

## Chapter 4

# Openings To Each Other in the Technological Age

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### Modernity versus Tradition

In this chapter I want to address the problems and possibilities that lie within the tension between modernity and traditional environments and peoples. At the core of this deep problem is modernity's negative definition of the 'other' – that is, the traditional – as lacking and disadvantaged according to modernist measures. This definition needs to be critiqued, and positive views of difference need to be developed in which 'self-identity' and 'the other' (including other environments and places) are made complementary. My method toward this end will consist of drawing from neglected strands of four historical-cultural sources: tradition itself, modernism, postmodern electronic telecommunications, and poststructuralist theory. The fundamental problem of how to describe, understand and nurture differences in a shared world can only be addressed by questioning 'our own' identity, 'our own' place, and 'our' relation to 'others'.

As the history of technology and culture shows, a remarkable appropriation took place in the period in Western history commonly called the 'Renaissance', 'Scientific Revolution', or 'Modern Age'. Through a complex series of events, the West took for itself the mantle of 'most scientific and technological', marking a transition not only in its self-image and claims on the rest of the world, but for the very 'measure' of itself and all others. This measure of cultural achievement and worth remains operative in today's contested phenomena of the Westernization or modernization of the planet through technology and capitalism.

That the appropriation was remarkable was not so much due to the rather sudden explosion of technological innovation, exploration, and capital development that took place, but to the oblivion or denial of the previous superiority of the 'other-than-Western' world. As a simple

indication of the outlines of the story somehow forgotten by the West, one can point to the ancient development of astronomy and mathematics in Babylonia;<sup>1</sup> the astronomy and city-building of the Aztecs and Maya in the New World; the incredible science and technology of India (for example, the Hindu astronomical tradition) and China (too many factors – from printing and gunpowder – even to list); and the science and cultures of Islam and Judaism (which were not only vital in themselves, but which preserved the Greek heritage, re-introducing it to Europe via Spain). All of this sophisticated science and technology was developed while most of Europe's material culture remained relatively crude and undeveloped.

Thus, what happened in the West was not only that it simply developed powerful science and technology, but that it also forgot its position and relationship to other times and other cultures. Specifically, it developed scientific attitudes and technology that dismissed or subordinated spiritual-cultural values, making material culture and machines the measure of mankind.

As a poignant case, one only has to note the encounter of Australian-Tasmanian aborigines with Europeans. Able to mount successful long-distance colonial campaigns, the Dutch (from 1642), the French (from 1772), and the English (from 1802) found the Tasmanians leading a very simple way of life (which the English subsequently used as one justification for practices of systematic genocide). In cruel contrast with the new Western materialist values and technological measure of human worth, the Tasmanians had deliberately chosen a minimalist technology on the basis of a cultural-spiritual value complex. As a result of a major cultural shift some 3,500 years before, Tasmanians had deliberately stopped using many of their domestic and practical tools, any clothing, buildings, and even fire except for ceremonial purposes and for cooking meat – despite the severely cold climate – in order to spend 'more time at song, dance, and ceremony'.<sup>2</sup> In short, an admirable aboriginal spiritual culture and set of practices were flowering at the time of the arrival of European colonizers, for whom material culture increasingly was all that mattered.

The historical phenomena of Western modernization perhaps reached its climax in the nineteenth century, with the development of machines that allowed modernity to become identical with industrialization. Machines, especially coal- and steam-driven engines, maximized mineral extraction, transportation, manufacturing, and other forms of industrialization. This brought a transformation not only of the basis of material culture, but – self-reflexively – of the very forms and materials of the built environment: the new world of iron and steel, glass, electrification, and chemical production.<sup>3</sup>

Though it is not my place to discuss the relation of this secular mechanization to religious roots, the arrogance and imperialism that accompanied the spread of Western technology unfolded with a missionary

zeal that oddly derived from the West's own spiritual traditions, even while it extricated itself from them and denied them. The assumption of authorization appeared not only in the drive across the North American continent, validated by belief in manifest destiny, but globally with a profane technological-evolutionary view. As Michael Adas has argued, 'Technological development was increasingly equated with the rise from barbarism to civilization, and machines were viewed as key agents for the spread of this new civilization . . .'<sup>4</sup>

Though architectural scholars know the well-rehearsed story of the development and spread of international architectural modernism, they tend to forget or overlook the way in which it was absorbed by technological modernism. Early-twentieth-century technological modernism, itself a fundamentally social-economic ideology, quickly subordinated its architectural subcategory, or variant, and the latter's radical social agenda. As a result, the cultural movement instead spun out a homogenous environment that displaced local, traditional ways of living and building. One of the initial drives of twentieth-century architectural and social modernity had been to displace outdated and harmful local regionalisms, which seemed no longer to have a place among the shifting of populations in the newly industrialized urban configurations that were well developed by the early part of the century. Old village patterns and stubbornly maintained tribal or group identities seemed to have little value among fellow brothers and sisters of the international industrial world. They were as irrelevant to the new age as the built forms and symbols of the obsolete Austro-Hungarian and Germanic identities must have been similarly irrelevant to the Holy Roman Empire. Yet these identities still legitimized the development of mechanized warfare among nation-states.

Given Western culture's sustained interest in the formal and aesthetic aspects of modernity, it is easy to forget or ignore today that subversive social agendas once drove much modern planning and design. Architects, planners, and designers of all sorts developed the clean forms and materials of modernity not only in response to the new industrial and social world around them, but as an explicit rejection of what they took to be atrophied traditional symbol and social systems. Their initial impulse also aimed to deny the reign of capitalism and the drive toward bourgeois comfort. According to James Holston: 'Modernist architecture claims to be an international movement that advances national development by building new kinds of cities which in turn transform daily life.'<sup>5</sup> Thus, modernist design embodied an epoch-making double-displacement of tradition: not only did it reject traditional built environments and life-worlds, but its advocates intended to supplant existing vernacular building traditions and local peoples by producing a new vernacular environment.

