

Aesthetics, New Urbanism and the Diana Krall Plaza:
A Case Study in Nanaimo, BC

by

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BA, Vancouver Island University, 2009

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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New Urbanism is nearly three decades old, yet it continues to be something of an enigma, inciting controversy and discussion nearly every time it is implemented. This thesis discusses New Urbanism in the context of its reaction to Modernism, and makes explicit its underlying theoretical orientations. Its continued value as a placemaking movement will be illustrated using Heidegger's *Dwelling* as the basis for making judgments about the quality and success of placemaking efforts. The fieldwork demonstrating these principles was conducted in the Diana Krall Plaza, a public space in Nanaimo, BC, enacted using certain New Urbanist principles. An aesthetic-phenomenological approach to place based on the synergy of aesthetic and existential concerns was developed to structure the fieldwork, and interpret the resulting data. This approach provided meaningful insights into the subjects embodied experiences and demonstrated value as a means of public consultation and theoretical framework for discussing placemaking and New Urbanism.

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Dedication

For Lisa, in thanks for her patience, encouragement, and willingness to live in a home where books, articles, and laptops have taken precedence over the dishes. And Alida, whose arrival delayed the completion of this thesis, but made all the hours spent working at home so much more entertaining. I love my girls.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Diana Krall Plaza

In 2011 the Canadian Institute of Planners held a contest to identify great places in Canada. In a decision that has generated more discussion and disagreement than consensus among residents of the city, the winner of “Canada’s Great Street” for the year was Nanaimo’s Commercial Street. Over the last few years the City of Nanaimo, British Columbia has demonstrated a revived interest in renewing the downtown core. The focus of much of this work has been on creating new development and design guidelines for Commercial Street and the surrounding area. Opening on to Commercial Street, and large part of its recent redevelopment is the Diana Krall Plaza. In previous decades Nanaimo has been marked by a tension between proponents of densification, urban renewal, and a unified economic engine in the downtown core against advocates of less restricted commercial development and suburban expansion, particularly in the city’s north end. As in many cities, this is in part a conflict between the automobile and pedestrian realms, but also between the development ideologies of unfettered commercial self interest and a desire to create socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable places filled with possibilities for community. Looking at the downtown core, each side can find support for their arguments. Proponents of strong urban planning approaches point to the success of Commercial Street while those that view investment in city centres as a waste of time and money point to the Diana Krall Plaza as an example of a failed space created through

centralised planning and progressive approaches to design. It is this plaza that will serve as the site of the case study component in this thesis.

The date of the original town plan for Nanaimo varies depending on which city document one is reading. Nonetheless, we know that between 1862 and 1864, the Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Company hired British architect George Deverill to draft a plan for the new coal-mining town. A man ahead of his time, the plan was “based on a series of streets that radiate from a focal point in the Nanaimo Harbour and resembles a European city centre, complete with public squares, broad main streets and narrow side streets that result in a variety of block sizes and shapes” (City of Nanaimo, 2008, p. 5). This street pattern forms, for the most part, the core of the city today. The Diana Krall Plaza was to re-establish the legacy of downtown Nanaimo as the centre of city life. It was previously called the *Harbourfront Plaza* even though it is approximately 500m from the water at the closest point but and was granted its new name by an act of city council in 2007.¹

Like most people in Nanaimo, I live outside of the downtown core, and rely on my car in order to access the center. Approaching downtown, I drive downhill on Fitzwilliam Street, which turns in Bastion Street, named for the landmark at the end of the street facing the waterfront as it crosses via a bridge over the Island Highway. Although I slow down as I enter downtown, there is a sense of acceleration brought on by the narrowing streets, increased building heights, and the movement of people at the intersection of Commercial and Bastion Streets. From this intersection I can see a number of two and three-story heritage buildings, including the Bastion where the road meets the

¹ While Diana Krall went to high school in Nanaimo, she has spent most of her life in Nanoose Bay, and made her bones in the music industry in Boston, Los Angeles, and Vancouver.

