

Sense of Place, Authenticity and Character: A Commentary

GUNILA JIVÉN & PETER J. LARKHAM

ABSTRACT *This commentary develops in particular from the recent paper on sense of place and authenticity by Ouf (Journal of Urban Design (2001), 6(1), pp. 73–86) and other related contributions. To those points are added an historical dimension and an exploration of the theoretical positions of Christian Norberg-Schulz and M.R.G. Conzen in particular. A wider discussion of ‘character’ is developed, in relation to sense of place and genius loci, the preferred term here. It is suggested that these complex theoretical concepts have become confused, and that genius loci arises most particularly from the experiences of those using places rather than from deliberate ‘place making’. Conservationists and urban designers in particular need to revisit the theoretical underpinnings of the terms and concepts that they employ, in order fully to understand the potential contributions of sense of place, authenticity and character.*

... you begin to realize that the important determinant of any culture is after all the spirit of place (Lawrence Durrell, 1969, p. 156)

Introduction

The recent paper by Ouf (2001) is welcome in that it directs attention to an important concept in urban design, that of the ‘sense of place’.¹ It also refers to the concept of ‘authenticity’, hitherto more common in areas of heritage, artefacts and museums (Jones, 1990), but which is also becoming applied to conserved urban landscapes (Assi, 2000). Both concepts relate to the literature on the experience of place or even placelessness (Relph, 1976; Arefi, 1999). This commentary is a response to an apparent rise in interest in these issues, and our concern that these complex theoretical concepts are being used only partially and without reference to the work of relevant theorists.

We suggest, therefore, that the discussion of these concepts in Ouf’s paper requires more elaboration before their usefulness in design can be fully understood. In particular, their contribution to the issue of ‘character’—a central contemporary concept in both design and conservation—is important. In this commentary we caution that uses of these concepts in design-related contexts

Gunila Jivén, Arkitektursektionen, Tema Stadsbyggnad, Chalmers Tekniska Högskola, SE-412 96 Göteborg, Sweden. Email: jiven@arch.chalmers.se. Peter J. Larkham, School of Planning and Housing, University of Central England, Perry Barr, Birmingham B42 2SU, UK. Email: peter.larkham@uce.ac.uk

appear to be uncritical and confused. We explore these concepts further, building upon a broad inter-disciplinary literature and with particular reference to the ideas of the architect Christian Norberg-Schulz and the geographer/planner M.R.G. Conzen. Both had long careers of research and publication in closely related fields, but their ideas are not evident in the recent literature. We suggest that their precision of conceptual thought can help to resolve current problems in the use of these terms.

The *Genius Loci*

This is an elusive term whose meaning has changed over the course of two centuries. The early users of the concept and term *genius loci* and its common English translations in the 18th century were developing a new aesthetic appreciation of new landscapes, and these were exclusively rural and garden landscapes (cf. Hunt & Willis, 1988). Alexander Pope, for example, promoted the Picturesque and the pastoral ideal under the influences of Classical writers, but particularly as shaped by human hand (Mowl, 2000) as his lines suggest:

Consult the genius of the place in all
That tells the waters to rise or fall
Or helps the ambitious hills the heavens to scale
Or scoops in circling theatres the vale ... (Pope, 1731, lines 57–60)

This use of the concept of *genius loci* is plain in the poetry of John Clare (Barrell, 1972) and other romantic poetry (Hartman, 1970); garden history (Hunt & Willis, 1988); Turner's paintings (Hunt, 1992); and, more recently, in neo-romantic art (Yorke, 1989). The concept has, however, developed away from this rather technical use, and has become applied to any landscape and any place, including urban ones. Its use in urban contexts predominates in the contemporary professional literature. In this respect its application to perception, the quality of places, and urban design has recently been explored by Isaacs (2000). The transition to modern uses has been well described by the influential American landscape writer J.B. Jackson:

‘Sense of place’ is a much used expression, chiefly by architects but taken over by urban planners and interior decorators and the promoters of condominiums, so that now it means very little. It is an awkward and ambiguous translation of the Latin term *genius loci*. In classical times it means not so much the place itself as the guardian divinity of that place. ... in the eighteenth century the Latin phrase was usually translated as ‘the genius of a place’, meaning its influence. ... We now use the current version to describe the *atmosphere* to a place, the quality of its *environment*. Nevertheless, we recognize that certain localities have an attraction which gives us a certain indefinable sense of well-being and which we want to return to, time and again. (Jackson, 1994, pp. 157–158)

When Jackson writes of ‘atmosphere’ he indicates that *genius loci* has also become allied to the concept of the ‘character’ of a place. Many writers on urban form and design have discussed the issue of ‘character’: some implicitly, others explicitly, using terms such as ‘spirit of place’ or *genius loci* (see, for example, Cullen, 1961; Conzen, 1966, 1975; Sharp, 1969; Worskett, 1969; Steele, 1981;

England, 1983). These treatments owe much to the broad tradition of the Picturesque in English art, architecture and landscape: the origins, as has been seen, of *genius loci* in its wider environmental setting. This tradition, as Bandini (1992) suggests, led to the 'Townscape' polemic and visual analysis in UK planning from the 1940s, notably promoted by the *Architectural Review*. For Gordon Cullen, who transformed the *Architectural Review* polemic into an analytical and design tool, Townscape was "the art of relationship"; it was important

to take all the elements that go to create the environment: buildings, trees, nature, water, traffic, advertisements and so on, and to weave them together in such a way that drama is released. For a city is a dramatic event in the environment. (Cullen, 1961, p. 9)