To comprehend the extent of its social agenda, one need only remember what a sweeping change it was to propose that architects should design

housing for ordinary and working-class people – and that even beyond housing, they should take responsibility for designing workplaces, social-service spaces, and even entire cities. For instance, in *The Modulor*, Le Corbusier noted that 'the liberation had not yet taken place' which would produce the home through a genuine 'science of housing', which included not only the dwelling with programmes for the bachelor, the married couple, the family, and the nomad, but also extensions of the dwelling for communal services to lighten the housewife's burden and, outside the building, regulate relations to traffic and sports grounds, health clinics, schools, youth centers, and open spaces.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, the modernist design project originally included validating, even supporting, new, non-traditional ways of living, especially for growing cities. The new urban forms would include a focus, for example, on the emerging life-worlds of single people (including working and professional women) and young couples, in addition to families. This demographic and emancipatory thrust was clearly evident in the Weissenhofsiedlung Experimental Housing Project built for the Deutscher Werkbund in Stuttgart in 1927. To cite but one of the participants using industrial construction materials and approaches, Mies van der Rohe argued in the Werkbund's publication, *Bau und Wohnung*, that what was needed was housing which 'makes more rational production possible while at the same time giving a great deal of freedom in the use of architectural space.'<sup>7</sup> It was no secret that the intention was to apply such new methods, forms and materials internationally, as was exhibited in a pair of postcards connected with the project which showed it both 'as is' and, via montage, as an Arabian Village (figures 4.1,4.2).

It is now clear that this ideology of technological modernization, which first announced itself in Western colonialism, passed to a new phase after World War II, when the dramatically increased power of the United States and its allies operated largely through 'effective' implementation policies. The attitudes and forms that had become operational in scientific-technological-industrial warfare were directly applied in new forms of the military-industrial complex – so aptly named by the warrior-statesman Dwight Eisenhower. More important, however, was the governing worldview of these international operations. As Ali Mazrui has convincingly shown, the process of global domination was guided by a 'social evolutionist teleology.'<sup>8</sup> In this effort, Michael Adas has added, 'Modernity is associated with rationality, empiricism, efficiency, and change; tradition connotes fatalism, veneration for custom and the sacred, indiscipline, and stagnation.'<sup>9</sup>

The forms and materials of modernization thus spread from central Europe across the world in a series of displacements of their original intentions. In the process, the initial impulses of figures such as Bruno Taut, Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier were shifted to a simplified set of

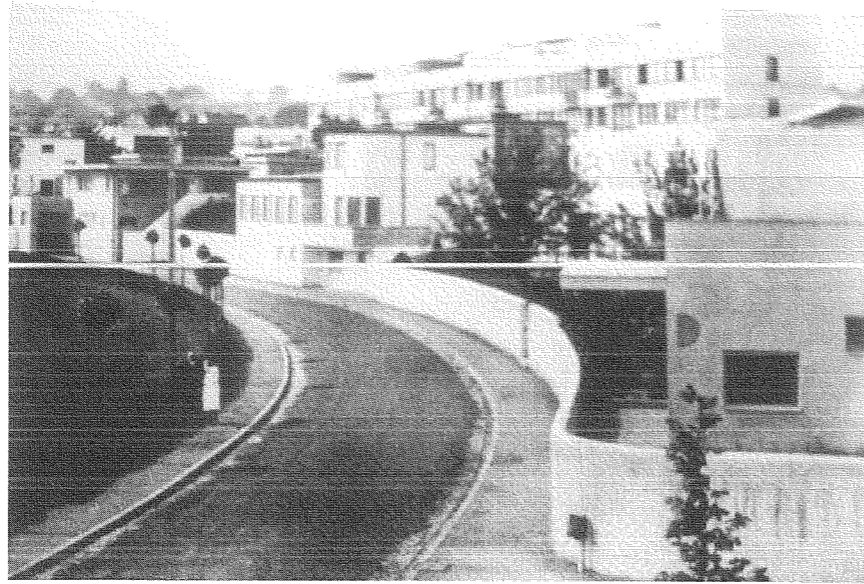


Figure 4.1. Weissenhofsiedlung, 1927. (Postcard in author's collection.)

economically driven, management-oriented forms. As a result, forms and materials became identified as important not because of their liberatory potential for an industrialized population, but because they were cost-

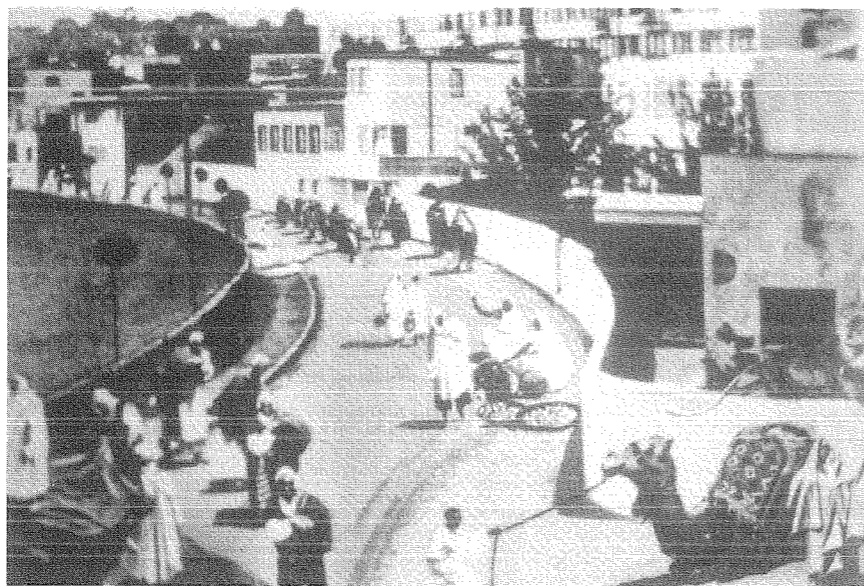


Figure 4.2. Photomontage of Weissenhofsiedlung as Arabian Village, 1940. (Postcard in author's collection.)

effective and efficient formations that displayed a futuristic and status-affirming image of economic and social power. To be considered a player in the world's political arena, one needed to display success at, or commitment to, moving from tradition to technological modernity.

