING PLACE IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM . . .
*Weaving Textures of "Well-being" from Human Spirituality
 and Collective Journeys of Education*

Sp(i)r(i)tual(i)ty:

[Latin *spiritus*, the "force of life"]

one's inherent capacity of em(power)ment—i.e.,
 an 'inner wellspring of self-transformative power' drawn
 from one's uniquely personal link to the energies of Creation;
 a link that binds one's individual human life to the
 whole of others, nature, and the un(i)verse; specifically,
 a link — accessed directly through intuition and faith — that opens
 oneself to Creation's wisdom and to deeper truth(s) of reality;
 more specifically, the source of one's (i)dentify and ind(i)vidual
 creative powers within the larger universe; broadly speaking,
 the source of one's inherent capacity to be self-
 gu(i)ding and self-d(i)recting—i.e., a source
 of inner wisdom not to be confused
 with organized religion or with
 the institutional church;
 in sum, the source of one's
 pride of being, one's capacity for
 generosity, and one's deep sense

of connectedness to a greater whole;

i.e., the inspirational founta(i)nhead for all

that guides and directs one's individual life—

one's **dreams**, one's **aspirations**, one's **ideals** /

one's **myths**, one's central **beliefs**, one's **fears**;

the deeper root that sustains one's moral-ethical

orientation, the source of one's capacity for

"education" and self-transformation.

Educat(i)on:

a tool for lifelong

learning;

(a)

journey

of

self-discovery;

(a)

journey

traceable to **educere**:

to draw out; elicit; evoke; evolve;

from Latin root, **educere**—"to lead";

from Middle English,

educaten—"to lead out";

(a)

journey

"...to know and to lead oneself";

(a)

journey

necessarily

focused as much on:

the

development

of one's

character

(spiritus)

as on

the

development

of one's

competence

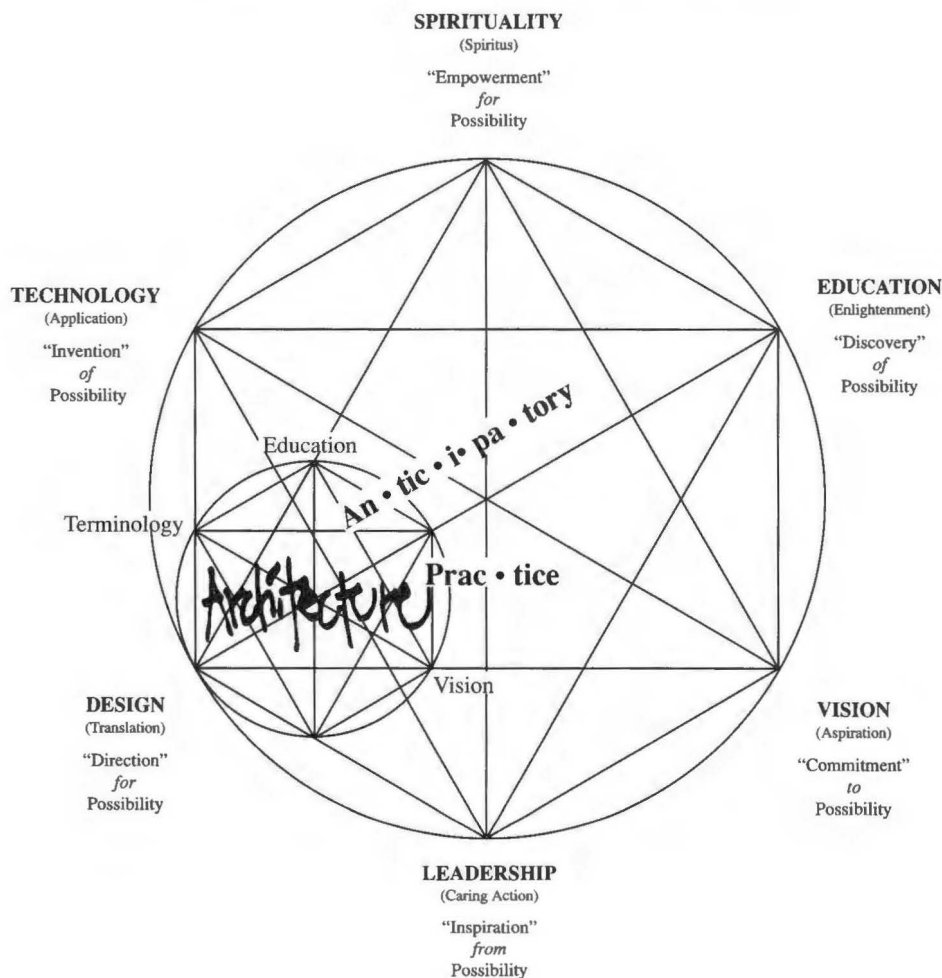
(skills)