This way of looking at places emphasizes the visual and external appearance; hence the focus on the 'street scene' and, arguably, the acceptance of tactics such as façadism (Richards (1994); although this has recently been questioned by Coleman *et al.* (2002)). Most reviews suggest that Cullen's work is central to contemporary concepts of urban design, but his work and the visual tradition that it represented have been criticized:

A painter by talent and romantic by instinct, Cullen's investigations of the desirable qualities of good urban environments differed considerably from the academic analyses of Lynch [1960]. Ironically, the personal vision and graphic fluency which Cullen brought to the explanation of his ideas was to some extent a handicap, arousing suspicion in the minds of those for whom a more 'objective' explanation of the urban designer's purpose was necessary ... Nevertheless, Cullen's method introduced a rather systematic framework for those sometimes elusive qualities ... (Gosling & Maitland, 1984, pp. 48–49)

These elusive qualities affect the emotional experience of, and reaction to, places. In this way, 'character' and *genius loci* become further enmeshed. This fusion of ideas is most clearly seen in discussions of 'the past' and conservation. Lowenthal (1979) has suggested that 'the past' exists as both individual and collective construct, with shared values and experiences being important within cultural groups. Group identity is thus closely linked with the form and history of place, creating a sense of place or *genius loci*:

in the course of time the landscape, whether that of a large region like a country or of a small locality like a market town, acquires its specific *genius loci*, its culture- and history-conditioned character which commonly reflects not only the work and aspirations of the society at present in occupancy but also that of its precursors in the area. (Conzen, 1966, pp. 56–57)

Jakle (1987), however, emphasizes the individual, subjective nature of place in his discussion of *genius loci*. In particular, he emphasizes the importance of the visual for, although we also perceive places with other senses, he feels that there is an innate conflict between verbal and visual thinking. To Jakle, the best person to experience and express the *genius loci* is not the resident but the tourist, for tourism "involves the deliberate searching out of place experience" (Jakle, 1987, p. 8). Walter (1988) implicitly uses the concept of *genius loci* in a study of the

'expressive intelligibility' of places: a quality that can only be perceived holistically through the senses, memory, intellect and imagination. In studying 'place' in classical thought, he contrasts Plato's subtle and complex views with the Aristotelian view of place as simply an empty container—a view that, he suggests, informs much current planning practice. The geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's view of space as the embodiment of feelings, images and thoughts of those who live, work or otherwise deal with that space (Tuan, 1977) is also relevant in this consideration of space, place and people.

Jakle's view conflicts with the views of those who see the experience and perception of *genius loci* as a facet of long-term familiarity with place. Others give more stress to the collective, rather than individual, view; Hayden, for example, emphasizes the contested nature of 'place' in history building (Hayden, 1995).

Norberg-Schulz and Genius Loci

The Norwegian architect and phenomenologist Christian Norberg-Schulz is a key theorist in elucidating the concept of *genius loci*, which he explores in several works spanning three decades. In his 1963 thesis, his original intention was to investigate the psychology of architecture (Norberg-Schulz, 1963). Based on the same gestalt psychological theory employed by Kevin Lynch, Norberg-Schulz (1980) explores the character of places on the ground and their meanings for people, although Lynch (1960) ignored meanings and focused on structure and identity. Norberg-Schulz uses a concept of townscape (although not as Cullen defined it) to denote skyline or image. He sees the skyline of the town and the horizontally expanded silhouette of the urban buildings as keys to the image of a place. He promotes the traditional form of towns and buildings, which he sees as the basis for bringing about a deeper symbolic understanding of places (Norberg-Schulz, 1985, pp. 33–35, 48). The culmination of his examination of the *genius loci* concept is found in *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). Here, *genius loci* is described as representing the sense people have of a place, understood as the sum of all physical as well as symbolic values in nature and the human environment.

In Norberg-Schulz's description of the *genius loci*, as well as in his own use of the concept, four thematic levels can be recognized:

- the topography of the earth's surface;
- the cosmological light conditions and the sky as natural conditions;
- buildings;
- symbolic and existential meanings in the cultural landscape.

The natural conditions of a place are understood as being based on features in the topographical landscape, including a cosmological and temporal perspective that includes continual changes of light and vegetation in the annual cycle. These characteristic rhythmic fluctuations contrast with the stability of physical form. This is the *genius loci* as a place in nature that we have to interpret when we are changing our built environment (Norberg-Schulz, 1980, pp. 25–32). Norberg-Schulz gives a special place in this conception of the *genius loci* to natural conditions, distinguishing three basic landscape characters: romantic, cosmic and classical (Norberg-Schulz, 1980; 1985, p. 48). These are also understandable as ideal types. Both buildings and the symbolic meaning of a settlement are

important for the *genius loci* concept as expressions of society's cultural interpretation of place.

Norberg-Schulz's analyses range from visual impressions to the lived or experienced realm. His four methodological stages—'image', 'space', 'character' and '*genius loci*'—illustrate people's experience of the physical environment. His aim, however, is to achieve the atmosphere, light conditions and sense-related experiences of the *genius loci*. Nature, he feels, is the basis for people's interpretation and it is in relation to nature that places and objects take on meaning. He discusses the way in which morphological and cosmic connections are given physical expression in society's dwelling and living. He seeks meaning and symbolic function by understanding the systematic pattern of the settlement. In summary, Norberg-Schulz conceives of people's life world as a basis for orientation and identity (Norberg-Schulz, 1980, p. 203; 1985, pp. 15–25).