Major problems linger today because of this political-cultural development. Given a culture of forms and materials one might call 'internationalism' or 'international technological modernism', the problem of 'in what style shall we build' remains a subject of critical debate. At once, there are the tensed desires for and ideologies of tradition and modernity: of what seems desirable and attractive to ordinary people relatively innocent of theoretical debates, and to professionals and researcher-educators heavily invested in the latter dimensions. As Ibrahim Al-But'hie, Akel Kahera, and Aziz Hallaj have demonstrated, the issue of 'modern or tradition' has not been resolved.<sup>10</sup> Of course, this is to be expected, for as Henri Lefebvre has argued, even as new principles of organization reshape experiential and built environments, previous ones do not disappear. New patterns are inscribed in addition to, or on top of, older ones, which continue to operate in the background and at the margins where openings occur. Thus, it is imperative to examine simultaneously all built environments – both those emerging today and those that remain in effect from common heritages.<sup>11</sup>

Today environmental designers are well aware of the problem: it is that Modernist environments – because of forms, materials, and modes of construction – by their very success in deploying and symbolizing the international homogeneity of modernized development, tend to displace and ignore local identities and senses of place. This occurs *de facto* through the character of internationalized technologies. Thus, Euclidean-cartesian buildings communicate with other elements of the Euclidean-cartesian environment (infrastructure, transportation systems, etc.) and with internal heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems that turn their backs both on bioclimatic conditions outside buildings and on traditional cultural responses to the natural environment embodied in local building traditions. In other words, the modernized technological environment is simultaneously imperialistic (on behalf, variously, of technological modernism, capitalism, or democracy), and oblivious of local identities and places. In its first movement, modernism expanded across the world, inserting itself everywhere; in its second, it has obliterated traditional environments. To cite only two empirical cases, Le Corbusier's housing complex in Algeria was inserted into one of the thickest sites of local 'otherness' (to the dominating French) as an instrument of political control; and his work in India, for all its stylistic influence and craftsmanship, turned away – and he turned admiring designers and engineers away – from engagement with the existing, historically sophisticated, local cultural-climatic environments.<sup>12</sup> As Adas has commented succinctly, such modernist practices have been

assaults on the measures of human worth, for in place of traditional spiritual-cultural values and traditional environments, technological modernism has proposed to establish itself as the only real measure.

Such international development has obviously occurred without the realization of any corresponding liberating social agenda because modernist architects' and planners' ideologies – originally intended to develop social freedom from untenable nationalism and from bourgeois ideas of comfort and conformity – have been co-opted by government and private-sector power systems. Fortunately, it may still be possible today to retrieve this social agenda and the impulse of architects, planners, and designers to provide environments in which workers and ordinary people may positively produce and live. In this vein, critical theorists such as Jürgen Habermas and Henri Lefebvre have argued that such a modern possibility could remain a source for renewed public life. Though I cannot develop this theme here, I refer the reader to the substantial body of literature on the prospect for, and necessity of continuing, liberation through the development of post-Enlightenment critical-socialist modernism.<sup>13</sup>

### From Modernity to Postmodernity

Much attention recently has been paid to the transition from modernism to postmodernism, and from the industrial age to the postindustrial. Thus, changes in technology, production and consumption have been identified as driving cultural and economic changes – changes that are transformations within capitalism. Capitalism appears to be entering a new and more powerful phase in which, while continuing to involve manufacturing and consumption of goods (now in new patterns of global dispersion and interconnection), it is simultaneously adding a new dimension or layer. Thus, the production of goods with use value first shifted to the production of goods with largely exchange value (as could be seen in the globalized demand for brand-name clothing, music, electronics, and so on). Now it has been shifted again to the production of goods with exchange values of information-entertainment technologies and services.

A result of this increased layering of modernism is that new means of generating and consuming wealth have appeared, ones which are related to traditional patterns in ways that are as yet not completely clear. On the one hand, information technologies such as computer and telecommunication systems have replaced older industrial-age technologies – infrastructure, telephone and telegraph, paper records, and so on – and on the other, they have created entirely new physical and cultural environments. The information and telecommunications sectors have developed everywhere, and nowhere, in forms that appear to be stabilizing not as postmodern but, instead, as 'high-tech', producing buildings with even more metal and glass on display than in the preceding phase of modernism. Their appearance in

the forms and materials of modernism, postmodernism, late-modernism, or high-technology is historically understandable and also a sign of immaturity. Just as the first automobiles appeared as modified (animal-drawn) buggies, so the first systems buildings have appeared in various formations of modern glass and steel. The new forms and materials have yet to be generated, yet to be codified.