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MAKING *PLACE* IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM . . .

*Binding a 'Passion for Possibilities'
with One's Own Moral Compass*

If I'm buying those shoes from the factory in Indonesia where I know those kids
are being abused, what's my moral obligation to those young people there?*



*Development
Cycle
for
Anticipatory
Practice
... "being responsible"*

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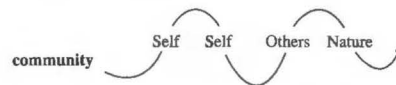
* Greider. 1997.

Glossary for Vanguard · Anticipator

Vanguard (Fr., *avant-garde* / *a·vant garde*): in the forefront; leaders 'by example'
Anticipator: one who weaves *foresight* with *farsight* to create path-breaking possibilities

en · er · gy 1. The transforming / transformative **power** medium
of Creation's (re)generative / (re)cycling processes. 2. a (re)**source**
that can neither be created nor destroyed, but can be transformed.

Comm(unity): [Middle English *communité*, from Old French *comunete*, from Latin *communitas*, from *communis*, COMMON.] a common bonding
energy of the universe; a bonding **energy** whose capacity for human bonding is tapped directly through the medium of human collabora-
tion—ie., through the mutual exchange of caring/sharing/trusting relationships.



Lest we forget, we do not *create* (ie., "make") community;
rather, we open ourselves up to this unique bonding
energy through relationships of "family"—
lifelong commitments of
caring · sharing · trusting;

"c o m m u n i t y,"
in a very real sense,
c o n t i n u a l l y
(re)makes
us.

Vision: an expression of one's inherent human capacity to *envision*—ie., to imagine possible futures and desired relationships not
yet spiritually-present or materially-real; the medium through which each of us translates our capacity for (en)visioning *ideals* into
practical *ideas* for daily living.

(dreams honed to a point of action)
dream + plan = vision

Leadersh(ī)p: [... *not* to be confused with the idea of *being led* by 'leaders' or with *leading* others ...] rather, one's inherent **capacity** to
care for oneself and others in ways that serve to **inspire**; an inherent and **active** quality of *caring* which each of us must choose to
exercise (in our own unique way) if we are to make our vision(s), real—ie., if we are to move from "problem" to possibility.

(caring enough to *act*)
vision + care = leadership

Having
Ideals:
("being idealistic")

... not so much a quest for utopian perfection,
as an open-ended "commitment" to liberate oneself
from an over-reliance upon the *known* understandings
of conventional wisdom; a process directed essentially
toward changing or transforming one's *self* as the
surest means for changing or transforming one's
"environment"— one's cities, included;
most importantly, a process of inquiry
rooted in self-discovery and the
belief that one *can* act
to make one's
ideal(s),
"real"

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Jan '98

**Vanguards
for
"Well-being"**

**Our Present
Task . . .**

To gain
a view of ourselves
as

vanguards of well-being
committed to a global development
of "public family" as potentially the
most effective means for addressing a
d e e p e r

spiritual.cultural.environmental

c r i s i s

unfolding beneath the

urban *face* of global change;

in seeking to expand
concepts of 'family'
to one of

public

f a m i l y,

each of us is obligated
to participate actively in
at least three spheres of well-being:

Spiritual

Cultural

Environmental

W e l l - b e i n g

(as)

**Personal
Guide**

paying
attention
to
linkages
of

**self
and**

"spirituality"

self /universe

the
Spiritual
(personal)

(as)

**Professional
Advocate**

paying
attention
to
relationships
of

**service
and**

"opportunity"

self /others

the
Intellectual
(practical)

(as)

**Global
Visionary**

paying
attention
to
bonds
of

**ecology
and**

"communality"

self / nature

the
Existential
(planetary)

P u b l i c F a m i l y

P l a c e

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Jan '98

Making Place in the New Millenium ...