Urban morphologists and designers attempting to understand the methods and the basis of the values of Norberg-Schulz as a phenomenologist must consider the philosophers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Both had a great impact on Norberg-Schulz, whose methods and gestalt psychological understanding of people's perception are influenced by Husserl's phenomenology and philosophy of experience. In the same way, both Norberg-Schulz's values and conceptualizations rest on the philosophy of Heidegger, whose special fondness for plain living and pre-industrial life permeates Norberg-Schulz's language when he discusses earth, place and existential values.

It is, therefore, clear that the concept of *genius loci* is complex and multi-layered. Many authors hold different, sometimes conflicting, views about its nature and meaning. We now explore some of its uses in design and planning.

Genius Loci, Design and Planning

Aspects of *genius loci* (as explored by Norberg-Schulz) are apparent in many design-led considerations of traditional, pre-industrial settlements. Sentosa, for example, explores how traditional cosmological beliefs, societal structures and traditional measurements shaped what he terms the "*genius loci* within Balinese dwellings environments" (2001, p. 255). The location, planning, design and even conservation of Asian settlements ranging from traditional Korean villages (Kang, 1999) to Japanese castle towns (Satoh, 1998) have been related to similar factors, although Xu (2000, Chapter 7) suggests, for Suzhou at least, that the common *feng shui*-based interpretation of *genius loci*-related factors was minimal at the contemporary administrative level and is usually a later interpretation.

Other aspects, particularly those relating to the importance of *genius loci* and the natural environment, are well represented in landscape design theory and practice, for example as represented by McHarg (1969).

The concept of *genius loci* has also been used, explicitly and implicitly, in a wide range of plan documents throughout much of the second half of the 20th century. Many of these users and interpretations appear confused, however: some using a very generic interpretation, with few displaying the conceptual richness of Norberg-Schulz's approach. The post-war reconstruction period in UK planning provides relevant examples.

Thomas Sharp, a well-known consultant who prepared numerous reconstruction plans, was most sympathetic in his texts to the character of the places that

he re-planned, particularly to the smaller towns of mediaeval origin and informal layout. He wrote of Exeter, but with obvious wider relevance, that:

The planner's first approach to his task is to sum up the personality of the city which has been put under his care. A city has the same right as a human patient to be regarded as an individual requiring personal attention rather than abstract advice. ... The good plan is that which will fulfil the struggle of the place to be itself, which satisfies what a long time ago used to be called the Genius of the Place. (Sharp, 1946, p. 11)

Despite Sharp's textual sympathy for history and character, and his use of terms such as 'genius of the place', it is difficult to interpret precisely what he meant, or how this influenced his design for the bombed historic city. There are also problems in interpreting Sharp's many-layered plans: there are, for example, contradictions between his words, which are generally sensitive to history and context, and the images contained in the plan documents (Stansfield, 1981; Larkham, 1997). With regard to J.B. Jackson's views, however, is an external consultant better able to discern character and sense of place? A similar plan produced by a local civic organization for Tunbridge Wells suggested that:

It would be disastrous if, in our zeal for improvement, we ignored or forgot the essential character conferred upon our Borough by the past. The character of such a town as Tunbridge Wells is the result of centuries of steady growth. There must be no harsh transition, no break in a steady evolution ... (Spalding, 1945, p. 3)

This represents an interesting set of local value judgements at a crucial time in urban design, when Modernism and the International Style were about to dominate post-war comprehensive redevelopment in the UK and much of the Westernized world.

To the academic urban morphologist and qualified town planner M.R.G. Conzen, who was formulating his key concepts in the 1940s just when these plans were being published, 'townscape' (although not in Cullen's sense), or 'urban landscape', connoted historical expressiveness. Towns vary in historical expressiveness or historicity. They have their own *personnalité* (Conzen, 1949, p. 89). Conzen argued that, when form after form is added to the surface of the earth, the whole cultural landscape should be seen as an 'objectivation of the spirit' of a society, and as the *genius loci* (Conzen, 1966). Conzen used the concept of *genius loci* to characterize the geographical variations in the composition of town plan, building pattern and land and building utilization. The urban landscape is thus a palimpsest, a layering where subsequent layers do not erase all traces of their predecessors. Except by reference to Schwind (1951), Conzen did not give a deeper explanation of the concept. The townscape concept, however, is central to Conzen's terminology and his conceptualization of how people make, use and alter places. This embodiment, the 'objectivation of the spirit', also relates closely to Tuan's view of (urban) space.

Conzen regarded changes to urban form in relation to a cyclic building development by repletion, transformation, clearance and even urban fallow, before a new cyclic phase is initiated. This was seen as a natural part of the process of urban transformation. *Genius loci* is amended as the physical townscape is transformed. He had a non-normative view of changes, while Norberg-

Schulz, influenced by Heidegger, makes normative evaluations in relation to firm formal doctrines. Neither Conzen nor Norberg-Schulz considers attributes in relation to aesthetic values. Norberg-Schulz, however, evaluates whether an urban form is 'right' or 'wrong' in relation to other cities from his knowledge of traditionally-built, usually mediaeval, European cities. He argues for what Scruton (1979) refers to as a historical romantic tradition (for this argument see also Lundequist, 1998). Norberg-Schulz does, however, present an analysis of a town outside this tradition, Khartoum, where he shows great respect for the local tradition and discusses it in relation to the colonial part of the town (Norberg-Schulz, 1980).