As I have argued elsewhere, however, what is radical and important about the logistical systems which provide the principle of organization of this new environment is that they are atypical and polymorphous.<sup>14</sup> They have neither any necessary locational demands or special placements nor inherent forms or materials. For example, given the internationalization of banking and credit systems, there is no need for local 'safe-looking' banks in which to place money – only convenient ATMs (automatic teller machines) and secure, user-friendly computerized credit-transfer systems. Note that the degree to which the new electronic systems establish their own logic or logistics is precisely the degree to which traditional types, forms, materials and patterns of social use or behaviour become irrelevant or even undesirable (figure 4.3). These placement-indifferent systems have appeared in their most developed forms in credit, energy, transportation, entertainment and administrative systems.

Congruent with the homogenizing development of systems environments, yet apparently moving in the opposite direction, is an attraction, almost fetishizing, of exotic, remote, authentic, and disappearing traditional environments. Travel once limited to the wealthy or leisure class has



Figure 4.3. Automatic teller machine: the place-indifferent measure of tourism. (Photo by author.)

become common to the paid labour force. Hence, international tourism has today become a major global phenomena with enormous economic impact. Tourism is one of the most developed and advanced technological-information-image systems. And the demand to see the foreign, exotic and authentic has created amazing and irresolvable tensions. Today's tourists seek traditional environments even as the capitalistic systems that produce the wealth (which allows them to desire and travel to such sites) destroy the traditional environments themselves. Moreover, in seeking traditional environments in large numbers, tourists destroy these environments, because they consume the cultural, natural and economic bases that generate and sustain them. Today tourists seek traditional environments, but insofar as they actually want them in terms of their images, fantasies and projections rather than the environments' own, they create enormous pressures to develop fake, caricatured or stereotyped environments in the midst of the places they visit (Cancun, the coast of Tunisia, Disney World, everywhere . . . ). In short, today's tourists want other places to be interesting but safe, exotic but convenient, tasty but digestively friendly, full of character but antiseptically clean.<sup>15</sup>

Alternatively, generating and co-opting the exactly opposite alternative (as capitalism seems to have the genius to do), insofar as tourists want authentic traditional environments on the environments' own terms, they cause situations to be constructed that demand that peoples and places remain frozen as living museums, rather than partaking in the processes of normally occurring change and development. In this way, locals are led to dress-up in traditional costumes and display themselves for tourists. If a tradition is not healthy and strong enough to absorb such visitors and their expectations, the local people and places become fictions – if not lies (against which it is hard to maintain another, or deeper, identity and sense of place).<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, if a tradition is vibrant, its members will nevertheless be objectified while unavoidably enacting their tradition, in a process whereby their actions are compared with a version of tradition as preferred and specified by the tourism trade. Because of the dual possibilities of meanings that their activities imply, such subject peoples are no longer able simply to go about their ordinary daily lives within a continuing tradition.

These issues obviously are critical for people concerned with the vitality and future of traditional cultures, and for those who are fond of travelling and working in foreign and exotic places. As Caren Kaplan has put the question:

So many of us desire to travel for fun or for education, even as many of us feel ambivalent about the mobile nature of employment and family organization. How do we sort out these perceptions of travel and come to understand the ways in which they are linked to a more postmodern

movement of destabilized nation-state, cultural and economic diasporas, and increasing disparities of wealth and power?<sup>17</sup>

Reconciling the individual experiences and structural inequalities of the visitors and the visited is a congruent responsibility, especially given the almost irresistible attraction to policy-makers of generating income by exploiting their own places and peoples:

[M]any have embraced tourism as a sustainable economic alternative to the unpredictable cycles and heavy environmental costs of extractive industry. Others see a darker side to tourism: the selling of place, history, and cultural identity in exchange for low-wage employment in an increasingly urbanized, economically divided, and corporate-dominated social environment.<sup>18</sup>

The importance of these concerns for researchers and practitioners is seen, for example, in the themes of recent conferences of the International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments. When the group met in Berkeley, CA, in 1996, it heard from figures such as Manuel Castells and Saskia Sassen about technology and the global city, and from Ali A. Mazrui and Suha Özkan about issues of contested identity. When it met in Cairo, Egypt, in 1998 the group vocally reported on and debated research on tourism.

Given that the desire for traditional environments and touristic practices are inextricably bound up with cultural production and reproduction of images and texts, any adequate postmodern examination of these important areas of investigation (the mix of technology, modernism, and no-longer-modernist rejuvenations of traditional-local identities), will also need to include attention to mass media. Forty years ago Daniel Learner contended that the process of modernization would depend largely on the effectiveness of mass communication and media, where 'newspapers, radio, and other forms of media would expose the increasing urbanized and literate populations of underdeveloped areas to a flood of information about the world beyond family and community,' thus orienting them toward change.<sup>19</sup>

Today, in addition to actually visiting other places as tourists, it is possible to visit them virtually through film, television, telecommunications, and the worldwide web. Though most images, represented environments, and experiences may be the occasion for mere voyeurism, hopefully some will run to the other end of the spectrum, providing at least the possibility of understanding participation that will provide ways for people to encounter each other. Obviously, film and television are largely modern, capital-intensive phenomena, dependent on capital systems for production and distribution. Since it is right to suspect or reject much of what mass media present as 'the' desirable, as 'the' norm, what matters most to such a project of liberation would be the opportunity, the

possibility, and multiplication of self-articulated, chosen, and affirmed identities and differences.

In modern capitalist modes of dissemination, virtual visits via mass media and actual visits as part of mass tourism frequently function as instruments of stigmatization and stereotyping of the 'other'. But they may potentially also contain ways to present differences positively and consciously affirm self-identities with a combination of hope and good will. In making such visits, is it not possible to be open to others, to offer ourselves to their receptions and reactions?

