So far in this book we have been talking about persistent historical utopian and religious landscapes, which represent divergence -- how cultural landscapes are different from one another. Now, we consider convergence -- how contemporary cultural landscapes are similar regardless of where they are found in most of North America. In many ways, these placeless places are the landscapes that all the diverse peoples of the North America share in common: Amish shop at Menards (a mega building supply chain) in western Wisconsin; Norwegians go to the movies about outer space; Black teenagers hang around the Mall of America in Minneapolis; and Quebecers and Mexicans shop at Wal-Mart. From the various diverse and distinctive cultures and places, people come together in the auto and postmodern landscapes of downtowns, highways, malls, suburbs, and amusement parks.

With the industrialization of North American economies, the size of cities grew rapidly. As urbanization impacted more people and places, rural landscapes became significantly less important and relevant in industrial economies but, of course, they did not vanish. As an expression of both industrialization and urbanization, car ownership rose and transformed the density, extent, and appearance of cities, ushering in suburbanization. Suburbanization was particularly pronounced in the wealthier countries of Canada and the United States after World War II and, thus, resulted in extensive new auto-based landscapes (Figure 5-graph). Indeed, 80 percent of everything ever built in the United States and Canada was built after World War II (Kunstler 1994).

As suburbs grew and spread into the surrounding countrysides and downtowns were remade to accommodate cars, critics reacted negatively to these “machine spaces” by calling them placeless places. The term “placelessness” was born.

Go into a Protestant church in a Swiss village, a mosque in Damascus, the cathedral at Reims, a Buddhist temple in Bangkok, and though in every case you are visiting a place of worship with a common aura of piety, you know from one pious site to the next that you are in a
distinctive culture. The site of a multiplex movie theater -- or a spectator sports arena, or a mall, or a modern hotel, or fast-food establishment in any city around the world -- and try to figure out where you are. You are nowhere. You are chasing pixels on a Nintendo: the world surrounding you vanishes. You are in front of or in or on MTV: universal images assault the eyes and global dissonances assault the ears in a heart-pounding tumult that tells you everything except which country you are in. Where are you? You are in McWorld (Barber 1995, 98-99).

McWorld is another way of saying placelessness. For E. Relph (1976), placeless landscapes “both look and feel alike” and are “experienced only through superficial and stereotyped images.” When cultural landscapes begin to look alike, terms like placelessness, flatscapes, thin places, generic, or, even kitsch are used. Placeless places may be shallow in meaning and experience, but they also represent freedom from the social norms associated with particular places. Placelessness invariably captures the dialectical tension between traditional and modern values: community and individualism; tradition and newness; and social norms and freedom.

Even as places have meaning to one group, they are at the same time meaningless to other groups. For example, the "cold, heartless" placelessness of downtowns are home to the homeless, whose knowledge and attachment to these places allows them to survive -- to find food, money, shelter, safety, and friends. Another example: rural Wisconsin might all look alike to urbanites -- a kind of placelessness -- but for the Amish, the rolling hills of pasture, hay, corn fields, and large vegetable gardens and woodlots are their intimate homes.

Part I. Auto Landscapes

What some call placelessness, John Brinckerhoff Jackson (1997) calls “auto-vernacular landscapes” with its suburban tract homes with garages and commercial suburban strips. The auto landscapes of placelessness express the life styles (values and behaviors) of the middle-classes -- endlessly similar looking and placed houses in subdivisions with only minimum, if any, personal, rather than ethnic, characteristics. Historical ethnic and utopian landscapes have been replaced by class-based landscapes which create a deceptively sense of placelessness though. The overt and striking differences of ethnic and religious landscapes in specific places have been superseded by subtle landscape variations of class over very large areas of North America. Mexico’s landscape forms express the differences between Indian, Mestizo, and Spanish heritage people and the sharp class differences that they reflect. While Mestizos account for 60 percent of Mexico’s population, most of the wealth is retained by European descendents (by one estimate, the richest 40 people own nearly 30 per cent of Mexico’s national wealth).

Wilbur Zelinsky (1979) gets it right when he says that since the late-nineteenth century in the Unites States and Canada almost all middle-class and affluent “ethnic” groups, except for the newest and poorest immigrants, have lived in similar kinds of places, even though they might still retain a few ethnic ceremonies, languages, foods, and musical preferences. Middle-class Afro-American, Chinese-American, Jewish, and Latino suburbs, for example, look alike. Despite the seeming uniformity of placelessness, slight regional differences persist. For example, newer suburban houses in Southern California are predominantly stuccoed with tiled roofs; in the South and New England, brick is most popular; and in the Midwest, vinyl siding predominates. Nevertheless, as distinctive historical landscapes disappear, the few real places, that have maintained ethnic cultural landscapes and the partially or completely fabricated ethnic festivals and places like make-believe Chinatowns, Wild West ghost towns, Cherokee Indian villages in western North Carolina, movie sets of Mexican plazas or Western frontier towns on the back lots of Hollywood movie studios, are increasing more popular and wide-spread. These places deserve to be studied as landscapes of fantasy and entertainment, which we will do in Chapter 7.

Ada Louise Huxtable (1998) makes a common critique of placelessness, which he calls “invented environments,” such as fantasy theme-parks, fake-old new towns, and even heritage preservation. Henri Lefebvre (1971, 38) says that “the rational, absurd, confused present-day landscape . . . had no equivalent prior to the nineteenth century.” But as this book contends, all cultural landscapes are invented -- human ideas and ideals underlie the creation and maintenance of all cultural places. Still, placeless landscapes, particularly auto-based ones, are distinctive in form and scale from historically earlier rural cultural landscapes.
The two geographical concepts of space and place are critical to understanding the cultural landscapes of placelessness. **Space** refers to abstract geometry devoid of environmental and human characteristics. Space is the stage upon which human actions take place. Space is located by longitude and latitude and represents “friction” to be overcome, like gravity but on a horizontal plain. **Places**, on the other hand, are created by specific individuals as they express and experience cultural (group) values, and thus, places are full of human meanings. Both environmental and cultural characteristics are associated with places, such as the U.S. Midwestern Dairy Belt, Cajun Louisiana, and Northeastern Megalopolis. In another example, the term “house” represents space; the term “home” stands for place.

Explanations for placelessness in North America are numerous:

* mass communication and consumption;
* homogeneous economic systems of multi-national corporations;
* centralized governments and their agencies;
* standardization of products and land use codes; and

Underlying all of these forces are the particular and peculiar “modern” interpretations of “technique” and “efficiency” based on scientific principles from food preparation to highway construction. The capitalist principles of profit maximization in the short-run, regardless of the consequences to local people and places, also contribute to placelessness in particular ways. Placelessness reflects the individualistic and collective alienating forces of powerlessness and dehumanization, especially in post-industrial societies. The former World Trade Center in New York City, for example, illustrates placelessness because it had no reference to places, whether to Manhattan or anywhere else, because world trade, as now practiced, is nearly ubiquitously global. Globalization exploits indifferently the peoples and places of the world and concentrates profits disproportionally among the world’s wealthiest corporations and individuals. Ironically, while the forces that create placelessness destroy distinctive places and diminish the significance of real places, placelessness in turn engenders cravings for distinctive places. Packaged foreign travel is one response, of which the cruise ship phenomenon is a prime example. Another is newly-created distinctive cultural landscapes that are mere fabrications or fakes of the originals which they copied; all the while trying to be and being experienced by people as real. For without knowing what is real and valuing it, pseudo-places are experienced as real! Placelessness has become distinctively real.

Placelessness results when places with their complex environmental and cultural attributes are transformed into **simple spaces**, devoid of the rich fabric and meaning of cultural landscapes. Placeless places lack or have reduced diversity, significance, and a **sense of place** for people. Placelessness dehumanizes the world and because dehumanized places have little or no human attachments, the people in these placeless places become even more vulnerable to more dehumanization.

All cultural landscapes share sameness or similarities; otherwise no spatial and cultural patterns would be discernable. Placelessness is yet another type of cultural landscape, but reflecting different social processes. The hegemony of the capitalist market and of governmental agencies have created placelessness on a scale and appearance that were not known in North America until after World War II, when the federal government in particular supported, indeed subsidized, large national and multi-national corporations and a middle-class standard of living and lifestyles.

E. C. Relph (1976) uses the concept of placelessness to refer to the unique mass auto-based cultures of Canada and the USA. He identifies five specific manifestations of placelessness:

1) **other-directedness** in places (parking lots, suburban commercial strips, amusement theme parks such as Disneyland, Universal Studios, and Sea World; entertainment districts in downtowns of major metropolitan areas);
2) **uniformity and standardization** in places (highways, tract houses, airports);
3) **formlessness and lack of human scale** in places (factories, skyscrapers);
4) **place destruction** (in wars, urban renewal, open-pit mining, quarries); and
5) **impermanence and instability** of places (seemingly continual remodeling of shopping centers, abandonment of industrial areas and inner-city residential neighborhoods).

The processes that created placeless landscapes long predated the emergence of these landscapes. For example, the industrial revolution
already established uniformity, standardization, and lack of human scale. Placelessness, then, is the wide-spread, indeed pervasive, applications and manifestations of scientific and engineering processes across North America, particularly in urban and metropolitan areas.

The placelessness of auto-landscapes consists of distinctive features: skyscrapers; downtown streets and parking lots; urban renewal public housing projects; highways, highway signs and billboards; suburban housing; car garages; shopping malls; and franchise food chains. In reaction to the auto placelessness, economic forces created postmodern landscapes expressed inner cities: counterculture neighborhoods, gentrification, urban entertainment, and festival places. Postmodern suburban versions also emerged as edge cities and gated communities.