Learning from Detroit

My own personal introduction to the subject of urban *place* making occurred some years ago in the midst of my design practice in inner-city Detroit. I was invited to assist in the evaluation of a municipal proposal intended to introduce several dozen units of prefabricated housing systems into an intensely urban neighborhood (high-density, racially and ethnically-mixed) on Detroit's near-West side. Accompanied by sophisticated charts of lifecycle cost analyses suggesting ease of maintenance and other positive benefit-to-cost ratios, municipal architects argued that the proposal offered these long-time City residents an opportunity to dramatically increase their housing stock. A rather lengthy architectural presentation followed, promising compatible site planning, sensitivity to public and private space, a reasonable diversity of materials, facades, and sections, and the latest in prefabrication construction technology. Upon completion of the architects' presentation, the neighborhood's leadership caucused and returned to share its decision. Expressing genuine appreciation for the professional expertise and advice that had been offered, this grassroots body had nonetheless decided that it would "pass up" (i.e., not accept) the city's offer. The logic of this decision was hardly understood by any of us professionals at the time, but the reason given by this richly diverse slice of residents was quite succinct — "We are building *families*, not houses."

Recognizing that family is one of the more enduring and ideal social models we still have, this Detroit experience was a formative moment in my professional journey of self-discovery. As an architect and urban designer, I was specifically reminded of the need to perceive housing as a quality of relationships far richer than its physical aggregation. I was also reminded of the need to continually enlarge our concept of family—beyond its *kin* dimension; particularly, as relates to requirements for human 'well-being' and the more extensive relationships of "public family." Reflecting deeply on my oversights, I knew, also, that it was due time to revisit the guiding principles and assumptions of my earliest education in the academy. In short, this formative moment marked the beginning of a humble search for a renewed balance of understandings—a search wherein I am continually seeking to look inward and outward at once.

Part of my search for balance was a decision to commit my talents and energies to the families and leadership of this geographic area of the City. A personal partnership between myself and what is descriptively known as the G.R.O.W. area of Detroit is, this year, entering its twenty-first year of fruition.

Culture:

(an)
evolving / enabling
r e s e r v o i r

"v a l^{of} u e s"

through which each of us makes continuing
c h o i c e s
about our own intended self-development
and about our own
broader commitment to the well-being of
nature and to the life quality of others;

metaphorically-speaking,
(a)
"filtering lens"

of
"u n d e r s t a n d i n g (s)"

(that we choose to believe)
and through which we
perceive, reflect, and
act upon our surrounding
"quo"- ante and our
"status" within

... *The G.R.O.W. Experience*

Born out of a crisis of land dispossession—when the construction of a major freeway artery through its geographic heart resulted in the forced relocation of some 200 of its families—GROW has transformed itself. Specifically, over a period of several decades, the GROW Land Association has grown from a loose collection of home owners, individual businesses, and competing block clubs into a cohesive community force of some 1,500 central city residents.⁹

In its earliest years, the leadership of GROW made two fundamental strategy decisions that have allowed it to hold its course when practically all other central city neighborhood associations have ceased to exist. First, GROW's criteria for screening public and private offers of support is rooted in the idea that "GROW is building *families*, not houses." Time and again, this strategic filter has allowed for decisions on the basis of shared values and longer-term aspirations, rather than on the basis of expediency. Second, at a time when it had more than its fair share of industrial pollution, clogged alleys and uneven (often, non-existent) enforcement of city codes and ordinances, GROW recognized the primacy of land and the longer-term value of land ownership as the foundation from which it could best address its immediate ills. This led GROW to make a landmark decision to challenge—and successfully amend—the City of Detroit Master Plan for Long Range Land Use.¹⁰

GROW's twin theme of "land and family" has not only served as an unprecedented challenge to centralized municipal master planning, it has also been a means of healing across generations and among all ethnics within the GROW neighborhood. Working collaboratively and with little fanfare, GROW residents have set in motion a chain reaction that gives tangible meaning and expression to the idea of "citizens—'many hands'—caring for a city."