There are some local, regional, and perhaps even national traditions of film, for instance, with which specific groups have begun to articulate and legitimate chosen identities and senses of place. I am not speaking of identities or any other dimension imposed or given 'unto them' by capital, governments, or an external elite, but only identities generated by and consented to by group members themselves. Other interesting shifts may also emerge through the wider availability of video and web pages on various free-nets which can be activated by individuals and groups in a self-determining manner.<sup>20</sup>

In a broad sense what I am saying is that it is important to note not only problems, but also possibilities. Principally, one must recognize there is no inherent form or material, no necessary placement or environment, in which the undeniably powerful, desirable, perhaps unavoidable, technological world-to-come will come. Instead, people have a chance to let it come, to open to it, in ways that affirm local modes of dwelling in bio-cultural regional traditions. If so, this would allow the new electro-technologies to be absorbed into traditional environments, ways of life, and value complexes.

As one example, my own recent work has explored the ways in which non-manufacturing high-technology activities (multimedia, graphics, code-writing, research and development) are colonizing existing environments in the United States.<sup>21</sup> At the same time that electronic-atopical technology is generating high-tech systems environments, it is also, almost invisibly, occupying domestic and industrial buildings from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (figure 4.4). Part of the ethos of this high-technology work culture is that it is a 'cool', or 'hip' and free, form of work that allows non-formal dress and work habits with a high degree of amenities. The attitude common to work performed at home via telecommuting (as the much-discussed 'electronic cottage industry') applies equally to the workplace. The image of the latter has been made casual and imaginative with the perks of loosely structured (but long) hours of work, refrigerators full of drinks and snacks, couches for lounging, and such recreation equipment as ping pong and pool tables for relaxing.

Because the work is done on and via polymorphous electronic systems, connected to other systems via telecommunications, the work setting can

just as easily be a converted house or warehouse as any place resembling a modified traditional office building. There currently seems a strong attraction to the industrial forms of warehouses, factories, and 'decommissioned' utility facilities and religious structures. On the one hand, this preference is economically and environmentally practical, since these buildings often were built to last (unlike many American structures), and because they recycle huge energy investments. They are also made with durable brick, wood and metal construction, with high levels of craftsmanship. Meanwhile, in terms of self-chosen image and symbolism, the strong materials and forms of these older industrial buildings connote a power and robustness which appeal to new entrepreneurs feeling their oats, just as the reuse of older homes connotes the comfortable unity of home and work and promotes continuity with the historical appearance and identity of local areas. These newly emerging groups, in the midst of formulating their identities and delineating their places of activity, exemplify an amazing new opportunity. For better or worse, right now, many such people are deciding what stock from their own traditional built environment to use, what heritage of identity and place to revitalize.<sup>22</sup>

But the larger point I wish to make with this example is that some technology subgroups in the United States (certainly not comprised only of

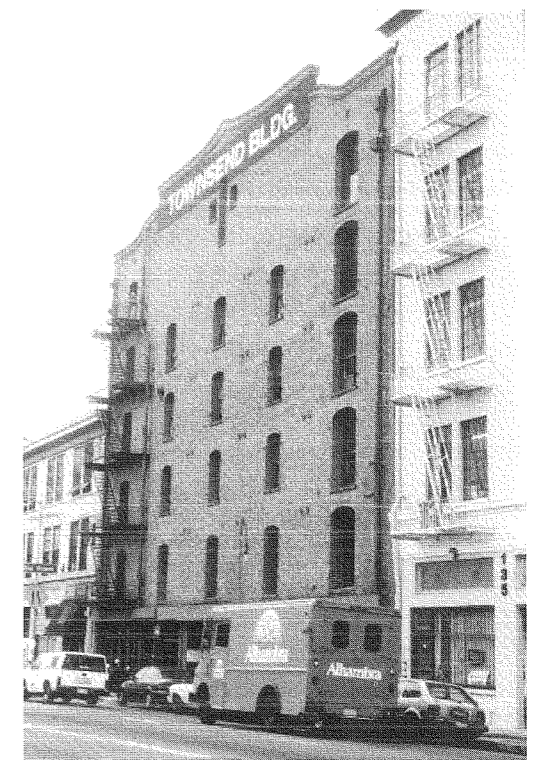


Figure 4.4. Townsend Building, San Francisco: once a coffee warehouse, now multimedia and legal offices. (Photo by author.)

US citizens) are choosing to define their shared identities and senses of place both in new ways they determine to be appropriate to who they are and how they live and within traditional environments that they have transformed to meet their needs. How other such subgroups around the world might choose to adapt their traditional cultural and natural environments to the atypical information technologies, I have no idea. That would be for them to work out. But one may already draw some clues or hints from previous environmental changes, and from the above-mentioned modes of film, video, and web pages that have been appropriated by individuals and local or regional groups.

### Poststructuralist Theories of the 'Other'

As my treatment of modernity and postmodernity indicates, I believe it is fundamental to focus on the tensed relationships between traditional and non-traditional people and environments. Such responsibilities have also been the purview of those poststructuralist, postcolonial theorists who have positively elaborated an ethics of difference. Notable among these writers have been Emmanuel Levinas, Luce Irigaray, and Werner Marx – of whom I have space, unfortunately, to consider only the first.<sup>23</sup> Even with their entirely contemporary, *avant-garde* positions, interestingly they agree with some of the attitudes toward justice, law and compassion embodied in some of the West's oldest premodern traditions.<sup>24</sup> For example, an ancient formulation, reinvented by Levinas, calls for responsibility to the 'widow, orphan, and stranger'.