seawall, part of the original fortifications built by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1853. If my windows are rolled down on a nice day, I notice the smell of the ocean wafting in from the nearby marina mixed with the scents of fresh coffee and baking from nearby cafés and restaurants. Before I feel like I have really entered into the street, I need to find a parking spot. Today it's a little busier than usual and I need to circle the block in order to find street level parking, but rather than feeling stuck or delayed, the pause is a moment of anticipation. On the street bankers, business owners, and city workers mingle with shoppers, coffee drinkers, the occasional hippie, and the latest group of passengers dropped off by the Gabriola Island ferry. I turn down the hill, cross the street past the Mon Petit Choux French bakery and café, and walk towards the Diana Krall Plaza.



Figure 1 - Entrance to the Diana Krall Plaza, Nanaimo, BC

The plaza's main entrance is at the corner of Commercial and Wharf Streets, and leads to a triangular open space enclosed by the walls of the Nanaimo Credit Union, the Vancouver Island Regional Library, and the backside of the Port Theatre. The space feels purposeless. One gets the impression standing in the plaza that it was not created intentionally but is the result of trying to beautify leftover space as part of a plan to revitalise the downtown. Entering the plaza, I am funneled off the street past a statue, initially mistaking the seagull on top of it to be the real thing, rather than an imitation. I register a moment of confusion at the inclusion of the bird on the statue when there are plenty of actual seagulls regularly fouling the plaza. As I am paying more attention than usual on this visit, I notice for the first time the dedication of the plaza to jazz musician Diana Krall inlaid in brick at the base of the statue, and to the left an interpretive plaque dedicated to the history of Nanaimo's fire department.

Inside the plaza the sense of acceleration and anticipation of entering the downtown core evaporates. I feel at once alone and under scrutiny, though on reflection I am not aware of anyone else in the plaza that would have been present to offer such attention. Instead of the sense of anticipation and acceleration felt when entering downtown, the exaggerated scale of the surrounding buildings instills a feeling of motionlessness and suspension as I move from one end to the other. Not until I exit the plaza on Front Street do I feel once again that I am a body at motion, and part of a moving landscape. A long staircase leads from the south corner of the plaza to the back entrance of the Nanaimo Conference Centre, and the vacant lot that will someday house the missing hotel phase of the conference centre development. The east corner of the plaza exits beside the Port Theatre onto Front St., with another small entrance exiting on

the east end of Wharf St. The only entrance to the plaza that does not involve multiple sets of stairs is at the corner of Commercial Street and the aptly named Wharf Street, which used to connect the business district to the docks in the late 19th century. In fact, the Diana Krall Plaza and the Port Theatre occupy land that would have been underwater in Nanaimo's first city plan. Apart from the monumental public art near the entrance, as well as some concrete seating, once inside the plaza from the Commercial Street entrance, the only distinguishing features are a set of awnings inside and on the left hand side, and a rather pixelated television screen on the back of the Port Theatre.² The rest of the enclosing facades are unadorned concrete and brick.

The brief account I have offered of my own experience of journeying to and being-in the Diana Krall Plaza has been inspired by Wylie's (2002) phenomenological account of climbing Glastonbury Tor.³ I have attempted to be as faithful to this experience as possible, but a slightly artificial quality remains. I believe that this is because outside of doing research for this project, I have no other motivation for visiting or using the space, despite spending a lot of time in my day-to-day life downtown close to the Plaza. This is an existential failure, not merely one of planning, efficiency, or any other aspect of managing the space and downtown inhabitants as things to be ordered. A successful and meaningful place is a space that provides a balance between shelter, refuge, contemplation, freedom, exploration, and possibility. Thrift & Dewsbury (2000),

² The screen attached to the back of the Port Theatre was installed in an attempt to create a reason for people to gather in the plaza. It has been used for this purpose only on the special occasions of the Canadian Olympic hockey games in 2010, and when the Vancouver Canucks hockey team plays in the final series of the NHL Stanley Cup playoffs.