Skyscrapers

Formlessness and lack of human scale are illustrated by many types of landscape features in industrial societies. Because all large cities in North America became major industrial centers, “dirty” smoke-stack factories and railroads were divorced from human scale. With the rise of commercial skyscrapers, the vertical scale of downtowns was also transformed into another dimension of placelessness. Technically, the first skyscraper was erected in 1885 in Chicago. Having steel frames support the entire weight of walls, instead of walls carrying the weight of buildings, was a revolutionary construction technique. This load-carrying structural frame was called the “Chicago skeleton.” Although the original skyscraper was only nine stories high, this technique allowed buildings to be built higher and higher in subsequent years. The combination of several other innovations -- elevators, central heating, electrical plumbing pumps, and telephones -- allowed skyscrapers to be built in larger and taller versions. In 1913, the Woolworth Building in New York City had 57 stories and a height of 792 feet, which is still one of the tallest 101 buildings in the world today. By 1931, the Empire State Building in New York City had 102 stories and was 1,250 feet high. By the 1930s, skyscrapers had become prominent features on U.S. urban skylines. As placelessness spread across the globe, particularly to the “emerging” economies of East and Southeast Asia, taller and taller skyscrapers were built. The number of skyscrapers world-wide doubled from the 1960s to the 1970s, and almost doubled again by the 1980s, and more than doubled in the 1990s (Table 5- ). In the United States, tall skyscrapers were built earlier than other countries and peaked in the 1980s and 1990s. Of the world’s 101 tallest skyscrapers in 2003, the USA had 42 percent and Canada had three percent.

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When compared to the percentage of the world’s total income, measured by Gross National Income in 2003, the United States represented 33 percent, and Canada and Mexico accounted for two percent each. By way of contrast, Japan accounted for 13 percent of the world’s income, yet had only five percent of the tallest skyscrapers. Compared with each country’s share of the world’s population, United States’ 296.5 million represent 4.6 percent; Canada’s 22.8 million is 0.5 percent; and Mexico’s 106.5 million is 1.6 percent (GeoHive 2005). Clearly, the United States has a disproportionally larger number of the world’s tallest buildings than its wealth and population would suggest. U.S. culture in general values “extremes” unlike other cultures: the first, the tallest, the longest, the biggest, and the largest of anything are considered virtuous in their own right.
In contrast to the United States, the wealthy countries of Western Europe have noticeably not embraced very tall skyscrapers, just as they have not embraced many of the other aspects of placelessness, such as freeways, suburbs, and larger shopping centers.

In inner cities, earlier or recent versions of skyscrapers are highly visible forms of placelessness. The increasing height of buildings in general and skyscrapers in particular, and the number of commercial and residential buildings in major metropolitan areas in Canada and the United States in the last 50 years has “heightened” aspects of urban placelessness.

**Downtown Streets and Parking Lots**

The landscape of transportation, or what Victor Gruen (1964) calls “transportationscape,” accounts for 38 million acres of roads, streets, and parking lots in the United States alone. Auto landscapes emerged in the late 1920s when Henry Ford had sold over 15 million Model T cars. The application of “science,” “engineering principles,” “mass production,” and “safety” to manufacturing products and to large areas resulted in placelessness, devoid of the particular cultural attributes of specific groups. There are after all no Jewish or Roman Catholic highways or parking lots!
Parking lots illustrate the other-directedness, standardization, uniformity, and formlessness of auto landscapes. The downtowns of Canadian and U.S. cities, small or large, were profoundly transformed by the increase of cars after World War II. First, cars took over the traditional downtowns, or Central Business Districts (CBDs). By 1972, 74 percent of Detroit’s downtown land areas were devoted to the movement and storage of cars (Jakle and Sculle 2004A, 10). Local governments began to enact ordinances to regulate the flow and parking of cars. To accommodate more cars and reduce congestion, downtown streets were widened, invariably at the expense of sidewalk space. Streets in San Antonio were widened from 36 to 50 feet. By the end of the 1920s, 112 street-widening projects had been completed in U.S. cities -- transforming the horizontal scale of the downtowns from pedestrians to machines. Even in smaller towns, technical transportation and “safety” concerns superseded issues of human-scale. In

Eau Claire, Wisconsin, side streets in residential neighborhoods were widened to accommodate the size of snow removal equipment, rather than buying equipment that fit the existing streets. Because major city streets in Canada and the United States are wide enough for parking on both sides of streets, placelessness cuts through tree-lined residential areas, turning human-scaled places into machine-designed spaces.

In addition, first, private and public parking lots and then, multi-story parking garages aided in the transformation of pedestrian-scaled downtowns into increasingly auto and truck (machines) spaces. In downtown Indianapolis, everybody is now within a city block from a parking lot, parking garage and deck, or underground parking plaza, whereas in 1914, the Sanborn Insurance Maps for the city showed that the same area had only 23 garages and 20 livery stables (Jakle and Sculle 2004A, 132 and 117).

The most personalized places in placeless spaces are people’s houses and their yards. House colors, plantings, flowers, yard ornaments, colored stones, wire or wood fences and hedges, and outdoor lights reflect individual and broadly national merchandise preferences. Yet, people’s homes are connected to other places by the impersonal, standardized spaces devoted to automobiles: garages, driveways, streets, and highways.

**Urban renewal: public housing projects**
Urban planners and politicians succeeded in creating placelessness with public housing projects. The Canadian and U.S. governments spent billions of dollars to build huge public-housing projects for the poor, first in the 1930s and later again in the 1960s and 1970s. Planners and policy makers thought that new housing would cure the social problems of the urban ghettos: sub-standard housing, unemployment, dysfunctional families, and drug addiction. Typical of placelessness, “technique,” in the form of architecture in this instance, ruled over social concerns.

In response to housing deficiencies and high unemployment rates during the Great Depression (from 1929 with the Stock Market crash until 1941), the U.S. federal government built public housing. The first housing project, Techwood Homes in Atlanta, Georgia, was constructed in 1936. At first, public housing was primarily for White working-classes. By the 1960s, this was no longer true. Large, multi-story towers are associated with public housing, but earlier projects, like the Ida B. Wells projects in Chicago, were actually low-rises.

Public housing projects serve 1.3 million people in the United States. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) reported that in 1997 the five largest number of public housing units were in New York City, 160,000; Detroit, 57,000; Chicago, 40,000; Philadelphia, 22,000; and Baltimore, 18,000 -- massively impacting the inner-city landscapes of these cities.

The Robert Taylor Homes, known as “The Hole,” on the Southside of Chicago was the largest public housing development in the world -- 28 buildings with 16-stories each, housing 20,000 people. Inhabitants had unemployment rates of 95 percent, high rates of drug addictions, and suffered from gang warfare. By 1999, 21 of Chicago’s high-rise buildings with 16,000 units of public housing had been demolished, among them the notorious Cabrini-Green on the Near Northside, just west of the Gold Coast, and the Henry Horner public housing project in the Westside ghetto, yet fewer than 1,500 replacement units have been built (Economichumanrights.org 2005). Demolition of public housing projects is occurring across the United States, including the first public housing project of Techwood Homes in Atlanta. By the 1990s, the very public housing projects which were to solve the problems of the 1960s and 1970s were being demolished in the United States because the placelessness of housing projects had become the problem!

Canada has 205,000 public housing units; the largest proportion was constructed in the 1970s, although “slum housing” was being demolished shortly after World War II. Toronto’s Regent Park was Canada’s first and largest low-income housing project.

Highways

Highways are the quintessential placeless landscapes because standardized engineering principles were and continue to be applied across the United States and Canada and throughout much of the wealthy world.
Except for the topography, vegetation, and language and markings on signs, highways in all specific places are the same. Roads in the open countryside and urban streets are the arteries in industrial and post-industrial societies. They are the spatial connectors which link people, activities, and places. Roads, and the spatial mobility they facilitate, are crucial to the flow of people, social interactions, ideas, capital, and raw materials. Culture is expressed on roads: for example, social status and wealth by car models and sizes (Minis to SUVs); social and political opinions with bumper stickers and demonstrations; patriotism in parades; social and sexual prowess by cruising; and mourning during funeral processions (all the cars of mourners are together with car lights on).

Originally, roads in the countryside were built without “modern” transportation principles and were adjusted to local topographic conditions. Today, such roads are commonly designated as “rustic” because of they have maintained their curves and rolling topographic characteristics. With the standardization of state highway designs and construction techniques and with more and faster cars, roads became standardized across most of the United States and Canada, but not so in Mexico.

The “extreme” forms of road design standardization are interstate highways, which were authorized by the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956. The U.S. interstate highway system, often referred to as the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways, is the world’s largest and most grandiose public works project, dwarfing anything authoritarian governments ever did, including the famous Nazi-era German Autobahn. After World War II, President Dwight Eisenhower convinced Congress that an interstate highway system was necessary for the military security of the United States. By 2006, 46,876 miles have built. Similarly, in Canada, the Trans-Canada highway was initiated after World War II (built from 1948-1965) with federal cost-sharing agreements and national standards. Most interstate highways in the United States cost just over 1 million dollars per mile to build. In metropolitan areas, interstates and highways in general are much more expensive to build. The most expensive highway to date is Boston’s one billion per mile project, but Los Angeles’ Century Freeway is more typical, costing 127 million dollars per mile. The Federal Highway Administration calculates that the average combined rural and urban interstate highway costs are 20.6 million dollars per mile. When he last

section of I-105 in Los Angeles was completed in 1993, about $425 billion (measured in 2006 dollars) had been spent. More than $80 billion a year are spent to maintain and upgrade this highway system.