In fact, it is not very difficult to have sympathy for and act to help the widow and orphan. In part, this is because they immediately evoke pity. Obviously, they need help. And, at one remove, it is clear all men and women are frail, and daily need the help of others. An ethics of compassion, then, does provide a basis to begin to overcome selfishness. But another reason it is somewhat easy to help the widow and orphan is that they are the widows and orphans of our relatives, of our neighbours and comrades, of our fellow citizens and co-believers. That is, they already are within 'our' group; they are here because they are 'one of us'.

Hence the importance of the 'other' in the third, most extreme, mode of appearance: as 'the stranger'. How much harder it is to respond helpfully to the stranger. Strangers all too often arouse our suspicion, distrust, fear, defensiveness, even hatred and anger because they are perceived and defined as different. Not 'one of us', they too often are experienced as the 'negatively other'.

The city is important not only because of the unprecedented urbanization that has occurred with modernization, but because the city is the scene – even paradigmatically the place – where all people encounter strangers and must find a way to interact sociably with them if they are not to be at war

with each other and in violation of moral responsibilities. The city, where those with differences circulate in one place, is also where justice, law and charity are tested daily.<sup>25</sup>

At a deeper level, reflection shows how the distinction between the widow and orphan, who are 'of us', and the stranger, who is not, breaks down. This, however, requires rejecting the easy interpretation of the injunction 'to love our neighbours as ourselves', which might mistakenly be taken to mean to love only those who are like us, and not 'the others, the strangers'. A broader ethical or moral position is required in a city because the 'neighbour' in a city is not simply identical with 'those who are one of us, as over and against the alien others'. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer has argued, the neighbours we are enjoined to love as ourselves are those who simply appear nearby. Whomever is so placed, for whatever reason, makes a moral claim on us, is involved with us in mutual responsibility.<sup>26</sup>

If this is so, responsibility extends to everyone else, because in the shifting frames of place and time and in the course of individual and communal lives everyone has been a stranger in need, and all have come unto the homelands and households of others and taken or been granted new placement and identity. This conclusion is unarguable, as a diverse set of historical, cultural cases indicates. To begin, to contrast the settled peoples of Europe with the nomads coming in waves from the east offers an overly simple paradigm. Indeed, the difference between 'settled' and 'nomadic' perhaps is more one of the time frame or phase of a group's existence than of any unchanging characteristics. The same applies on a smaller scale, even within relatively settled peasant groups.

To take but one instance, dizzying shifts are evident even in cursory reflection on phenomena such as the movements of the Ural-Altai racial groups. The Ural branch is represented by populations now known as Finns on the one hand, and Ugrians (especially Hungarians) on the other. Thus, both seemingly stable northern peoples and those in the middle of the movements back and forth between Europe and Asia in fact belong together as part of one very complicated historical-linguistic shift. In regard to the other branch (the Altaic group), the much-noticed movement of the 'Huns' resulted from their being pushed westward by a series of displacements originating in China, then rippling across Asia.<sup>27</sup>

In the case of the village, Oscar Handlin's empirical examination has shown how simplistic interpretations of peasant society 'exaggerate [its] stability and continuity.' Alpine village records show that the stranger is absorbed, that 'no family had been there from time immemorial.'

And that evidence conformed to the larger European pattern, which showed frequent thrusts to all the marches and a steady eastward drift of peasant population through the centuries.

Yet the impression of sameness was not merely the product of distortion

through the observer's eye. Nor did it spring simply from the romantic fancies of folklorists. The villagers themselves believed that they had always been there, always worn the same costumes, made the same lace, sung the same music and danced the same figures. That belief was not evidence that they and their ancestors had actually done so, but it was evidence that the community possessed institutional devices for absorbing the effects of change and preserving stability over very long periods.<sup>28</sup>

A change of geography or time frame does not alter the story of the dynamic. The same tangled patterns of shifting roles of strangers and 'those at home' in a given place is as much the story of the Americas and Australia as Europe or Asia. Going forward temporally yields the same patterns. In the 1990s there continue to be vast transcontinental, even transglobal, migrations. The poor and the desperate, the well-off 'best and brightest', all circulate as they are able – by foot, by boat, and by jet. The flux of those already belonging and of strangers is everywhere in cultures and environments studied by scholars today.

### Unrealized Potentials

As should be clear, to begin to move beyond current dilemmas and situations, traditional environments researchers are not without resources – resources that lie within the character of tradition itself, as well as within the original impulse of architectural modernism toward social-reform, in the new possibilities of freedom to be found in postmodern information technology, and in poststructuralist theories that positively indicate how to affirm differences. To emphasize the obvious, for all the attention to waves of modernism and postmodernism, a large number of people around the world still have the drive to keep traditions vital, renewing them appropriately to new situations or conditions – which, after all, is how traditions remain traditions for thousands of years. That traditional ways are still affirmed and lived should not be overlooked, as Mervat El-Shafie and Amr Abdel Kawi have shown in relation to Egyptian oases.<sup>29</sup> Nor should one overlook the dedication of professionals helping empower traditional groups to deal with tourism, as in William Bechhoefer's work on Amasya, Turkey.<sup>30</sup> Yet, as Caroline Swope's case study of the coastal Salish has indicated, one must also recognize the difficulty of understanding and maintaining traditions.<sup>31</sup> Of course, many researchers are also, or instead, undeniably a part of the modern world, and need to work within it lest they become romantics, nostalgically trying to live in or develop a world of which they never were nor ever can be a part. (Obviously this caution speaks to my own condition and that of others who, *de facto*, already are modernized.) As J.-F. Lyotard has pointed out, theoretically, because of its sceptical, critical attitude and belief in progress, the modern always has

within it the drive and means to surpass itself, to become postmodern. To be modern means always to overthrow what comes before and to change it.<sup>32</sup> So, if tradition would be continually rejuvenated, it might find an ally in a part of modernism and postmodernism that would provide non-imperialistic opportunities to establish self-determining, differentiated or heterogeneous identities and senses of place. I believe this is possible.