³ Wylie's oeuvre contributes to the geographical literature on cultural geographies of landscape, embodiment and performance. His theoretical background explores the relevance of landscape phenomenology in relation to post-structural theories and particularly concerned with discussions of embodiment in performative and non-representation approaches in human geography.

writing about Deleuze's description of enactment note, "it is crucial to differentiate between two approaches to making the new" (p. 416). The first is the realisation of the possible, recognition that what we consider possible is often only considered as such because it has existed before, and what is possible is also viewed as inevitable. "In short" write Thrift & Dewsbury (2000), "conceptual blueprint becomes form, what exists is represented, and all claims to genuine creativity are flushed away" (p. 416). This way of bringing about new things is indebted to Plato's theory of Forms, wherein any creative act is merely an unsuccessful attempt at bringing about the best version of a thing that exists beyond the apprehension of humanity. Under this model things are enacted by proceeding with a process of elimination through the available choices of the possible, until what is left is the only option for realisation. In contrast, Deleuze advocates for actualisation of the virtual, which "cannot proceed by elimination or limitation, but must create its own lines of actualization in positive acts" (as cited in Thrift & Dewsbury, 2000, p. 416). This actualisation creates something truly new without reliance on past experience or forms. In regards to space, this acknowledges that being-in a place ought to be an opportunity for self-actualisation as much as it is an opportunity for a place to be actualised through our perception. Unfortunately for the Diana Krall Plaza, it appears that the enactment of this new space has followed on lines of realisation of the possible, resulting in a space suited best to pre-determined uses, rather than explorations. This contributes to its failure to engage the people of Nanaimo as a downtown destination. Where the Tor offers the experience of ascension, which is desirable to Wylie (2002) in his study of the embodiment of such an experience, there is no similar point of entry for

the study of the plaza. Instead the story of the plaza will be told through the embodied experiences and aesthetic responses of interview subjects.

Purpose of Study

This thesis will contribute to geographical literature on the relationships between placemaking, aesthetics, and New Urbanism. There are three central themes of investigation in this thesis. First, it will explore and attempt to resolve the synergy between geographical critiques of aesthetics-as-ideology and Heidegger's (1977) proposition that the arts are essential to dwelling meaningfully. Heidegger argues that it is in confronting the objectifying and dehumanising nature of modernism that the arts "may expressly foster the growth of the saving power" (p. 35). Second, it will examine the literature and practice of New Urbanism in order to consider whether a non-pragmatic theoretical orientation, specifically the Heideggerian notion of 'dwelling,' may be of value in approaching urban design and placemaking projects that draw on New Urbanist approaches. Third, this project will synthesise a historical-aesthetic approach to critical urban landscape studies that will be useful in evaluating the effectiveness of New Urbanism at achieving its social and community-based goals. These themes lead to three questions that will be answered in this thesis: Can an approach to research based on phenomenology and aesthetic experience provide meaningful data about the ways in which people inhabit spaces? Can it give us specific information on why the Diana Krall Plaza has so far failed to become a successful place in downtown Nanaimo? Is Heidegger's concept of dwelling a useful framework for to understanding New Urbanism's approach to the social and existential issues posed by sprawl?

The approach developed in this study will also be useful in the broader contexts of urban planning and geography as a means of engaging the public during the planning process. It will be able to provide insight into the use and engagement with spaces and places that already exist, as well as those newly created, that are realised using neotraditional or design-based approaches to urban planning. An aesthetic approach can demonstrate the ways people form attachments to places, and the ways that the language of aesthetics and processes of aestheticisation work in the community planning process to normalise particular values and landscape ideals. When pure pragmatism, efficiency, and neo-liberal approaches to urban design and aesthetics win out, or when aesthetic approaches fail to create interesting and inviting places, we are left with what one interview subject described as “aesthetic nausea,” a description reminiscent of Heidegger’s concept of homelessness, and Edward Relph’s (1976) compelling research on placelessness. Being turned off by a work of art does not rank high on the list of the great problems facing the world; however, an aesthetic approach to urban landscape interpretation can be used to describe the intersubjectivity of the urban aesthetic experience, and by drawing on broader aesthetic theory, provide a rationale for translating specific aesthetic or design approaches between various contexts. Planners and designers should, in theory, be concerned with implementing a vision of the *Good City*, and though ‘good’ may be as nebulous a term to describe a city as ‘beautiful’ is to describe a painting, the failing in the attempt to move beyond relativism and skepticism in this domain is greater than the failing to attempt it at all.