Tom Lewis (1997) points out how the Interstate highways fundamentally and profoundly transformed communities by subsidizing private car travel over public mass transit systems that subsequently contributed to low-density, sprawling suburbs and shopping malls. Interstate highways are, of course, part of the national highway system, funded in part by a gasoline tax on every gallon of gas sold in the United States. The more consumers drive, the more roads are built and “improved,” resulting in more auto placelessness.

Figure 5- Interstate highways, state highways, and roads in general illustrate the standardization of machine space by local, state, and federal governments. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.

The abstract notions of religious and political freedom have increasingly been replaced by physical freedom in everyday life. Freedom in the United States for most people, most of the time, translates into spatial mobility: daily commuting, seasonal vacating, and periodic changing of employment and residences. Ironically, individual freedom through auto mobility was achieved by way of massive centralized governmental road construction programs and social isolation as more people spent more time commuting. In some U.S. cities, particularly in the New York metropolitan...
area, average commuting times are now three hours per day. The U.S. Census reports that commuting-to-work took an average of over 100 hours per year and vacations only 80 hours (two weeks) per year (U.S. Census 2005)!

“speed bumps” which are widely and frequently used on highways passing through towns to slow traffic. Speed bumps or humps are only occasionally used, as are roundabouts, in some cities in Canada and the United States.

Drivers cannot ponder the particulars of landscapes (smells, sounds, micro-weather conditions, topography, and architectural details of buildings) as they travel at high speeds in their metal boxes. Only the occasional place-name signs tell you where you are (Figure 5- ) -- enormous signs in vast spaces at high speeds.

Highway Signs and Billboards

Language, as one aspect of culture, is expressed in the cultural landscape through highway signs. State and provincial highway departments standardized road signs; local governments regulated commercial signs; and professional highway and auto organizations made recommendations. By the 1940s, parking signs were standardized across the United States and about 80 percent of all traffic signs were parking related (Jakle and Sculle 2004A, 31). The standardization of signs extended placelessness across the landscapes of the United States and Canada especially, and, to a much lesser degree, across Mexico where road systems, regulations, and enforcements are less developed. An exclusively Mexican phenomenon is

Figure 5-. The “nightmare” of commuting and driving in traffic congested metropolitan areas is turned into paid fun in Disneyland! Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.

Figure 5-. Along Interstates it is difficult to know where you really are - - a placeless experience. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.

Billboards were designed as advertisements along roads and highways and are a very visible part of auto landscapes. The ubiquitous acceptance of autos has even resulted in the suburbanization of older, inner-city neighborhoods by the placement of billboards. Because billboards are designed to be read by drivers in fast-moving cars from a distance, their appropriate scale in the suburbs becomes inappropriate in slow-walking pedestrian areas. Yet city halls across the United States have allowed inappropriate locations of billboards (Figure 5- ). The U.S.’s dependence on cars, minimum land use controls, and the spaciousness of the country have resulted in the prevalence of billboards in the United States in particular; less so in land-use regulated Canada and much less so in Mexico with its
much lower private car ownership rates and consumer consumption patterns (Jakle and Sculle 2004B).

Figure 5-1. The sign’s size to the service station reflects the highway perspective, not a pedestrian one. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.

Figure 5-2. Suburbanization affected even nineteenth-century commercial streets, as the billboard attests. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.

Commercial signs advertising restaurants, hotels, gasoline stations, and retail services have also diminished the human scale. Particularly in the suburbs, highway-oriented signs visibly dominate the auto landscapes (Figure 5-1).

**Suburban Housing**


**Little Boxes**

Little boxes on the hill side, little boxes made of ticky tacky.
Little boxes, little boxes, little boxes all the same.
There’s a green one and a pink one and a blue one and a yellow one.
And they’re all made out of ticky tacky, and they all look just the same.

And the people in the houses all went to the university
Where they were put in boxes, little boxes, all the same.
And there’s doctors and there’s lawyers, and there’s business executives
And they’re all made out of ticky tacky and they all look just
the same.

And they all play on the golf course and drink their martinis dry And they all have pretty children and the children go to school And the children go to summer camp and then to the university Where they all get put in boxes and they all come out the same.

And the boys go into business and marry and raise a family In boxes, little boxes, little boxes all the same. There’s a green one and a pink one and a blue one and a yellow one And they’re all made out of ticky tacky and they all look just the same. . . .

Source: Song by Malvina Reynolds; made famous by Pete Seeger.

The suburbanization of North America is the result of at least four major factors: 1) federal transportation policies emphasizing and benefiting trucks and private automobiles; 2) federal housing policies that favored single-family detached houses in suburban areas over multiple-unit dwellings in inner cities; 3) federal tax policies that encouraged new commercial and residential developments in less developed suburban locations; and 4) federal national defense policies that subsidized the movement and restructuring of industry to favor suburban locations over central city ones.

Figure 5 - “Little boxes” on leveled hills in Los Angeles, the ultimate environmentally, architecturally, and socio-economically placeless landscape. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.

The explosive growth of suburbs after World War II was the dominant new theme in Canada and the United States, allies and victors of the war, but not in Mexico. From 1950s to the 1960s, the number of housing units increased by 20 percent in the United States, double the previous highest rates. The suburbs, as we know them today, were born. William Whyte (1956) captured the essence of this newly emerging landscape:

Suburbia is becoming the most important single market in the country. It is the suburbanite who starts the mass fashions -- for children, dungarees, vodka martinis, outdoor barbecues, functional furniture, [and] picture windows .... All suburbs are not alike, but they are more alike than they are different.

In the United States, the idea of the suburbs is particularly associated with Levittown. The first one was started on Long Island in 1947, but Levittown, Pennsylvania, exemplifies the scale of suburbanization. It was the largest privately-planned community constructed by a single builder in the United States. When it was completed in 1958, the development occupied over 5,500 acres in lower Bucks County and included churches, schools, swimming pools, shopping centers, and 17,311 single-family homes. For the 70,000 residents, Levittown represented the “American Dream” of homeownership. But by the 1960s, Levittown epitomized the worse aspects of postwar suburbia for critics. Yet architecturally and socio-economically homogeneous suburbs continued to be built. Canadians have never had a “Canadian Dream,” yet they too embraced suburban living.

For more than a century, suburbs have existed, usually places where the well-to-do moved to escape the increasing numbers of immigrants in cities during the late-nineteenth century. Earlier, older, well-to-do suburbs were built around commuter railroad lines and, earlier still, street car suburbs. Later, executive men would be met by their wives in “station wagons” or by hired help in such vehicles as they stepped off from
trains in New Rochelle, Stamford, Garden City, or Highland Park. But the new postwar suburbs were accessible only by automobiles and, in most cases, accessible only to white buyers. As more and more rural land at the peripheries of urban areas was converted to low-density suburban land uses, sprawl resulted. Suburbs represented a profound shift from high-density land uses in inner cities to ever lower-densities in housing, shopping, and employment. In 1980, 18 of the 25 largest U.S. cities declined in population, while the suburbs grew by 60 million people, 83 percent of the nation's growth. Over 50 percent of the U.S. population now lives in suburbia, according to the 2000 Census.

Governmental policies after World War II encouraged the rapid growth of suburbs in the U.S. and Canada. In the United States, the GI Bill of Rights allowed returning veterans and their families to buy houses, because the government guaranteed their home mortgages for banks. In Canada, the Central Housing and Mortgage Corporation provided similar financial support for veterans to buy houses. Single family suburban houses, once the prerogative of the few, now became available to many "honorably discharged" veterans who held jobs. With the government's help, five million veterans became suburban homeowners and new common suburban landscapes emerged.

Figure 5-. Immediately after World War II, developers built in the newly emerging suburbs thousands of one-and-half-story Cape Cod style houses, often called GI houses because the federal government guaranteed the mortgages. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler
Simultaneously, a “culture of consumerism” was expressed in cultural landscape forms, whether as fast-food chains, shopping malls, big-box retailers, oil company gasoline stations, and motel chains. First came the drive-in fast food “restaurants,” motels (which were actually drive-up hotels), drive-in banks, drive-in dry cleaners, and drive-in churches; then came the supermarkets, super truck stops, and super service centers for cars. These landscapes are suburban in scale, design, and location and oriented towards private automobiles. Both suburban housing and retailing were connected by the homogenous designs, age of construction, and engineering specifications for safe driving. Look-alike places or flat, placeless landscapes resulted. The absence of visual distinctions and surprises became the hallmark of commercial success and personal fulfillment!

Car Garages

As the numbers of cars increased, their visual impact on the cultural landscape became profound not only in public spaces but also in private spaces. Private garages reflect the changing importance and role of cars in suburban life styles. The private storage of cars in the USA, based on an average of 1.7 motor vehicles per family, covers almost 700,000 acres of land, or about the size of Rhode Island (Jakle and Sculle 2004A, 1). By the 1910s the wealthy began buying automobiles. In this era, free-standing garages were built behind houses along back alleys. Although cars were symbols of wealth and status, they were stored “out-of-sight” in back alleys with other utilitarian functions, such as garbage collection and milk and bread deliveries. Mass automobile ownership grew rapidly after World War II, particularly in the United States and Canada, and cars and garages took on new images of prestige — conspicuously displayed next to houses and in front of houses on public streets.