This caring beyond individual parcels of lawn is perhaps best illustrated in GROW's most visually prominent activity to date, the transforming of its public alleys. With paint, patch and collective human energy, GROW residents have cleared and embellished block after block of this unique public resource. Free of automobile traffic—and now increasingly free of glass, rats, and other debris—family picnics, block club basketball, and children's play are increasingly common sights in GROW's alleys.

After gaining City Council approval for its proposed network of alley parks, bikeways, and garden paths—principally, by ensuring that garbage pickup crews and emergency vehicles can still navigate its alleys—GROW residents, themselves, are now the only potential obstacles to an unfolding plan of implementation. In this regard, the task of petitioning hundreds of individual residents whose backyards border on an alley, remains a major design and educational undertaking. But, the unprecedented scope of this grassroots initiative to gain legal approval for modifying individual portions of alley easement has provided the inspiration for individual residents to exercise "citizenship" in a manner never before experienced (in "the City"). It is precisely this kind of collective risk-taking that serves to create relationships sustaining of "public family."

Opportunities for extended "face-to-face" contact—beyond kin, friend, and ethnic circles—coupled with opportunities to exercise individual initiative to achieve common goals (a "common caring") continue to have an inspiring effect on a broad cross-section of GROW residents. This "common caring" has resulted in daily expressions of personal pride, public trust, and public sharing. In turn, these relations of sharing, trusting, and caring continue to transform the physical character of GROW's public alleys, while also facilitating the collective exercise of a more resourceful and compassionate citizenship.

By creating and responding to unique opportunities to be innovative and to *direct* change, GROW residents are giving daily expression to the citizen-bonding concept of an active "public family" and to its reciprocating twin, a 'cared for' public space. In so doing, GROW residents are also actively contributing to a unique and unfolding chapter of *place*-making at urban environmental scale.

As I reflect on my ongoing GROW experience, it is increasingly clear to me that crafting physical space in such way that it resonates with sustaining qualities of "family" and human "spirituality" is a requirement that lies at the conceptual heart of *place* making; whether here in the United States or at other points around the globe—as in towns and cities within the Republic of South Africa.

Global

Social Crime:

[...not bounded by national boundaries...]
 crime that takes root in the absence of social justice;
 specifically, crimes of mass disenfranchisement and or mass
 ecological destruction that serve to violate our essential humanness
 and/or the essential *non-renewable* resources of nature; more specifically,
 the *violation* of equitable access to common opportunities fundamentally necessary
 for human well-being—particularly, those resources of "opportunity" being created
 with some significant degree of public subsidy; further, a *systematic* denial of fair access
 to resources and/or relationships needed to address such essential human requirements as
 health care, physical safety, and the opportunity for active participation in meaningful
 relationships
 of
 labor
 and
 "work"

Making Place in the New South Africa

Seeing the Whole, to Transform its Parts

Reflecting on my sojourns to South Africa, I am flooded with images of pain. I am also flooded with images of possibility. Upon further reflection, I am reminded that such dualities (pain and possibility/hatred and hope/bondage and freedom, etc.) have a common global presence and are often embedded on opposite sides of the same coin.

In keeping with the spirit of dualities, my experiences suggest that if new possibilities are to be achieved—beyond legacies of pain and disappointment, hatred and fear, disempowerment and discrimination—we are obligated to develop strategic models for life and living that go beyond the relatively limited visions of a post-Apartheid society.

I raise the issue of vision and strategic modeling here because, as I traveled among a broad cross-section of South African citizens, the most common and recurring theme in almost all conversation was the idea of *post-Apartheidism*; specifically, their continuing reference to "*post-Apartheid*" as something qualitatively different and richer than systems of apartheid—i.e., a need to develop *post-Apartheid* cities, *post-Apartheid* health and transportation systems, *post-Apartheid* universities, etc. My sense is that as long as we continue to use "Apartheid" as our standard of measure, the possibility of liberating ourselves from its "old modes of thinking" is made considerably more difficult.