Throughout this chapter, I have been speaking about (and from the perspectives of) not only tradition, modernism, postmodernism, and poststructuralism, but – reflexively – a sense of professional collegiality and friendship. Researchers and designers concerned with the built environment, through their international associations, share a common study of what to make of the world, and what to try to do next. This common ground in problems and in a range of approaches for research and practice explicitly recognizes differences of the other.<sup>33</sup> From everywhere researchers gather at places such as Berkeley, Paris, Tunis or Cairo to learn from each other and about the environments of other places, times and cultures.

Likely, nobody will arrive at definitive answers to the human questions about identity, place, and the 'other' which I have here outlined. But at least they may arrive at a sense for the questions' importance, open character, and timely-timelessness. Even more importantly, each of the major contending modes of constituting the world – traditional, modernist architectural, postmodern electronic-technological, and poststructuralist – contain not yet fully utilized, valid and promising theoretical and practical strategies with which positively to move forward as ethically responsible researchers and members of a global community. One need not continue with either methodologies or social practices that drive toward homogeneity at the cost of eliminating otherness or creating antagonists. Within a genuinely shared world one may affirm, even celebrate and rejuvenate, rich heterogeneities and fertile differences among traditions and their environments.

### Notes

1. See O. Neugebauer, *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity*, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1962.
2. R. Lawlor, *Voices of the First Day*, Rochester, VT, Inner Traditions, 1991, pp. 77-84; J. Clark, *The Aboriginal People of Australia*, Tasmania, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 1986; and I. and T. Donaldson, *Seeing the First Australians*, Boston, George Allen & Unwin, 1985.
3. M. Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1989, e.g., p. 134; and J. Habermas, 'Modern and Postmodern Architecture,' *9 H*, no.4, London, 1983, pp. 9-14. On the obviously sexist language that connects 'men' and 'machine technology,' see C. Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, New York,



Routledge, 1989. Much analysis and repair also remains to be done by applying Luce Irigaray's strategies for dealing with 'sexual difference,' as indicated in note 23 below.

4. Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, pp. 404-405.

5. J. Holston, *The Modernist City*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 10, cf. p. 6.

6. Le Corbusier, *The Modulor*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1968, pp. 110-111.

7. M. van der Rohe, *Bau und Wohnung*, Stuttgart, F. Wedekind & Co., 1927, p. 8.

8. A. Mazrui, 'From Darwin to Current Theories of Modernization,' *World Politics*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1968, pp. 69-83.

9. Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, pp. 412-413.

10. I.M. Al-Bur'hi, 'Housing: Complexities of Tradition and Modernity. The Case of Riyadh,' in *Conservation, Rehabilitation, and Implementation*, Berkeley, IASTE, Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Working Paper Series, vol. 111, 1999; A.I. Kahera, 'Building, Aesthetics, and Technology,' in *Ecology, Tourism, and Traditional Settlements*, Berkeley, IASTE, Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Working Paper Series, vol. 108, 1999; O.A. Hallaj, 'Housing in the Age of Technology,' in *Invocations of Tradition in the Architecture of Tourist Development*, Berkeley, IASTE, Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Working Paper Series, vol. 107, 1999.

11. H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, New York, Blackwell, 1991.

12. IASTE 2, Berkeley, 1990. Note the imperialistic connotations of technology in modernism discussed above may require a chilling rereading of Le Corbusier's motto: where 'the house as a machine for living' would provide the measure of progress at the scale of the dwelling, modernist forms and materials obviously would be more desirable than, and would displace, traditional ones.

13. For example, among recent work, see S. Moore, *Technology and Place*, Austin, University of Texas Press, forthcoming; and C.E. Irazabal, 'Architecture and the Production of Postcard Images: Tradition versus Critical Regionalism in Curitiba,' paper presented at the sixth IASTE conference, 'Manufacturing Heritage and Consuming Tradition,' Cairo, December, 1998. Among the 'classic' sources, see J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1992; 'Modern and Postmodern Architecture'; and Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

14. R. Mugerauer, *Interpretations on Behalf of Place*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1995; and Mugerauer, 'Electronic Communication and the Physical Community,' *ElectroCom 94*, Austin Software Council, 1994.

15. From the large literature on tourism, the critique is especially penetrating in C. Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1996; and S. Norris (ed.), *Discovered Country: Tourism and Survival in the American West*, Albuquerque, Stone Ladder Press, 1994.

16. This position is pointedly articulated in J. Kincaid, *A Small Place*, New York, 1988.

17. Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*, p.xi.

18. Norris, *Discovered Country*, back cover.

19. D. Learner, *The Passing of Traditional Society*, New York, 1958; and Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, p.414. Note the counter arguments of contemporary continental hermeneutics: Hans-Georg Gadamer reinterpreted and argued for the positive basis of tradition in *Truth and Method*, New York, Continuum, 1989; and Martin Heidegger called for the reaffirmation of sense of place, identity, and local life-worlds in the face of placeless mass media and technology in *The Question Concerning Technology*, New York, Harper & Row, 1977.

20. See R. Mugerauer, 'Qualitative GIS: To Mediate, Not Dominate,' paper delivered at NCGIA's Varenus Project, Alisomar, California, 1998.

21. R. Mugerauer and L. Tatum, *High-Tech Downtown: Guidelines for Planning and Designing Building Conversions for Non-Manufacturing High-Technology Activities as a Key to Central City Rejuvenation*, Austin, Mike Hogg Endowment for Public Governance/University of Texas School of Architecture, 1998; and Mugerauer, 'Milieu Preferences Among High-Technology Companies: A Pilot Study,' Austin, Graduate Program in Community and Regional Planning Working Paper Series, 1997.