Suburban garages were first detached next to houses; then they were attached to houses by breezeways; and later, garages were incorporated within houses themselves. Garages had the same styles and were built out of the same building materials as houses of the same era. Driveways also evolved and became more prominent. First, driveways were only two concrete strips separated by grass medians; then, driveways became solid narrow one-car concrete slabs, and finally, driveways accommodated multiple cars at one time, sometimes three to four cars wide. These developments in garages and driveways were particularly characteristic of middle-class neighborhoods.
Figure 5-. The location, orientation, and size of garages reflected the changes in the sizes, status, and number of cars. Source: Ingolf Vogeler, based on field work in Eau Claire, WI.

Ironically, when autos were initially real novelties and thus status symbols, they were hidden from public view in alleys. Since the 1950s, an increasing number of front-yard driveways and garages have been devoted to cars. By the 1990s, upscale new house styles had two- and three-car garages (one was often used for boats, bikes, or other recreational equipment) which were often larger in appearance from the street than the houses to which they were attached (Figure 5- garages). As the Build-Your-Own-Home (2005) web site proclaims: “So if you have room on your Lot, and the Architectural Guidelines allow for it, at least build a Triple Garage -- you can't go wrong with that.” Some 198 million cars, motorcycles, and light trucks are registered in the USA, well over one for every licensed driver. According to The Economist (September 3, 1998), the United States ranks first worldwide with 747 cars per 1,000 people.

Shopping Malls
Shopping malls -- enclosed shopping streets where consumer goods are exhibited and sold -- have their roots in the ancient bazaars and suks which are still lively institutions throughout the world where placelessness has hardly yet appeared. In the western world, London's famous Crystal Palace Exposition of 1851, and other expositions, later called World's Fairs, became the prototypes for shopping malls. The Crystal Palace was one of the first pre-fabricated glass buildings which created a greenhouse effect that allowed hundreds of tropical plants to flourish under its roof. The first enclosed, climate-controlled shopping mall in America, Southdale Center, was designed by Austrian architect Victor Gruen and built in Edina, Minnesota, in 1954. Today, the largest shopping mall in the United States -- the Mall of America or commonly called the “mega-mall” -- is also located in the Minneapolis suburbs. According to the Council of Shopping Centers, some 1,100 enclosed shopping malls are now located in the United States. Malls followed the exodus of city dwellers into the new suburban developments that proliferated in the 1950s and continue today. Because of our reliance on cars, suburbs have fewer people walking in pedestrian landscapes, historically associated with traditional downtowns.

Figure 5-. Placeless shopping at Kmart. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.

The “malling” of North America took place during the 1960s and 1970s. Like the suburbs, the malls were located off highways and accessible only by cars; although bus services were nominally operated in the suburbs
for the young, old, and poor. Like the suburban houses without front porches and the focus on backyards, shopping malls look inward too, away from the public streets. Shopping malls are isolated by huge parking lots, accessible often only by their own exits on Interstates and major highways. Shopping malls also attract large retail and restaurant chains on nearby locations. Malls are designed to encourage consumption, much of it impulse buying. As indoor shopping malls are falling out of favor, architectural designs, layouts, events (like fashion shows), music, and colorful displays are creating the “magic of malls,” making them a major form of recreation! More and more retail spaces are becoming “experiential destinations” -- offering food, fun, and pampering as well as things to take home. Consumption in postmodern economies has become a live style, some would even say a “religion” with its highly ritualized behaviors and shopping malls are its cathedrals.

**Franchise Food Chains**

Fast-food chains express the ultimate in auto lifestyles and auto landscapes. In 2005, eating out accounted for 48 percent of all money spent on food in the United States, most of it at suburban fast-food chains. In 1955, it was only 25 percent. About 75 percent of the U.S. population lives within three miles of a McDonald's fast-food restaurant and 66 percent live within three miles of a Pizza Hut, a Taco Bell, and a KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken). Two-thirds of the purchases at these chains are made through drive-up windows (Economist, 27 August 2005, 62).

**Figure 5-** The rotating bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken catches your eye along a commercial strip as “try our drive up window!” Your mother told you not to play with your food, but at McDonald’s you can, and not get “dirty” and get in “trouble.” Isn’t placelessness wonderful? Photos: Ingolf Vogeler.

**Part II. Postmodern Landscapes**

Placeless landscapes are better called the common landscapes of the post-World War II era. Prior to the industrialization of the U.S. and Canadian economies, agrarian communities were largely ethnically and religiously identified. Utopian communities were also scattered throughout the settled countryside. These common landscapes became increasing uncommon, or relic, landscapes as industrial and auto landscapes emerged. Starting in the 1920s and particularly after World War II, auto-based landscapes became the new common landscape types. Not coincidentally, at the height of suburbanization in the two northern countries of North America, the concept of placelessness and critiques of suburbia began. The term placelessness is unacceptable to describe the post-World War II landscapes, because these distinctive landscapes are no more placeless in any real meaningful way than the agrarian landscapes that preceded the suburbs. In this book, placeless places are the common or auto landscapes of North America.

Market forces destroy differences among places and cultures. Uniformity, standardization, and automation increase markets and profits but eventually markets become saturated and homogeneous. “New” markets must be invented to create continuing profits. Commonly, markets simply re-create products from those previously destroyed because this is easier.
and less risky than creating truly new products. For example, after World War II uniformity and class-homogeneous in the suburbs was reflected initially with nearly identical Cape Cod and later California Ranch style houses. By the late 1960s, however, the counterculture was the first to react against these standardized places with their homogenous middle-class lifestyles. Alternative life styles (communal living), foods (vegetarianism, organic produce, home-made yoghurt, whole-grain breads, brown rice, etc.), clothing (natural fibers, such as cotton and hemp, tie-dyed T-shirts, bell-bottom pants, leather belts and bags, colorful beads, etc.), religions (Tibetan Buddhism, Hindu Hari Krishna), and even buildings (A-frames, Geodesic domes, California Rustics) were expressed in alternative locations (sometimes in inner cities but more commonly in remote rural areas of New England, northern Great Lakes, Southwest, and northern Pacific Coast.

As more and more young people (few hippies were over 30 years old) embraced this counterculture, companies selectively created look-alike products for mass consumption. Today, the material forms of the counterculture have been mainstreamed. Niche markets for wines, coffees, natural and organic foods (Whole Foods Market), clothing, leather goods (Coach), and an eclectic array of earlier forms of building materials (narrow plastic siding, stucco, fake cut-stones and bricks), and styles (Arts and Crafts, Prairie) have emerged in the last 20 years. Likewise, the cultural landscapes of placelessness in the CBDs (downtowns) and suburbs have been converted into symbolically distinctive places like theme malls with highly specialized merchandise (Times Square, New York City; Mall of America, Minneapolis, has stores for only magnets, flags, candles, ties, pink-colored items), theme restaurants (Applebee’s, the neighborhood grill and bar chain), amusement spaces (downtown sports stadiums, theaters, museums, art and ethnic fairs, up-scale hotels and restaurants; places like Disneyland and Disney World), while new subdivisions try to capture by-gone eras of presumable community and neighborly values.

With de-industrialization (only 10 percent of all U.S. jobs were in manufacturing by 2003 versus 25 percent in 1970) and the growth of the service sectors in Canada and the United States, life styles, products, and architectural differentiation resulted in new uncommon landscapes; this time, fabricated placeless versions of past common real or imagined landscapes were created. Although uncommon places, whether historically authentic or contemporary fabricated ones, are still fewer in number and less obvious in everyday life than common landscapes, the new uncommon landscapes of the late-auto era are prototypes of new future common landscapes yet to fully dominate. Many processes and labels have been applied to these newest uncommon landscapes: gentrification, Edge Cities, and YUP-ification (Young Urban Professionals), and postmodernism.

The label postmodernism is probably the best over-arching term for the reaction against the auto-industrial era (also referred to as Fordism because of the importance of the mass production processes utilized by the Ford Motor Corporation) and the cultural landscapes that it produced. The concept of postmodernism was first used in the early 1980s, yet the anti-establishment movements of the 1960s were earlier prototypes of postmodernism. Although it has complex and contradictory meanings, postmodernism is characterized by eclecticism and cultural life organized around a variety of local issues and environments. It celebrates individual and group differences and contradictory meanings of cultural practices and places, very much in line with the emerging uncommon, postmodern cultural landscape forms.

Seaside, on Florida’s northwest coast, is a particularly good example of these emerging postmodern landscapes. The developer created brand-new New England-looking houses (although they were supposed to reflect Northwest Florida’s building tradition of wood-framed cottages). These nineteenth-century architectural style wooden houses are pastel-colored with front porches, towers, and white-painted picket fences along brick-paved streets. One of many of their slogans is “Learn to feel small again” -- a clear (postmodern) response to the impersonal, inhuman scale of modern urban and suburban placelessness. Environmental quality, particularly beaches, is another focus of this postmodern planned community. But the “luxury of simplicity” is only attainable for higher income groups.” A whole new movement called the New Urbanism, or “neotraditional town planning,” has embraced these kinds of postmodern landscapes which now appear in new suburban and inner city housing developments across the USA and Canada.
In a postmodern world of heightened individualisms, new cultural markers are appearing in middle-class neighborhoods. A much wider range of different colors, styles, and shapes of roofing materials, house siding, windows, and fencing is now available. The earlier wide wooden clapboard on suburban houses have been replaced or covered-up with wide aluminum and steel siding, and, by the mid-1980s, with exterior plastic siding. This newest siding comes in narrow-looking strips, which are actually sheets of vinyl, and in a wider range of finishes from wood-like textures, and shingle and shake styles, and more varied and deeper colors. New roofing materials, including metal roofs which are only seen on farm houses and barns, have also begun to reflect the eclecticism of postmodernism in the shapes and colors of shingles, many of which hark back to the eclecticism of the late nineteenth-century Victorian era.