Neither Norberg-Schulz nor Conzen were willing to suggest the form of physical design that an understanding of *genius loci* might imply. However, a place-specific form of design guidance, informed by these theoretical approaches and by extremely detailed morphological survey, has recently been developed (Stratford-on-Avon, 2001); its application will be worth monitoring closely. Vagstein has studied the small Norwegian town of Sykkylven, based on Norberg-Schulz's methods and theories, and has considered how the findings could be used in future planning and design (Vagstein, 1993).

In some contemporary planning documents the need to create, reinforce or celebrate 'character' or 'sense of place', whether for historic places (which are already palimpsests) (Cossons, 2000; Ouf, 2001) or for newly created places, has been highlighted. For the former, for example, UK central government guidance notes that 'character' and 'appearance' are key elements to consider when designating a conservation area, although they are hardly defined (Department of the Environment & Department of National Heritage, 1994), and Ouf (2001) discusses the *creation* of a sense of place in conservation contexts. But, returning to Hayden's view of contestation in the creation of history and 'place', Hamer (1998) shows the selective nature of the planning response in US Historic Districts: whose experiences and history are included or excluded? For newly created places, UK central government guidance notes that:

Considerations of design and layout must be informed by the wider context, having regard not just to any immediate neighbouring buildings but the townscape and landscape of the wider locality. The local pattern of streets and spaces, building traditions, materials and ecology should all help to determine the character and identity of a development ... (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 2000, p. 19)

An increasingly influential design paradigm in this context is the 'New urbanism', of which a key belief is that the characteristics—which mean literally the elements that positively contribute to 'character'—of successful places can be identified and re-interpreted. Thus:

the use of traditional architectural styles and urban elements like alleys, carriage houses, picket fences and common spaces surrounded by diverse housing types will create a distinctive physical character or a sense of place. (Kim, 2000, p. 48, in a journal issue devoted to 'the promise of New Urbanism')

It would appear, therefore, that planning and urban design in the post-war period have tended to use the terms 'sense of place', 'character', 'appearance'

and *genius loci* indiscriminately and interchangeably. This, as Norberg-Schulz (1980) argues, is incorrect: the concepts of sense of place and *genius loci* are distinct and operate at different levels. In many cases they have served as virtual synonyms for 'character'—itself often mis-used, as can be seen above in UK applications, as a synonym for 'external appearance'. There is a clear view that *genius loci* and 'character' can be created through appropriate design and planning; this runs contrary to the view that these characteristics emerge from individual and community perception, values and experience. We suggest that the concept of *genius loci*, as expressed in the writings of Norberg-Schulz and Conzen, can contribute to our understanding of place making and the interpretation of place. This may be particularly relevant to the case of conservation, which is of increasing importance to settlements worldwide (Jokilehto, 1999).

Genius Loci, Character and Conservation

Both *genius loci* and 'character' are well represented in considerations of conservation, since this deals so much with values and attitudes towards past and contemporary places, and how they are to change in the future. For example, in the debates concerning planning in UK conservation areas throughout the 1990s, the issue of the definition of character and its practical repercussions was of intense significance (Suddards & Morton, 1991; Vallis, 1994). UK conservation guidance refers to "the familiar and cherished local scene" (Department of the Environment, 1987, p. 2)—a clear, although imprecise, reference to concepts of local place identity that is much deeper than the more usual official phrase 'character or appearance' contained in the legal definition of a conservation area. However phrased, all contributors to these debates deal with the importance and uniqueness of 'place'. Those characteristics that make any place of *special* interest and worthy of conservation should be examined. Yet attempts to define quality and character, to identify constituent parts that may be measured or valued, are often intellectually unsatisfactory (cf. Kropf, 1996, p. 247), however successful they may prove in court or at a planning appeal (and this practice-based success forms the justification put forward by Vallis (1994)). It should be noted, however, that these concerns are rather different from Karimi's recent discussion on the maintenance of the 'spatial spirit' of conserved town centres—an idea that is not defined beyond "protecting the essence of the old cities" (Karimi, 2000, p. 221).

Conservation planning policies and interventions tend to focus on the physical fabric of buildings and (usually small) places. People are rarely closely involved; indeed, recent research demonstrates the extremely poor knowledge of conservation held by residents and the public (Larkham *et al.*, 2002). Yet it has been suggested here that it is group identity, the people as a society, that is closely linked with the form and history of place, creating a sense of place or *genius loci*. Again, the ideas of Hayden (1995) and the review of US area selection practices by Hamer (1998) are relevant here. It is interesting to consider the extent to which *genius loci* contributes to the broad public support for conservation, particularly of wider cultural landscapes (Alanen & Melnick, 2000) and the trend towards the study, and even conservation, of 'ordinary' landscapes (Groth & Bressi, 1997).