22. See Mugerauer and Tatum, *High-Tech Downtown*.

23. Space does not allow development of Irigaray's or Marx's work, both of whom powerfully develop the subject matter of this essay. Irigaray has argued, in a manner parallel to Levinas, that it is unexamined sexual difference that most effects our age metaphysically, epistemologically, ethically, and in terms of social action. For the ways that differences between the same and the other might be thought about via place, caress and sexuality, see her *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1984. Werner Marx has developed the strategy that compassion may be the only remaining viable basis and measure for human conduct in an era where transcendence, order and rationality are being abandoned. See his *Towards A Phenomenological Ethics*, Albany, SUNY Press, 1992; and *Is There a Measure on Earth?*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987. In regard to the ideas of Emmanuel Levinas used here, see especially *Totality and Infinity*, Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 1969; and *Otherwise than Being*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1991.

24. Given what appears to be a strain of nihilism in much of poststructuralist thought, those theorists who would support, for example, a liberatory leftist political agenda, have struggled to move beyond poststructuralist textual analyses to begin to formulate something like an ethics. There is considerable debate about which side of the nihilism/new ethics divide Derrida falls, as is the case with Baudrillard and Lyotard. In developing a 'safely leftist' position, many who in the past have argued against anything like objective meaning and value have taken up a post-Kierkegaardian tactic of reaffirming the unavoidability of obligations to others, not in the sense of a technical ethics – principled action grounded in a set of rational criteria – but in an attitude of responsibility and duty undertaken in 'fear and trembling' (the result is still what ordinary people would call an ethics). These theorists have regularly found the best routes lie through the unrepachable Jewish scholar Emmanuel Levinas, whose works were cited in the note 23 above. For example, see J. Caputo, *Against Ethics*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993. The return of deconstructivists and poststructuralists to puzzle over issues of

obligation via biblical and parallel traditions obviously requires considerable reflection: at least they have in common the contention that purely rational conceptualizations have severe limitations in specifying interpersonal and social responsibilities.

25. M. Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers*, New York, Basic Books, 1960; J. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, New York, Doubleday, 1966; and C. Norberg-Schulz, *The Concept of Dwelling*, New York, Rizzoli, 1986. Of course, this does not deny that the problem of opening to the stranger is a serious social issue in rural settings, too (see the acknowledgement in Handlin's history of the village in this chapter), but only that rural settings often remain the enclaves of groups of who are substantially alike and resistant to 'the other' in a way that cannot happen in the heterogeneous population mix of the streets, public spaces, and commercial interchanges of the city.

26. D. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, New York, Harper & Row, 1954.

27. See E. Hildiner, *Warriors of the Steppe*, New York, Sarpedon, 1997; and J.B. Bury, *The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1967.

28. O. Handlin, *The Uprooted*, Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1951, pp. 308-309.

29. M. El-Shafi, 'Siwa: Cultural Meaning and the Quest for Authenticity,' in *Preservation of Traditional Lifestyles and Built Form*, Berkeley, IASTE, Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Working Paper Series, vol. 114, 1999; and A.A. Kawi, 'The Oasis of Farafra in the Eyes of Its Inhabitants,' in J.-P. Bourdier and N. ALSayyad (eds.), *Dwellings, Settlements, and Tradition*, New York, University Press of America, 1989.

30. W. Bechhoefer, 'Surviving Tourism: Report from Amasya,' paper presented at the Sixth IASTE Conference, 'Manufacturing Heritage and Consuming Tradition,' Cairo, December, 1998.

31. C. Swope, 'Raising the Stakes: Manufactured Heritage, Coast Salish Identity, and Casino Architecture,' in *Invocations of Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Religion in Heritage Strategies*, Berkeley, IASTE, Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Working Paper Series, vol. 106, 1999.

32. J.-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

33. This basically amounts to what, in *Truth and Method*, Hans-Georg Gadamer has called 'the fusion of horizons,' in which our genuine questions allow us to pass over to learn from other people and places. See the section on 'hermeneutics' in R. Mugerauer, *Interpreting Environments*, pp. xxvi-xxxii.

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## Chapter 5

# Colonial Nostalgia and Cultures of Travel: Spaces of Constructed Visibility in Egypt

DEREK GREGORY

Egypt must soon be the favourite ground of the modern Nimrod, travel – who so tirelessly haunts antiquity . . . Thebes will be cleaned up and fenced in. Steamers will leave for the cataract, where donkeys will be in readiness to convey parties to Philae, at seven A.M. precisely, touching Esne and Edfoo. Upon the Libyan suburb will arise the Hôtel royal au Rameses le grand for the selectest fashion. There will be the Hôtel de Memnon for the romantic, the Hôtel aux Tombeaux for the reverend clergy, and the Pension Re-ni-no-fre upon the water-side for the invalids and sentimental – only these names will then be English; for France is a star eclipsed in the East.

(George William Curtis, 1856, *Nile Notes of a Howadji*)

Is getting to and from the registration desk to the elevators [at the Luxor Las Vegas] by boat along the river Nile any stranger than squeezing the Temple of Dendur into the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York? Any stranger than traveling to Luxor, Egypt itself?

(Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, *Destination Culture*)

### Traditions, Travel and Texts

In this chapter I want to disrupt some conventional appropriations of 'traditional environments'. 'Tradition' is at once an indispensable and an irredeemably compromised term. In one sense, my arguments can be read as merely another elaboration of the ways in which European modernity has 'invented' traditions – its own and those of other people. But I also depart from the usual terms of those discussions by connecting the invention of tradition to what Edward Said has identified as the citationary