Fences are yet another important “nostalgic” cultural marker in middle-class neighborhoods. Except for in high-income developments like Seaside, expensive and high-maintenance wooden fences are not being used; instead, consumers prefer traditionally-named yet recycled plastic picket fence styles. According to Window and Door magazine, the overall U.S. plastic fence products industry topped $1.7 billion in 2000 -- nearly tripling in size since 1987. Vinyl fencing has had annual growth rates of over 25 percent. These modern fences are re-creating the appearance of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century urban landscapes, so very different from the open front- and backyards of suburban houses which appeared for the first time in the 1950s.

Postmodernism is still in its infancy, appearing as new skyscrapers, new shopping centers, new subdivisions, and remodeled stores, offices, and houses. These spatially scattered postmodern places will become more wide-spread in the future, but never as wide-spread as industrial-auto landscapes and certainly not as spatially-dominant as agrarian landscapes. Figure 5- (diagram) shows the combination of relic agrarian, dominant auto, and emerging postmodern elements in the U.S. and Canadian landscapes today. In the past, cultural landscapes were destroyed; since the mid-1970s, they have been restored, commercialized, and sold as “culturally diverse” parts of the new uncommon landscapes. The frequency and combination of these landscape types actually varies significantly between urban and rural areas. In urban areas, relic landscapes are essentially gone, except on the rural-urban fringe, while postmodern places are the most common in very select places in metropolitan areas. In rural areas, on the other hand, almost no postmodern landscape elements are present, except for an occasional new bank, store, or small cluster of houses, in these largely relic agrarian landscapes. Postmodernism so far has had very little expression in Mexico.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Landscapes Types in Contemporary USA and Canada</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uncommon</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Form:</strong> ethnic, religious, utopian landscapes: agrarian economy, prior to the auto era</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Patterns:</strong> persisting (religious: Roman Catholics), vanishing (ethnic, utopian, religious: Mormon),</td>
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Placelessness is best understood as common landscapes which emerge and decline as new common landscapes replace them. Late-nineteenth century agrarian landscapes (type 1), such as the Amish still live in, were replaced by auto-based landscapes (type 2), starting in the 1920s and accelerating after World War II. Source: Ingolf Vogeler.

**Types of Postmodern Landscapes**

The formations of cultural landscapes lag behind economic and social transformations. New ideas and ways of thinking about life must be accepted before behavioral changes can occur. When sufficiently large numbers of people adopt different behaviors, new material expressions, including new cultural landscapes, invariably emerge. Such “new” ways of behaving are labeled postmodernism, or post-Fordism, which emphasize play and hedonism; whereas the “old” ways of modernism, or Fordism, stressed work and order.

**Counterculture Neighborhoods: Spontaneous Postmodern Inner City Landscapes**

In every generation “alternative” lifestyles exist, often developing into distinctive “bohemian” neighborhoods. In the United States, the 1950s Beat generation and late-1960s hippies sought to separate themselves from mainstream society and start anew the “good” life: fully experiencing “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Beat poets Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg spearheaded this movement, first based in New York City and then spreading to other major metropolitan centers, including the Canadian cities of Montreal and Toronto. In the United States, Haight-Ashberry in San Francisco reflected the sexual, spiritual, political, and intellectual freedoms of the counterculture in reaction to the dominant placelessness. By the 1920s Mexico City already had well-developed alternative colonies of artists, poets, and writers, made famous by the muralist Diego Rivera and painter Frida Kahlo. Frida Kahlo’s brightly colored purple house with red trim in Mexico City reflects both Iberian and artistic elements.

**Kensington Market** in Toronto is an example of the evolving cultural landscape types from common to uncommon. The changing land uses and appearances reflect the tastes and financial resources of different cultural groups over time (Figure 5- ). A late-nineteenth century single-family residential area was gradually converted into stores by various immigrant groups over the last 100 years. Eastern European Jews, representing about 80 percent of the city’s Jewish population in the 1920s, operated open-air markets and set-up stalls in the front, back, and side yards of their houses. Later, living rooms were turned into shops, with families living in the other rooms. As businesses succeeded, store fronts were added to these houses. And eventually, some of the houses were torn down and replaced with free-standing stores. By the 1960s, the Jewish community had moved out and new low-income immigrants from Hungary, Romania, Italy, Portugal, and later, the Caribbean Islands, China, and Vietnam moved into the area. Urban planners have repeatedly tried to “clean-up” this area, while conventioners and tourists find this one of the most interesting places in Toronto. On the other hand, the up-scale gentrification of Yorkville, another nineteenth-century neighborhood, has been encouraged by planners (Figure 5- ). Tensions and power struggles between groups that represent authenticity and placelessness continue across North America.
In an economy of large corporations with their distinctive logos and architecture designs, the few independent retailers stand out. Honest Ed’s in Toronto sells the same brand products as Kmart but the individualized exterior of the store gives the impression of uniqueness and fun (Figure 5). Honest Ed’s is a prototype from the late-1960s of the “new” postmodern places that were built by corporate chains starting in the 1980s.

Gentrification

In the process of gentrification, individuals and corporate investors buy rowhouses, apartments, and even individual houses that were constructed of substantial building materials, like bricks and stones, and with significant architectural details. When originally built, these neighborhoods were occupied by middle-class groups. As the middle class left for the suburbs, lower income, often racial minorities and immigrant groups, occupied these inner city areas. Gentrification “rediscovered” these potentially attractive neighborhoods for young professionals, displacing lower income and usually racial minority families.

Zelinsky (1992) calls gentrified places “latter-day Bohemias” which grew in number particularly in the 1960s and are now found in all major metropolitan areas of Canada and the United States. Some of the best known neighborhoods are Yorkville in Toronto, Beacon Hill and Back Bay in Boston, Greenwich Village in New York City, Rittenhouse Square in

Figure 5-. Kensington market in Toronto represents a transformed residential area into immigrant-operated stores. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.

Figure 5-. Honest Ed’s department store in Toronto, or jokingly called “Edward’s of Bloor Street” to be classy, reflects an early expression of postmodernism: local distinctiveness and authenticity (“there’s no place, like this place”) while actually selling globally-made, corporate consumer products. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.
Philadelphia, Georgetown and DuPont Circle in Washington, D.C., Mount Adams in Cincinnati, Peachtree in Atlanta, the French Quarter in New Orleans, and North Beach and the Castro in San Francisco.

Figure 5- . The nineteenth-century middle-class neighborhood of Yorkville, Toronto, was gentrified into commercial shops by the late 1960s. The row houses are now boutiques, cafes, and art galleries, each distinguished by bright postmodern colors. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.

Lower-income gays were often the leaders in the gentrification of inner city neighborhoods; with yuppies, affluent young urban professionals, following closely behind. As outcasts in the dominant homophobic societies, gays sought urban areas for themselves. They tended to be “pioneers” in these inner city areas taking the risks of buying low-value, deteriorating buildings in run-down neighborhoods. They restored and rebuilt these structures with their financial resources and sweat-equity. Once gentrification was established, other yuppies and developers joined them and thereby expanded the size of the gentrified neighborhoods. Lesbians are much less associated with specific urban neighborhoods, probably because of their lower income levels, less interests and skills in refurnishing older buildings, and less reliance on the bar scene for socialization. Lesbians rely more on interpersonal networks rather than occupying specific territories in cities (Edwards 1994). Canadian and U.S cities have experienced gentrification, but not Mexican cities, even though homosexuals and their organizations exist there too.

The emergence of “gay” urban neighborhoods in every major Canadian and U.S. metropolitan area provides a particularly good example of uncommon postmodern cultural landscapes. When the New York City police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village, a large number of homosexuals resisted arrest for the first time in history. Stonewall, as this event came to be called, was the start of the modern gay rights movement worldwide. After the 1969 Stonewall raid, many major cities including Toronto, New York City, Chicago, Minneapolis, Houston, San Francisco, and Seattle have held Gay Pride Marches on the last Sunday of June, in honor of Stonewall.

Two cultural landscape markers are common in gay neighborhoods such as The Castro, The Mission, Neo Valley, and South of Market in San Francisco, Hillcrest in San Diego, Capitol Hill in Denver, and Uptown in Chicago and DuPont Circle in Washington, D.C.: distinctive commercial names (e.g., Tomboy, Batteries Not Included, Male Hide Leather, Out and About, Amazon, Lavender, Lickety Split) and the six-colored rainbow flags, stickers, or paintings on cafes, restaurants, bars, hotels, bed and breakfasts, theaters, shops, businesses, apartments, and houses. As these neighborhoods became well established and highly gentrified, rents and land prices increased, driving many lower-income gays and lesbians out of the neighborhoods they founded.

Highly gentrified areas have distinctive commercial establishments: gourmet coffee shops; fern and wine bars; trendy restaurants; boutique clothing and New Age shops; and lesbian, gay, and feminist bookstores.

Old Town and Boystown in Chicago are the center of gay life in Chicago. Distinctively “gay” stores are found along North Halsted Street such as the Bad Boys and Flashy Trash clothing stores, and the nightclub Manhole (“home of the undress code”), and the Womanwild art gallery. The City of Chicago, as part of its two billion dollar 20-neighborhood restoration projects, budgeted 3.2 million dollars to renovate eight city blocks in this neighborhood for widening streets, planting trees, installing antique-looking streetlights, and constructing two 24-foot steel sculptures which will serve as gateways and nearly 50 smaller sculptures -- all decorated with electric lights in the rainbow colors of the gay-pride flag. In
response to high rents and property values, investors and builders have gentrified the nineteenth-century brick apartments and built new buildings in Old Town (Figure 5). Apartments have been renovated on the exterior (sandblasted, painted, new windows, doors, and stairs) and remodeled on the inside. The use of postmodern colors such as dark blues, purples, and greens are common in such gentrified areas.