The impact of much conservation activity is to constrain, and usually to minimize, physical change. But communities change; values and aspirations

change, and individuals change, whether by ageing or by moving. Thus we would expect the *genius loci* to change. It is highly debatable whether it is *allowed* to change under many urban design and especially conservation regimes. "Historic preservation's sense of history is not aimed at telling dynamic stories in which urban life is constructing itself, but instead is aimed at establishing a static Past When Things Were Nicer" (Cromley, 1987, p. 32). Other conservation policies deliberately seek to change places, sometimes under the guise of 'enhancement': Hamer (1998, Chapter 1) gives the example of the creation of Independence Mall, Philadelphia, which "entailed the removal of almost all evidence of the history intervening between the time that is now deemed significant and the present"—wholesale demolition of three entire city blocks. A new area character has been created: whose *genius loci* is represented? Or, following Relph and even Norberg-Schulz, has placelessness resulted, with a loss of *genius loci*?

Authenticity

Such actions raise the issue of 'authenticity'. This is a concept familiar in the broad field of conservation, although the importance of the survival of original material does vary from high in a museum context to much lower for working machinery (Larkham, 1996, pp. 257–264), and also from culture to culture and period to period (cf. Jokilehto, 1999). This is not a new concept; indeed, it has been the subject of a major international conference (Larsen, 1995). Assi (2000) has specifically examined the issue of authenticity in built-environment conservation, yet it could also be applied to those new environments that borrow design cues from the past.

Assi rightly draws attention to the fact that it is society that places value on authenticity: "to be authentic does not give a value *per se*; rather it should be understood as the condition of an object or a monument in relation to its specific qualities" (2000, pp. 60–61). And yet there is a clear 'cult of authenticity', at least in modern Western society. In areas other than the built environment there are considerable parallels in concerns regarding authenticity but considerable differences in its values and conceptions. In art, for example, there is a general consensus over what constitutes 'fake', 'restoration' and 'replication'. The *intent* to deceive is here viewed as a major consideration, more significant than actual deception; this may be more a factor of the perceiver rather than the perpetrator. There is also a widespread acceptance that repairs and restorations should be reversible, even if not readily discernible to the naked eye; these arguments are explored in Jones (1990). Indeed, Lowenthal suggests that:

many fabrications are essentially mental rather than material; the fake inscription or manuscript is simply an adjunct to an intended historical deception. Yet their supposed veracity, sanctitude and uniqueness makes fraudulent physical objects seem essentially repugnant. ... Although it is now evident that artefacts are as easily altered as chronicles, public faith in their veracity endures: what can be seen and touched cannot lie. Material objects attest to the pasts from which they came because they are tangible and presumably durable. (Lowenthal, 1990, p. 21)

To exemplify the problems inherent in art history, and the approaches that have been developed, Jones (1990, pp. 28–49) cites the cases of replication, the collector's copy, artists' copies, the persistence of tradition, and deception. All are approaches to the elusive concepts of 'original' and 'fake'.

There is no such attempt to deceive where the same culture may continue manufacturing items for a long period, or may (even after the passage of centuries) revive traditions of manufacture and use. Likewise, items copied by artists as part of their training, particularly in the studio of a master, were not intended to deceive. Indeed, they were accepted as 'genuine', and often marketed by the master as such—an accepted practice in the Renaissance period. Copies of original artworks, produced by craftsmen for collectors, became popular from the Classical revival brought about by the aristocratic Grand Tour. Such works were often regarded as works of art in their own right, and only when collections were broken up were some passed off by traders as genuine. Since the same time there has been a demand for mass-produced replicas as souvenirs. Many such objects are not direct copies, and are instead historicist re-interpretations or are clearly cast and moulded using new materials.

In the majority of such cases, there is no original intent to deceive. Deception, when it occurred, was a later stage in the life cycle of these products; often after several re-sales when the original provenance of the item was lost or conveniently forgotten. As Jones (1990) shows, the number of such deceptions practised by middlemen is enormous. Yet, in their original state, with full provenance, the same items were widely accepted, sought after and manufactured. Today, when research has uncovered historical details of a 'fake', some items are now re-valued as key examples of craftsmanship and revival styles.

In dealing with mechanical devices, however, constant use means constant replacement of damaged or worn pieces. Yet it is equally widely accepted that, despite such intervention, the 'identity' of a vehicle may remain unchanged: this was found to be so in the High Court after the purchaser of the racing Bentley known as 'Old No. 1' challenged its provenance in 1990. Its chassis had been replaced after race damage; racing engines were frequently replaced; and the body was a reconstruction. Nevertheless, it was held that, irrespective of the date of its constituent parts, the vehicle itself had always retained a coherent and distinct identity. Indeed, there are many cases of car restorations where a vehicle, accepted as authentic, has been constructed from various parts.

Authenticity, Conservation and Design

This discussion of authenticity offers clear lessons for the built environment. The intent to deceive should be contrasted with eclectic postmodern references to past forms and styles; it is rarely possible to say that an urban form intends to deceive. Even the Italianate appearance of Portmeirion hardly does that. Yet some designers would argue that they are working in the tradition of a particular style—for example the Classicism of Quinlan Terry—this is not intent to deceive nor mere slavish copying.

However, Relph's discussion of 'inauthentic' attitudes to place is of relevance. He explores the concept of 'kitsch' (which, since his study, has become a commonplace in postmodern design), and that a dominant professional view was then one of professional detachment from places in overcoming their

'incongruities and inefficiencies'. This, he argues, leads to 'placelessness' (Relph, 1976, Chapter 6).