While all South African cities are littered with the legacy of Apartheid—i.e., the fragmentation and systematic separation of race and income groups through discontinuous and dysfunctional land use patterns (creating immense social divisions, haphazard and inefficient access to urban facilities, and the concentration of black South Africans in remote residential areas with few economic opportunities)—we must somehow overcome our present preoccupation with its resulting evils. In short, a "conceptual leap" in the way that we think about South Africa's future is now required.

Thus, as we exercise individual initiative to transform the system of Apartheid, each of us is challenged to engage the truth of a larger reality—namely that, failure in any part(s) of a "system" inevitably points to some deeper imbalance in the

whole (of that system).

Therefore, to speak of transforming the "system of Apartheid" (as we must), is to recognize immense structural contradictions in all of its primary spheres of human relationships; i.e., longstanding crises in South African social, political, and economic practices must be creatively addressed at one and the same time. Particularly, with respect to its utilization of human resources, what we are obligated to address is an entire "cultural system" in bankruptcy. Thus, to fully address the demands of a South African cultural crisis, each of us is required to stretch our imaginations to develop the most comprehensive understanding that we can of a *healthy* human system—a 'healthy' South Africa—in order that we might better understand the deadly roots of its illness.

Stated another way, any commitment to the collective task of creating "post-"Apartheid environments wherein policies of Apartheid will not be tolerated, is really a commitment to the larger task of envisioning more *humane* ways of living, wherein policies of Apartheid will not be necessary.

Making Place in the New Millenium ...

A Point of Present Closure

Through this essay, I have suggested that *place* making practices will ultimately be judged by their capacity to creatively bind the more specific programmatic requirements of human physicality in a grander spatial dance with evolving *aspirations* of human spirituality. In effect, whether one's primary professional circle is education, practice, or policy (or collaborations between) or whether one's more specific interests lie in architectural design, physical planning, cultural heritage, revitalization, Gender/Class/Ethnicity relations and/or globalization, it will be of great importance to visualize in one's mind's eye, the following:

(a)	(an)
programmatic	evolving
'physicality'	'spirituality'
is	is
(primarily about)	(primarily about)
construction	commitment
of	to
products	relationships
of	of
quality	aspiration
equitable	human
compensation	justice
and	and
ecological	personal
sustainability	accountability

"making place"

via
designed space

J. Chaffers
Jan '98

Notes

GROW (Grass Roots Organization of Workers) is a private-sector not-for-profit association comprised of four distinct ethnics: German/Polish/African/Hispanic. The GROW neighborhood covers approximately 1.2 square miles. One-third of its land area is comprised of public alleys, with another one-quarter now existing as cleared vacant lots. (It is notable that the leadership of GROW has come to view vacant lots as unique opportunities, rather than as cause for despair.) Residents of this central-city Detroit neighborhood worked collaboratively among themselves and with students of architecture from the University of Michigan to craft the first comprehensive neighborhood master plan ever adopted as part of the *official* map and text of Detroit's Long Range Land Use Master Plan. Much credit for the success achieved in the initial stages of implementation of the GROW Plan must go to Carl Levin—then, President of the Detroit City Council and now, the Senior United States Senator from the State of Michigan.

- Much of this essay and all 'graphic totems' are excerpts from a forthcoming text, *Space Spirit*, by the author.

- Escobar. 1995.
- Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc. 1994.
- Stranahan. 1997.
- Sassen. 1994. Hoogvelt. 1997.
- Escobar. 1995. Greider. 1997.
- Saul. 1992. Sassen. 1994. Hoogvelt. 1997.
- Stranahan. 1997.
- Hoogvelt. 1997.
- GROW (G.rass R.oots O.rganization of W.orkers) African/Latino/Polish/German ethnicities.
- The resident-developed 'GROW Master Plan' was the first such conceptual plan adopted in the history of the City.

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Stranahan, Mark. 1997. "Internalizing Frontiers." One, among an emerging series of position papers focused on contemporary discursive analysis within the context of global planning and development. (As a small note, I would add that Mr. Stranahan is a gifted and refreshingly talented architect and former student who continually adds to the depth and breadth of my knowledge.)