Similarly, gentrification has transformed inner city neighborhoods in all major Canadian cities. Whether in Canada or the United States, these gentrified places were developed in response to the placelessness of the urban downtowns, urban renewal projects, and suburbs.

Homosexual communities, which express postmodernism ideals of diversity and personal narratives, have also created summer music and film festivals and retreats. Some of the best known are the lesbian separatist Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival (MWMF), which started in 1976, and attracts over 3,000 women each summer. Of the over 90 women-only festivals in the United States, MWMF is one of only two festivals with a womyn-born-womyn policy, i.e. women who were born and raised as girls and who currently identify as womyn. Of the hundreds of gay and lesbian summer retreat towns, a few are particularly well-known nationally.

Provincetown on Cape Cod is a summer retreat for many gays and lesbians from Boston and the greater New England area. According to the Provincetown Gay and Lesbian Guide (2005), “two moms or two dads might push by with their strollers. Leathermen, bears, dykes on bikes, transgendered folk, and lots of shirtless hunky boys -- you’ll spy them all moving easily in the mix. No matter what scene you’re looking for, you can find it.” This “personal narrative” expresses postmodernity nicely. Other popular gay and lesbian summer retreats with gay and lesbian hotels,
restaurants, nightlife, and attractions are Laguna Beach, California, and Key West, Florida.

All kinds of corporate retail chains have also responded to these latest postmodern trends. As the economy shifted from manufacturing to services, new retailing emerged and, as it spread, created hegemonic brandscapes (Thompson and Arsel 2004). Electronic product chains such as Best Buy and Circuit City are the postmodern equivalent of the household and tool retailers like Sears and Montgomery Wards of the earlier auto era. Borders, Waldenbooks, and Barnes and Noble bookstore-coffee chains replaced small, local independent bookstores, all the while advertising themselves as “community centers.” Borders has 460 superstores in the U.S. and has even teamed up with the largest web-based bookseller Amazon.com. About 650 Waldenbooks stores are located in U.S. malls alone. Borders’ web page projects postmodern values by saying that they provide our customers with the books, music, movies, and other entertainment items they love in a relaxing, enjoyable atmosphere. We are a company committed to our people, to diversity, to our customers, and to our communities” [italics added]. Furthermore, “Borders celebrates the individual. It is a place to indulge tastes and needs, to explore and discover. It is not only what we offer -- it is what we make possible. Borders is genuine, accessible, energetic, spirited, vital, active, and a friend (Borders 2005).

From the 1950s to the 1970s, mass retailers like Woolworth and Sears never invoked such ideals!

The transformation of coffee in the United States and Canada has been remarkable in the last 30 years, illustrating the emergence of postmodernism. Cheap (e.g., 25 cents per cup), “bottomless” (free refills), watery, blended coffee was the hallmark of “American” dining until the “yuppification” of the 1970s. At home, percolated and instant coffee was common. The Japanese called it “soft” coffee because it was so weak and tasteless in comparison to the stronger (“hard”) coffees of Europe. Now, in grocery stores and coffee outlets alike, whole coffee beans, loose or pre-packaged, are identified by country-of-origin and style of roasting and “custom”-made “double espresso latte mocha” cost $3.25 per cup! Coffee houses and folk music had become synonymous with counterculture communities by the mid-1960s. The 1950s coffee slogans, like Maxwell House’s “Good to the last drop!” and the 1960s-1970s hippie coffee houses were replaced by upscale, gourmet coffee-shop experiences by the 1980s.

The spread of corporate coffee chains is another indicator of the postmodern economy and landscape. Seattle was the origin of this “coffee revolution” and is the headquarters of Starbucks, the largest chain of coffee houses in the world. Starbucks is probably most typical and explicit of this newest genre of coffee houses. Starbucks now has over 6,000 U.S. retail stores and more than 10,000 worldwide. It controls 51 percent of the U.S. coffee-shop market. Seattle has the highest concentration of Starbucks, with one for every 13,340 people. San Francisco houses the second highest density. In New York City, Starbucks operates 161 stores or one store for every 57,852 people. Yet in Philadelphia, they have only 41 stores. Starbucks proudly proclaims that it uses and sells “fair trade” coffees to ensure that coffee farmers receive fair prices for their coffee and that they can sustain their farms for the future. Fair price and environmental sustainability -- that’s so postmodern!

In a postmodern world, global brands use language particularly well to relate to local communities, whether with their employees, customers, or producers, to create feelings/illusions of cultural heterogeneity: which in turn creates oppositional meanings and actions for others, e.g., the anti-Starbucks and anti-McDonald’s (particularly dramatic in France) responses. For both Canada and the United States, the Delocator web site (2005) provides the locations of “alternative” coffee houses and the nearest Starbucks to avoid and provides this statement: Cafés are vital social outposts that have historically provided subjective, social, local, and at times, irrational interaction, inspiration, and nourishment to artists, hipsters, musicians, activists, intellectuals, radicals, and others alike. Currently, independently owned cafés around the world are under aggressive attack; and their numbers have been sharply decreasing for many years [italics added] (Delocator 2005).

Comparing the italicized words of Delocator with those of Borders reveals the confrontational values imbedded in postmodernism, continuing the oppositional traditions that have always characterized societies, but particularly in the United States with its peculiar and particular goals of “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.”
Postmodern Urban Renewal

By 1990 only 25 per cent of U.S. whites lived in central cities compared with 50 percent in the 1960s. Loss of manufacturing jobs, high crime rates, and deteriorating public services, particularly school, fueled white flight. For example, Chicago, Illinois, lost 326,000, or 24 percent, of its manufacturing jobs from 1967 to 1987. Ironically, as white flight was occurring to the suburbs, cities were trying to attract middle-class whites back into inner cities, at least for entertainment, festivals, and sports events. While urban renewal was initially associated with public housing projects for low-income and unemployed groups, essentially Blacks, by the 1980s urban renewal was about creating attractive fun places for middle-class white families and singles, mostly with those professional well-paying jobs. The postmodern transformation of the economy occurred before it was expressed in landscape forms. Because the culture economy is much smaller and less developed “south of the border,” such postmodern entertainment places are few in Mexico.

Urban nightlife in large cities is increasingly being disneyfied as big brands take over large parts of downtown areas for large-scale, glossy corporate nightlife developments: gentrified waterfronts and central areas with bars, pubs, nightclubs, music venues, cinemas, theaters, restaurants, casinos, cafes, and sporting arenas. Paul Chatterton and Robert Hollands (2003) call the places of the night-time culture economy nightscapes. Mainstream forms of nightscapes feature large national and international corporations which use strategies like branding and theming to target cash-rich professionals, including women and gay populations. The saturation of mass entertainment markets with their emphasis on standardization, economies of scale, and homogeneity created the conditions for the emergence of the culture economy. Post-Fordism has replaced Fordism: service employment, especially in finance and business services, has of-set losses in manufacturing jobs. Industrial-related landscapes have likewise declined and disappeared while service-cultural-entertainment landscapes appeared in older buildings in inner-city locations (warehouse districts, e.g. Minneapolis and San Diego) or in brand new ones in the inner cities and the suburbs. These mainstream and up-scale entertainment venues act as “gated” communities, similar to gated residential communities in the suburbs.

Postmodernism is expressed in the many versions of bar-restaurants. The Hard Rock Café chain reflects the eclecticism of the postmodern urban scene in North America and around the world -- the ultimate expression of postmodernism: seemingly local and special while actually being international and corporate. Canada has five cafes; the United States, 46; and Mexico, eight. The rest of Latin America has only 5 cafes. With many large screens showing often several different sports events simultaneously, sports bars, whether individually owned or corporate licensed, are particularly popular in the United States and the Midwest. ESPN Zone cable sports network and sports bars and restaurant chain has locations in major entertainment sites such as Times Square in New York City. The Hooters chain uses beach themes, complete with cheerleader-dressed waitresses, 1950s-1960s jukeboxes, and sports on televisions. Another postmodern themed restaurant and merchandise chain is Planet Hollywood. Its stores are found in Honolulu, Las Vegas, New York City in Times Square, Myrtle Beach, and Orlando at Walt Disney World, and in 16 other “play” locations around the world. Planet Hollywood’s is so well known that its web site provides no description of how distinctive it is, although it does show photos of “famous” people who have been seen there. Planet Hollywood -- the name says it all! Other examples of themed restaurants are Dave and Buster’s and Prime Restaurants. In Ontario, Canada, the Firkin Group of Pubs offers “traditional” English pub settings because “every Firkin pub is a little bit different but just right for you.”

Corporation retailers are part of the postmodern landscapes as well. Niketown, Nike’s flagship retail outlet, on 57th Street West Manhattan is a typical postmodern retail and entertainment site with three-storey-high screens showing merchandise and sport stars.

Large-scale themed urban entertainment, festival, and nightlife places are another expression of the emerging postmodern landscapes in large Canadian and U.S. cities. Toronto’s Ontario Place, opened in 1971, is an “internationally” acclaimed cultural, leisure, and entertainment parkland consisting of three artificially-made islands along the Lake Ontario waterfront. Another Canadian example is Vancouver’s Grandville Island, a waterfront redevelopment project started in 1979.