One must question how far this should be taken. When striving to halt the decay of an area or monument, for example, how important is the 'authenticity' of original fabric? As places and buildings are *used*, a strong parallel could be drawn with working mechanisms such as the Bentley discussed above. The overall 'character and appearance' (to use the British terms) could be more important, to more people, than authenticity of original materials, and this is the treatment afforded to Japanese timber temples (Jokilehto, 1999). Similarly, how 'authentic' should designers be when developing in the vicinity of a monument? Some answers may require detailed explanation to elucidate the logic of a designer's response to historic context, character and sense of place: an example is given in Malfroy's study of a site on the Pariser Platz, Berlin (Malfroy, 2001)—an iconic locale even before the fall of the Berlin Wall, facing the Brandenburg Gate.

However, public reactions to new structures are often negative even when the designer's rationale is made explicit, as done by Malfroy. Behavioural research on the reactions of people to places, including to historic buildings and areas, produces complex and conflicting results (see the review by Hubbard, 1993). Hubbard cites a number of pieces of research suggesting that "historical authenticity or morality seem to be of little concern to the majority of those viewing a building" (1993, p. 368). Far from desiring authenticity, people questioned in Guildford (UK), for example, showed little relationship between their assessment of buildings and historical appreciation of the environment; architecture was interpreted in a way consistent with the respondents' personal histories, and therefore our relationship to the historic built environment thrives on an "essentially mythical and wilful distortion of history in order to accommodate preferred historical imagery" (Bishop, 1982, p. 230, cited in Hubbard, 1993). Again, these views might suggest interventions such as *façadism*, widely seen as anathema to the conservationist (Coleman *et al.*, 2002).

Although limited in the two case studies presented, Ouf's exploration of the application of authenticity to conservation did reinforce the point that the aims of interventions require clear statement. Image creation in the Dubai gold market was a heritage development project rather than a conservation of authentic character. In Sharjah, however, the conservation focus was clearly "the *creation* of a traditional place that could be recognized by the local people as a traditional nucleus" (Ouf, 2001, p. 81, emphasis added).

Local lay perceptions are significant in developing a sense of place and also, it seems, in the concept of authenticity. But how are such views elucidated, particularly before the physical intervention? Moreover, it seems that these examples fall into the category of 'place making', a term increasingly commonly used in urban design (cf. Tibbalds, 1992; Hayward & McGlynn, 1993). All theoretical perspectives reviewed here suggest that *genius loci* cannot be created by professional intervention, although principles of place making (Montgomery, 1998) can seek to promote conditions under which user experience is improved and a sense of place emerges. The requirements of the tourist market here (and generally; cf. Orbaşlı, 2000) seem prominent particularly in conservation and place making, even if these interventions are made in accordance with what Norberg-Schulz would see as interpretations of the natural conditions of the place and with reference to built form and meaning of place. Whether they

strengthen the cultural historical value of the place is difficult to explore so close to their date of construction.

One of the conclusions of the Nara Conference (Larsen, 1995) was the need for a broad interpretation of authenticity that would allow for an evolutionary process of change in urban and architectural form, spurred by socio-cultural change. Building upon this, it is suggested that:

such authenticity will be reflected in the continuation of traditions and traditional types of function and use. This will necessarily involve gradual changes in the built environment that may be seen as an expression of an authentic cultural and social spirit. (Assi, 2000, p. 67, citing Stovel, 1994)

This brings us back to both the Conzenian concept of ongoing incremental urban change, with the palimpsest townscape being the objectivation of the spirit of its creators, and the Norberg-Schulz view of the place of tradition in the *genius loci*. The current Swedish integrated approach to the cultural heritage is also of value in this respect. This approach evaluates heritage under three headings:

- ‘document value’: value of the artefact, whether it be expressed in socio-economic, architectural or other terms. This allows discussion over exactly which aspects of any particular heritage artefact are most important (e.g. building façades or interiors);
- ‘experiential value’: people’s experience of this ‘document value’, including the debate about whether ‘experiential value’ can persist without the actual ‘document value’, i.e. if a building is demolished;
- ‘strengthening factors’ such as age, patina and authenticity. Again these are viewed on a case-by-case basis.

This approach, sensitive to individual cases, allows evaluation of factors including authenticity and contribution to sense of place to a far greater extent than does, for example, the UK system. It is also able to recognize the changeability of the ‘experiential value’ over time.

Conclusions

This commentary on a series of closely related concepts was spurred by recent papers that appear to give only a partial view of each. A wider exploration of literature, official guidance and practice (although this could be taken still further) leads us to conclude that historical and theoretical perspectives on *genius loci* and spirit of place have become confused, particularly in the tendency of practical planning and design to work towards ‘creating’ a sense of place through using elements of historical forms. To use Norberg-Schulz’s schema, the contributions of topography, natural conditions and variations, and symbolic meanings, tend to be given less weight than built form. Although this approach may result in a place with identifiable character, we argue that it is the people—individuals and society—that integrate these features, through their value systems, to form a sense of place. We therefore agree with Kropf that “this underlines the need to put any account of physical characteristics within the context of other aspects such as activities and intentions in order to move towards a better account of character” (1996, p. 247).

Yet the values and attitudes of individuals and of societies change over time. What is not valued now may well be valued in the future, and *vice versa*. But not even the 'document values' can long survive without positive 'experiential values': these qualities are interdependent.