The impetus for this research comes from a desire to better understand and inform the response of urban geography to the phenomenon of sprawl and placelessness in North

America. The design of the Diana Krall Plaza in Nanaimo is one such response to criticism that disinvestment in the city core has resulted in failure to maintain safe and experientially rich places in the region. The enactment of this space and many others has been guided by the principles of New Urbanism, a design-based set of planning principles that are promoted by adherents as a means to address the social, environmental, and economic problems resulting from the increasing dominance of sprawl over the urban and suburban landscapes. New Urbanism remains a relevant topic for investigation, as it is a development practice that links a theoretical approach with value judgments and perceptions of what constitutes the good city, and a specific morphology of design that, when implemented, will promote this vision of the good city (Grant, 2006).

Contemporary approaches to understanding urban and suburban landscapes have tended to be either theory-based, dealing with practices that reproduce space or allow for certain uses of space as discussed by Harvey (1996, 2000) and Lefebvre (1991), or rational, legislative approaches based in architecture and urban form put forward by practitioners such as Krier (1978, 1984) and Calthorpe (2001) that tend to favor economic and environmental efficiency over aesthetic and experiential concerns. The aesthetic this latter group have in mind is an example of the way that aesthetics can de-problematise views of the city by framing them in language that makes them appear natural. This process is discussed in more detail later in the thesis. Work by phenomenological geographers such as Relph (1976), Seamon (1994, 2000), and Tuan (1974, 2001) demonstrates that there is value in pursuing an approach that draws on theories of form-based urban planning and the more philosophical questions surrounding identity and authenticity and their relationships to space. In addition, the interests of critical

geographers and planners overlap in a number of key areas that make this a worthwhile course of study.

Many geographers and planners share a concern with addressing the social and economic inequalities related to spatial practice and the social production of space. Although planners and designers may seem to be more occupied with efficiency and aesthetics respectively, many are motivated by a vision of a more equitable society, recognised spatially through access and participation, using new modes of development that do not segregate people based on the ability to afford a certain type of housing. In addition, both critical geography and urban planning share a common pursuit in revealing ideals and assumptions inherent in our understanding of good cities, neighbourhoods, and communities. In spite of these common goals, urban social geography has lent itself to a more critical approach that identifies and challenges spatial inequity, drawing largely on Marxist, feminist, post-structural accounts of urban social life (Fincher and Jacobs, 1998). Planners and architects have adopted a more form-based spatial practice in building new, positive, life-affirming settlements that rely on a more pragmatic view in determining whose values are represented in these developments. It could be said that developments in planning are driven forward by practice and experimentation rather than engagement with new theoretical ideas. While academics can be limited in their ability to venture into the city and create new neighbourhoods in order to demonstrate their ideals, contemporary planners and the New Urbanists in particular can be criticised for not being self-reflective enough in examining the values and spatial practices that they encourage or normalise through their approach to urban design. I argue that this gap between theory and practice, between criticism and construction can be narrowed by studying the role

that art and aesthetics play, both as a critique and interpretation of landscape, and as a tool for placemaking within New Urbanism.