In the United States, Baltimore’s urban renewal is exemplary of these postmodern cultural landscapes. In the late 1970s, dilapidated wharves and warehouses were torn down to make room for Baltimore’s Inner Harbor Place which now contains Maryland Science Center/IMAX, U.S.S.
Critical Cultural Landscapes  Copyright © 2010 Ingolf Vogeler

Chapter 5 -- Auto and Postmodern Landscapes

Constellation, Haborplace, Top of the World Observation Level, Baltimore Maritime Museum, National Aquarium in Baltimore, National Historic Seaport, Pier Six Concert Pavilion, Baltimore Civil War Museum, and Baltimore Public Workers Museum. According to the Baltimore Area Convention and Visitors Association, Baltimore is an American success story. The crown jewel of Baltimore is the Inner Harbor, a scenic and popular waterfront area with dozens of retail stores, restaurants and attractions. The fun and festive atmosphere of the Harbor is enhanced by street entertainers, open-air concerts, fireworks, parades, paddle boats, cruise boats and an outdoor ice skating rink. Baltimore, one of the top 10 summer destinations in the world for 2005 as named by Frommer's, the world's leading travel guide publisher (Baltimore. 2005).

Baltimore attracts over 11 million business and leisure visitors each year. Cities like Baltimore have said goodbye to industrial decline and welcome to the “café-latte society.”

In the Midwest, high amenity downtowns have also been transformed into postmodern “playscapes.” Many festivals are held in Milwaukee's Henry Maier Festival Park. 1) Summerfest, the world's biggest music festival (over one million people), has 13 stages featuring big-name performers and serves ethnic foods like gyros and jambalaya as well as traditional festival foods like roasted corn and beer. 2) The Indian Summer Festival, the largest Native American festival in the USA, is also held in Henry Maier Festival Park. This festival features powwow competitions, Indian dance troupes, canoe processions, cultural exhibits, storytellers, Lacrosse tournaments, fireworks, fine art exhibits, and “authentic” foods (Milwaukee.com 2005). 3) An annual Irish Fest, one of largest music festivals in the Midwest attracting 137,480 people, is also held at the Park. And in the Chicago Loop, the old Navy Pier has been converted to a “fun” place with museums, stages, and theaters. Its attractions, including a ferris wheel and a putting green, draw twice as many visitors each year as the Grand Canyon. Other examples of postmodern urban renewal private-public projects, whether main streets, warehouses, or waterfronts, are found in New York City’s South Street Seaport, Boston’s Quincy Market, St. Louis’ Cherokee Street, Seattle’s Pioneer Square, New Orleans’ and San Antonio’s Riverwalk, San Francisco’s Fisherman’s Wharf, and San Diego’s Gaslight District.

Despite the stated goals of efficiency and cost effectiveness, festive places have changed urban streetscapes. While placelessness in road construction was characterized by massive and uniform concrete and asphalt highways and streets, the emphasis on eclecticism in postmodern landscapes has resulted in U.S. and Canadian urban renewal projects and gentrified neighborhoods incorporating different shapes, colors, patterns, and materials for sidewalks, and even streets. The results are that economically significant spaces in Canadian and U.S. cities have been turned into theme parks. Mexico has always retained more of its street and road texture (colonial cobblestones; dirt roads; potholed, patched, and newly-paved highways), mostly for lack of maintenance and allocation of funds.

Mike Davis (1999) argues that recent attempts to revitalize downtowns are based on constructing “militarized” spaces designed to “terrorize non-white, non-wealthy populations.” Urban public places no
longer offer heterotopian safety valves where groups of different classes and races may interact. The new downtowns are designed to ensure a seamless continuum of middle-class work, consumption, and recreation, insulated from the city’s “unsavory” streets. Ramparts, battlements, reflective glass, and elevated pedestrian ways guard against the underclasses. Spatial apartheid is now found in the downtowns of all major inner cities in Canada and USA: middle-class whites above the streets on the pedestrian walkways and over-street malls connecting skyscrapers and the “underclass” whether young black men, poor Latino immigrants, or elderly homeless white females on the public streets below. Skyways represent the suburbanization of downtowns because the skyways are technological “solutions” to the race and class by spatially segregating people in downtown areas and in the suburbs themselves.

**Edge Cities**

Edge cities, or post-suburban places, are another alternative to the previous placelessness of the suburbs but this time on the edges of the suburbs or at critical locations within the suburbs themselves. Edge cities are the very opposite of past horizontal suburban developments: mini-skyscrapers clustered around accessible nodes on the edges of metropolitan centers, often on the interstate highway system and near airports. Edge cities are easily recognized today by the concentration of high-income suburban office, hotel, and retail high-rise complexes. Before the 1980s, high-rise buildings in the suburbs were atypical in U.S. metropolitan areas but not in Canadian cities which already had high-rise apartments by the late 1960s.

Joel Garreau (1991) defines edge cities as having five million square feet or more of leasable office space; 600,000 square feet or more of leasable retail space; and more jobs than bedrooms. In addition, they must be perceived as unique places and have been built since the mid-1970s. They grew particularly fast in the 1980s. The United States has 171 edge cities in such places as Silicon Valley, CA.; Route 128 Technology Corridor in Massachusetts; Tysons Corner, VA.; Schaumburg, IL.; and Irvine, CA. The headquarters of such world corporations as Microsoft, Motorola, and McDonald’s are found in edge cities.

Edge Cities are examples of new uncommon landscapes created by large-scale, capital-intensive, and corporate chains in contrast to the mostly smaller-scale, individual developers who created new uncommon landscapes of inner city residential gentrification.

The archetypal edge city is Tysons Corner Center, Virginia, which is located at the junctions of Interstate 495 (the D.C. beltway), Interstate 66, and Virginia 267 (the route from D.C. to Dulles International Airport) and only 11 miles from Washington, D.C. Tysons Corner is today the largest retail area on the East Coast, south of New York City. Tysons Corner has five anchor department stores, 245 other stores (literally from A to Z), over 3,400 hotel rooms, over 100,000 jobs, over 25 million square feet of office space. Although functioning like a city, Tysons Corner is not incorporated and lies mostly in unincorporated Fairfax County.

The Mall of America, in Bloomington, Minnesota, next to the Twin Cities international airport, is an extreme example of malls turning themselves into shopping-entertainment centers. The 78-acre and four-level complex opened in 1992 and is the nation's largest retail and entertainment complex with more than 520 “world-class” shops; Camp Snoopy, the nation's largest indoor family theme park; Underwater Adventures, a 1.2 million gallon walk-through aquarium; and a 14-screen movie theater. Through carefully designed spaces, varied colors and textures, and a
brightly-light, plant-rich interior court, the Mall manages to give the feeling of small-scale, personal spaces. Yet the Mall’s statistics reveal its huge scale and impact, typical of postmodern mega suburban places:

- Cost to build: $650 million
- Gross building area: 4.2 million square feet
- Gross leasable space: 2.5 million square feet
- Total store-front footage: 4.3 miles
- Number of stores: more than 520
- Sit-down restaurants: 20
- Fast food restaurants: 30
- Specialty food stores: 36
- Movie screens: 14
- Parking spaces: 12,550
- Employees: 11,000 year-round, 13,000 during summers and holidays
- Contribution to Minnesota’s economy: more than $1.7 billion annually (Mall of America 2005).

The Mall of America attracts more than 40 million visitors per year -- more than the Grand Canyon, Disneyland, and Graceland combined. It is the number one tourist attraction in the United States. The Mall insulates itself from the natural and cultural places that its themed sections and many themed stores try to portray. The Mall’s themes are organized around West Market (European market place), North Garden (European garden), South Avenue (Luxury stores), and East Broadway (upscale U.S. city). Overall, the Mall creates illusion that the good life can be acquired through the purchase of goods (Goss 1999). The Mall of America is like other theme parks but devoted principally to shopping. The Mall reflects themes found in other shopping and entertainment sites. The theming goes so far that in the West Edmonton Mall in Edmonton, Canada, a large-than-life statue of a police officer is arresting prostitutes on imaginary Bourbon Street in New Orleans (Goss 1999 and Hopkins 1990). In almost 30,000 shopping malls in North America variations on themed retailing is played out.

Striking postmodern architectural forms are commonly found in Edge Cities and new suburbs in general. The cooperative retailer of outdoor equipment, REI, has a postmodern flagship retail store in Minneapolis with climbing walls, waterfalls, and natural landscaping (Figure 5).

Despite the weather, every new shopping center built in the United States in 2006 was roofless and several traditional malls will have their roofs removed. These open malls are called “lifestyle centers” or simply “streets” and they are appearing not only in southern California but also in muggy Houston and frigid Massachusetts. Rick Caruso, owner of eight shopping centers in southern California, claims that his post-modern malls are more real and authentic than conventional ones (Economist 22 December 2007, 104).
Critical Cultural Landscapes  Copyright © 2010 Ingolf Vogeler

Chapter 5 -- Auto and Postmodern Landscapes

Figure 5. The flagship store of REI in Minneapolis is an example of postmodern architecture. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.

Postmodern Architecture

Postmodernism is expressed in architectural forms from the smaller details on houses to the grand scales on skyscrapers. The most dramatic expressions of postmodern architecture are skyscrapers. Since the late 1980s, architectural details and new building materials have resulted in a new generation of more decorative skyscrapers (Figure 5- ).