There is equal confusion with the issue of authenticity and its place in conservation, place making and area character. Recent theoretical developments need to be employed in practice. International conventions may not be the most appropriate way to secure this. There are lessons to be learned from the use of the concept in other, perhaps more familiar, fields. We suggest that there is relevance in the approaches of M.R.G. Conzen and Christian Norberg-Schulz. Again the values and views of the people occupying or using places are important.

Therefore, we propose that designers need to develop more theoretically informed conceptions of sense of place, authenticity and character, which—furthermore—should be informed to a much greater extent by the views of the people directly involved. This should not be a new conclusion: it was, for example, Lynch's guiding principle in the research that became *The Image of the City* (Lynch, 1960). Nevertheless, it is inescapable given the range of opinions that we explore here, and the range of highly criticized interventions in historic built environments and in the creation of new environments.

Note

1. Sense of place' is widely, and apparently interchangeably, referred to as the *genius loci*, itself a term often translated in earlier uses from the 18th century as the genius, or spirit, of a place. We use *genius loci* where possible in this paper to avoid confusion.

References

- Alanen, A. R. & Melnick, R. Z. (Eds) (2000) *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America* (Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press).
- Arefi, M. (1999) Non-place and placelessness as narratives of loss: rethinking the notion of place, *Journal of Urban Design*, 4(2), pp. 179–193.
- Assi, E. (2000) Searching for the concept of authenticity: implementation guidelines, *Journal of Architectural Conservation*, 6(2), pp. 60–69.
- Bandini, M. (1992) Some architectural approaches to urban form, in: J. W. R. Whitehand & P. J. Larkham (Eds) *Urban Landscapes: International Perspectives*, pp. 133–169 (London, Routledge).
- Barrell, J. (1972) *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730–1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).
- Bishop, R. (1982) The perception and importance of time in architecture, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Surrey.
- Coleman, R. et al. (2002) *Revise PPG15! The Case for Changes to PPG15* (London, Richard Coleman Consultancy).
- Conzen, M. R. G. (1949) The Scandinavian approach to urban geography, *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift*, 12, pp. 86–91.
- Conzen, M. R. G. (1966) Historical townscapes in Britain: a problem in applied geography, in: J. W. House (Ed.) *Northern Geographical Essays in Honour of G.H.J. Daysh*, pp. 56–78 (Newcastle upon Tyne, Oriel Press).
- Conzen, M. R. G. (1975) Geography and townscape conservation, in: H. Uhlig & C. Lienau (Eds) *Anglo-German Symposium in Applied Geography*, Giessen–Würzburg–München, 1973, *Giessener Geographische Schriften* (special issue), pp. 95–102.
- Cossons, N. (Chairman) (2000) *Power of Place: The Future of the Historic Environment*, report of the Historic Environment Review Steering Committee (London, Power of Place Office).
- Cromley, E. C. (1987) Public history and the historic preservation district, in: J. Blatti (Ed.) *Past Meets Present*, pp. 30–36 (Washington, DC, Smithsonian Institution Press).

- Cullen, G. (1961) *Townscape* (London, Architectural Press).
- Department of the Environment (1987) *Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas—Policy and Procedures*, Circular 8/87 (London, HMSO).
- Department of the Environment & Department of National Heritage (1994) *Planning and the Historic Environment*, Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (London, HMSO).
- Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (2000) *Housing*, Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 (London, The Stationery Office).
- Durrell, L. (1969) *Spirit of Place* (London, Faber).
- England, R. (1983) *The Spirit of Place* (London, Pidgeon Audio Visual).
- Gosling, D. & Maitland, B. (1984) *Concepts of Urban Design* (London, Academy Editions).
- Groth, P. & Bressi, T. (Eds) (1997) *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press).
- Hamer, D. (1998) *History in Urban Places* (Columbus, OH, Ohio State University Press).
- Hartman, G. H. (1970) Romantic poetry and the genius loci, in: *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958–1970* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press).
- Hayden, D. (1995) *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press).
- Hayward, R. & McGlynn, S. (Eds) (1993) *Making Better Places: Urban Design Now* (Oxford, Butterworth).
- Hubbard, P. J. (1993) The value of conservation: a critical review of behavioural research, *Town Planning Review*, 64(4), pp. 359–373.
- Hunt, J. D. (1992) Ruskin, “Turnerian topography” and genius loci, in: *Gardens and the Picturesque: Studies in the History of Landscape Architecture*, pp. 215–239 (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press).
- Hunt, J. D. & Willis, P. (Eds) (1988) *The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden 1620–1820* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press).
- Isaacs, R. (2000) The urban picturesque: an aesthetic experience of urban pedestrian places, *Journal of Urban Design*, 5(2), pp. 145–180.
- Jackson, J. B. (1994) *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press).
- Jakle, J. A. (1987) *The Visual Elements of Landscape* (Amherst, MA, University of Massachusetts Press).
- Jokilehto, J. (1999) *A History of Architectural Conservation* (Oxford, Butterworth).
- Jones, M. (Ed.) (1990) *Fake? The Art of Deception* (London, British Museum Publications).
- Kang, D. J. (1999) Conservation planning in traditional Korean villages, *Built Environment*, 25(3), pp. 236–243.
- Karimi, K. (2000) Urban conservation and spatial transformation: preserving the fragments or maintaining the ‘spatial spirit’, *Urban Design International*, 5, pp. 221–231.
- Kim, J. (2000) Creating community: does Kentlands live up to its goals?, *Places*, 13(2), pp. 48–55.
- Kropf, K. S. (1996) Urban tissue and the character of towns, *Urban Design International*, 1(3), pp. 247–263.
- Larkham, P. J. (1996) *Conservation and the City* (London, Routledge).
- Larkham, P. J. (1997) Remaking cities: images, control, and postwar replanning in the United Kingdom, *Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design*, 24, pp. 741–759.
- Larkham, P. J., Pendlebury, J. & Townshend, T. (2002) Public involvement in residential conservation planning: values, attitudes and future directions, in: Y. Rydin & A. Thornley (Eds) *Planning in the UK: Agendas for the New Millennium*, pp. 237–255 (Aldershot, Ashgate).
- Larsen, K. (Ed.) (1995) *Nara Conference on Authenticity, 1994* (Nara, UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Government of Japan Agency for Cultural Affairs, International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property & International Council on Monuments and Sites).
- Lowenthal, D. (1979) Environmental perception: preserving the past, *Progress in Human Geography*, 3(4), pp. 549–559.
- Lowenthal, D. (1990) Forging the past, in: M. Jones (Ed.) *Fake? The Art of Deception*, pp. 16–22 (London, British Museum Publications).
- Lundequist, J. (1998) *Arkitektur; Etik = Estetik* (Stockholm, KTH, Institute för Arkitektur och Stadsbyggnad).
- Lynch, K. (1960) *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press).
- Malfroy, S. (2001) Urban morphology and project consulting: a Berlin experience, *Urban Morphology*, 5(2), pp. 63–80.
- McHarg, I. L. (1969) *Design with Nature* (Garden City, NY, Natural History Press).
- Montgomery, J. (1998) Making a city: urbanity, vitality and urban design, *Journal of Urban Design*, 3(1), pp. 93–116.