In response to the common auto landscapes, new forms of the uncommon auto landscapes are still emerging. The transformation of hotel design is striking in the postmodern landscape. The hallmarks of 1950s and 1960s U.S. and Canadian auto culture were drive-ups, motels, and car trailers, immortalized in such films as The Long, Long Trailer (1954). Simple, horizontal lines were fashionable; decorative details were out. In fact, “new” industrial products such as aluminum for storm windows and doors, and Formica kitchen and bathroom countertops were thought to be superior to natural wood. Asphalt roof shingles were usually light grays. Pastel colors of lime green, pinks, and turquoise were used outside and inside houses, as was “orange” varnish on kitchen and bathroom cabinets. Pastel colors were also popular in cars and men’s clothing. Remember when men wore pink shirts with black ties!

While drive-up fast food restaurants and drive-up banks persist, car-accessible motels have not been built since the late 1970s. By the 1980s multiple-story hotels were being built reflecting the combined influences of the energy crisis, increasing urban sprawl, rising land values, and postmodern architectural forms (Figure 5- ).

Figure 5-. Since the 1980s multiple-story hotel have reflected the combined influences of the 1970s energy crisis, increasing urban sprawl, rising land values, and postmodern architectural forms. Photo: Ingolf Vogeler.

Food chains also express postmodernism, as corporations respond to earlier placelessness. The Perkins Restaurant chain, founded in 1958 and now with over 500 locations in 35 U.S. states and four Canadian provinces, has re-made its appearance by embracing postmodern eclecticism: green-colored signs and architectural details like tile roofs, roof brackets, awnings, stucco walls, and decorative lamps, even though the chain continues to fly the largest U.S. flags of any other private or public building. In fact, commercialized nationalism is unique to the United States. U.S. flags of all sizes, the colors of the U.S. flag (red, white, and blue), and eagles are prominently displayed at stores, malls, and chain stores. Indeed, U.S. flags are even placed next to the altars in most mainstream churches and, of course, in all public schools in the United States.
Major retail chains also modified their architectural forms and colors to reflect postmodern sensibilities. Kmart transformed itself into Big Kmart, adding colors and height to its store facades (Figure 5-).

Suburban house styles began to emphasize verticality and complexity with ever more garages. Whether modest or expensive, postmodern house are distinctive from their placeless counterparts (Figure 5-). House and roof colors changed too. Earth or environmental colors are now popular: grays, browns, and greens. In response to the 1970s energy crisis, new roof shingles were black, to absorb the sun’s energy, but by the 1980s the concerns of the energy crisis were fading. Roofing materials began to reflect the eclecticism of postmodernism in the shapes and colors of shingles, many of which harked back to the eclecticism of the late nineteenth-century Victorian era.
construction materials and shape are decidedly postmodern. Photos: Ingolf Vogeler.

Figure 5. Postmodern house styles come in several forms: 1) modest one-story Ranch styles with “decorative” gables, non-functional central dormers, and steep-gabled two-car garages (bottom); 2) expensive, massive-volume, two-storey, eclectic gables and roof lines with multiple garages. In either case, garages appear from the street to be larger than the houses. Photos: Ingolf Vogeler.

Historically, the width and material of private driveways varied across the urban-rural continuum: usually concrete in cities and suburbs, asphalt in exurbia, and gravel in the countryside. Since the 1990s, wealthier home owners have personalized their driveways by using very expensive, interlocking concrete pavers or less expensive, colored stamped concrete which look like stone pavement (Photo driveway).

Figure 5. A postmodern driveway: concrete is used here to simulate bricks through color and stamped patterns. But despite trying to look like the real thing, placelessness is actually maintained yet cleverly obscured. Similarly, the stucco walls of the house are actually applied to wood-framed walls, not stone or brick as they were and still are in Europe from which this “style” was copied. Source: ConcreteNetwork 2005.

Gated Communities

Gated, frequently guarded, communities are another type of postmodern suburban landscape. Developers create exclusive residential areas in which residents voluntarily agree to rules and ordinances which they would probably reject if they were public regulations. The United States has about 40,000 gated communities, accommodating over three million units (with seven to eight million residents). The U.S. 2000 Census reports that seven million households lived in walled communities, and four million households lived in controlled access communities (Sanchez and Lang 2002). Developers estimate that eight out of ten new residential
In the United States, 55 million people live in community associations, paying around $35 billion in annual fees which were used to maintain roads, street lights, and parks and to provide security. Community associations now have 18 million homes in 230,000 such communities. Some 12 percent of the population of Metro Phoenix lived in gated communities by 1999 (Webster et al. 2002). Around 1.25 million people serve on community-association boards. In Nevada, a 55-acre community called Front Sight, featuring streets with names like Second Amendment Drive and Sense of Duty Way, is being built for gun enthusiasts (people who buy an acre plot get lifetime use of the 22 firing ranges, an Uzi machinegun, and a safari in Africa).

Whether gated or not, house owners are members of associations which own common areas and set rules. Developers, who never live in these developments, commonly establish the first covenants or rules, which are often difficult to change later. Some of the rules are rather strange. Some communities prohibit or control flags, clotheslines, wind chimes, signs on lawns or in windows, garage sales, the presence and size of pets; number of cars and where they may be parked; times when garbage cans be put out on the streets; what flowers may be planted; prior-approval of colors for painting houses; and even the age of the residents who can live in the communities.

Two of the earliest models for master-planned communities date back to the 1960s: Irvine in southern California, and Sun City outside Phoenix. All of Irvine was built by one firm, the Irvine Company, with a present population of 200,000, which could double in the next 20 years. Sun City, a town of 46,000 people, is a retirement community. A dozen places now use the Sun City name. Many of these towns require that at least one person in each house to be 55 years or older, and no children are allowed. Leisure World, another pioneer from the 1960s, has 20,000 people with an average age of 77. But the retirement market is changing. The newest Sun City outside Phoenix is a computerized, Starbucks, and multi-gym complex aimed at “active adults.” Gated, retirement communities will only grow as the 76 million members of the baby-boom generation retire. By 2010, there will be 75 million people aged 55 or more in the United States. Evan McKenzie (1994) in his book, Privatopia, argues that settlers in the United States have always wanted to create a new world and gated and retirement communities are just the latest in a long tradition of...
“utopianism,” even if in the form of individualism.
Joel Kotkin (2000) calls the rise of gated communities “an escape
to sanity” from the corruption and inefficiency of big-city government.
Community associations took off in California in the 1970s, the same
decade that Proposition 13 was passed, which cut and limited property taxes
for local governments and thereby prevented the growth of services as the
population grew. At the same time, the use of private schools and private
security guards grew; the latter now outnumber public police by four to
one. Of course, the wealthy have always lived in “gated” communities --
behind actual walls, fences and gates and/or in exclusive parts of
metropolitan areas with large number of country clubs, golf courses, parks,
up-scale shopping centers. The distinctive cultural landscape of wealthy
neighborhoods is explored in the topographic map exercise of the
Northshore of Chicago in Chapter 9.
Gated communities perpetuate spatial class and racial divisions.
Large numbers of the white, middle class are abandoning the state: living
on private roads, paying for their own private police force, sending their
children to private schools, and playing golf at private clubs. Why bother
supporting public services when you are providing your own? And what
about all those poorer people, stuck with public housing, public schools,
and public transport? From the political right, Charles Murray talks about
the USA becoming a “caste society,” with inner cities becoming like Indian
reservations. From the political left, Robert Reich fears a secession of the
successful (Economist 2001).
D. Kirstin Maxwell (2005) studied web-based advertisements for
gated communities in every province of Canada. She found that gated
communities are becoming increasingly common in Canada, particularly for
new retirees in southern British Columbia and southern Ontario. Prevalent
marketing features in all of the material studied were the good life
associated with a peaceful, relaxed, quiet, slow-paced lifestyle. Exclusivity,
prestige, and privacy were prominently featured in the marketing materials.
“Gating” and security are appealing features in Canada, even though
Canada’s gated communities are not as physically secure as U.S. gated
communities. Gated community marketing uses implicit rather than explicit
references to gates and security, whether in Canada or the USA (Blakely
and Snyder 1997).
Developers present gated places as free of social problems and
protected from the troublesome or unattractive other people and the wider
world. Communities are portrayed as friendly and welcoming. Luxurious
and healthy lifestyles are attainable by simply buying a home in a particular
gated project. In these ways the marketing material idealizes places,
communities, and lifestyles, creating a fantasy world which draws people
into gated communities.
Gated enclaves represent the hope of security; they appeal to
consumers searching for a sense of community and identity. Gated
communities remain relatively uncommon in Canada because crime and
urban problems are not as severe as in the United States. In addition,
Canadians are more positive towards government services than the anti-
government individualism of the United States.
While whole communities are gated in the United States and
Canada, house compounds, small and large, are fenced and gated in Mexico
and in Mexican communities throughout the United States, particularly in
the southwestern Borderlands. Another form of “gated” architecture is
common in Mexico. Colonial houses were built right up against streets with
wrought-iron grilled windows and enclosed courtyards. These features were
copied from the Arab invaders of Spain. Today this “Spanish-Moorish”
tradition is re-enforced by security needs in modern Mexico, where almost
all houses now are fenced or walled (Figure 5-).
Gated communities in North America try to shelter people from the
reality of the outside world and give people a sense of empowerment in
impersonal societies. Like gated residential areas, postmodern landscapes
in general, as identified earlier in this chapter, provide “safe, nice, and fun”
places. In addition to postmodern entertainment and recreational activities
in inner city and suburban places, completely fabricated and “restored”
historic places have been created and have become major amusement
destinations in the United States. Only a few postmodern landscape types
have emerged in Canada and almost none in Mexico. In the next two
chapters, we turn our attention to some of the most critical real fantasy
places in the United States.
Figure 5-. Contrasting house styles but one building tradition in Mexico: an historic house in Oaxaca and a modern one in Tijuana. Photos: Ingolf Vogeler.