- Mowl, T. (2000) Alexander Pope and the "genius of the place", in: *Gentlemen & Players: Gardeners of the English Landscape*, pp. 93–104 (Stroud, Sutton).
- Norberg-Schulz, C. (1963) *Intentions in Architecture* (Oslo, Universitetsforlaget).
- Norberg-Schulz, C. (1980) *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York, Rizzoli).
- Norberg-Schulz, C. (1985) *The Concept of Dwelling: On the Way to Figurative Architecture* (New York, Electa/Rizzoli).
- Orbaşlı, A. (2000) *Tourists in Historic Towns* (London, Spon).
- Ouf, A. M. S. (2001) Authenticity and the sense of place in urban design, *Journal of Urban Design*, 6(1), pp. 73–86.
- Pope, A. (1731) *Epistle to Lord Burlington* reprinted in Davis, H. (Ed.) (1966) *Pope: Poetical Works*, pp. 314–321 (London, Oxford University Press).
- Relph, E. (1976) *Place and Placelessness* (London, Pion).
- Richards, J. (1994) *Façadism* (London, Routledge).
- Satoh, S. (1998) Urban design and change in Japanese castle towns, *Built Environment*, 24(4), pp. 217–234.
- Schwind, M. (1951) Kulturlandschaft als objektivierter Geist, *Deutsche Geographische Blätter*, 46, pp. 5–28.
- Scruton, R. (1979) *The Aesthetics of Architecture* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press).
- Sentosa, L. S. (2001) Genius loci within Balinese dwellings environments: the unlikely scenarios of urban development in Bali, *Habitat International*, 25, pp. 255–272.
- Sharp, T. (1946) *Exeter Phoenix* (London, Architectural Press).
- Sharp, T. (1969) *Town and Townscape* (London, Murray).
- Spalding, H. (Ed.) (1945) *Royal Tunbridge Wells: Traditions and Future of the Town* (Tunbridge Wells, Civic Association).
- Stansfield, K. (1981) Thomas Sharp 1901–1978, in: G. E. Cherry (Ed.) *Pioneers in British Planning*, pp. 150–176 (London, Architectural Press).
- Steele, F. (1981) *The Sense of Place* (Boston, MA, CBI).
- Stovel, H. (1994) Notes on aspects of authenticity and notes on authenticity in relation to the World Heritage Convention, prepared for a preparatory workshop in Bergen prior to the Nara Conference.
- Stratford-on-Avon (2001) *District Design Guide* (Stratford upon Avon, Stratford upon Avon District Council).
- Suddards, R. and Morton, D. M. (1991) The character of conservation areas, *Journal of Planning and Environment Law*, November, pp. 1011–1013.
- Tibbalds, F. (1992) *Making People-Friendly Towns* (London, Longman).
- Tuan, Y.-F. (1977) *Space and Place* (London, Edward Arnold).
- Vagstein, A. M. (1993) *Stadtanalyse—Eksempel Sykkylven* (Oslo, Miljøverndepartementet).
- Vallis, R. (1994) Character: meaning and measurement, in: P. J. Larkham (Ed.) *Conservation Areas: Issues and Management*, pp. 17–21 (Birmingham, University of Central England, Faculty of the Built Environment).
- Walter, E. V. (1988) *Placeways: A Theory of the Human Environment* (Chapel Hill, NC, University of North Carolina Press).
- Worskett, R. (1969) *The Character of Towns* (London, Architectural Press).
- Xu, Y. (2000) *The Chinese City in Space and Time: The Development of Urban Form in Suzhou* (Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press).
- Yorke, M. (1989) *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and Their Times* (New York, St Martin's Press).