As the literature of critical geography has matured, so has the practice of New Urbanism. In the 1970s, urban design began to be recognised as a practice separate from architecture, planning and city governance, a simultaneous yet separate development from the overwhelming influx of social theory into the discipline of geography during the early 1970s. Iris Aravot (2002) acknowledges that, “Pre-designed urban surroundings obviously existed long before any definition, but it was in the 1970’s that the concept of ‘urban design’ was introduced” (p. 201). While humanistic geography and urban design shared an antipathy to the placelessness resulting from postwar modernist urban and suburban developments, urban design was unique in its desire to put normative theories of the good city into practice. Although it may suggest that there are formulas that may be applied in order to create more successful environments, New Urbanism shares this historical “opposition to modernist urbanism” (Aravot, 2002, p. 201) but is distinct from critical theory, which resists totalising or normalising approaches. There is now an opportunity for geographic scholarship and the practice of New Urbanism to inform each other. This thesis will explore the ways that aesthetic theory can be used as a tool in critical human geography, and as something that when put into practice can add value to life by allowing us to live as dwelling, *being* people, rather than simple consumers that react to but do not co-create the worlds we inhabit (Porteous, 1996). In this thesis, New Urbanism will be explored in order to describe and develop its theoretical underpinnings, and it will be examined in the context of Heidegger’s notion of *dwelling* as a way of creating positive, existentially meaningful, and life-affirming spaces.

There will be several significant results of this research project. The first will involve developing and exploring an aesthetic theory as it relates to New Urbanism and its successes and failures at placemaking. This aesthetic theory, while not proposing any normative design standards, will help to further research in this area by providing a rationale from which to make generalisations about spatial practice, the planning process, and the ways that people form attachment to place. I will discuss the origin of aesthetic approaches to urban landscapes, and review the critical use of aesthetics in the geographic literature. Using aesthetics as a means of approaching and relating to the world is challenged by Heidegger's concepts of dwelling and technology. Heidegger's critique is not that aesthetics is unimportant, but that it is insufficient as the main way of relating to the world. In Heidegger's essay, "Poetically Man Dwells" it is the experience of art as a locus of shared meaning as opposed to the subjectivity engendered by aesthetic responses that allows dwelling to occur. Aesthetics and dwelling move beyond the theoretical into practice as a way of understanding the politics which are normalised in New Urbanism, and whether or not the site examined in this case study, inasmuch as it embraces aspects of New Urbanism, is successful in creating a place of meaningful experience, characterised by the unity of self and the world. The danger inherent in this approach, as with all totalising approaches, including New Urbanism itself, is the assumption of a universal perspective that will allow insight into what constitutes the good life and the beautiful city.

The aesthetic-phenomenological approach to space developed in this thesis will provide a framework for gathering and interpreting phenomenological research data from users of the Diana Krall Plaza. This will provide specific answers, based in the embodied

experience of site users, to questions regarding the use of New Urbanism and aesthetics in the ongoing placemaking and revitalisation efforts in downtown Nanaimo. Some of these research questions are: What role does aesthetics play in developing guidelines for growth? Whose ideas are they? What are the assumptions that are taken for granted by planners and developers in the design and aesthetic phases of the plans, which are therefore normalised? What role does aesthetics play in fostering connections between people and places? And, as examples of aspects of New Urbanism, do these developments promote meaningful, situated experience? These are not the questions that interview participants will be asked, rather they are questions that help to guide the study and challenge the pragmatism that characterises the philosophical grounding of New Urbanism (Shibley, 1998). Pragmatism is a view of the world that makes judgments regarding actions based on the value of their consequences. Of course, one's reaction to a certain set of consequences will be greatly determined by one's social position, life experience, and perspectives, and therefore any pragmatic project must be approached critically in order to shed light on who determines acceptable or even desirable consequences. Out of this awareness comes a tension, as during this research I am reluctant to draw on absolutes when determining what outcomes are desirable, but feel nonetheless that a purely relativistic approach to these questions would not recognise that meaningful knowledge may be developed through intersubjective, context-aware research.

The Case Study

It is perhaps telling that while discussing this research project over the course of its fieldwork and writing, many people recognised my descriptions of the space, but were

unaware of its name or of its significance in downtown Nanaimo. Many of these people work and spend time in downtown Nanaimo, but could not associate the name with a place. Investigating the failure of this site to engage the imagination of the city is an important part of this thesis and the process is informed by my own background in the arts and a desire to see downtown Nanaimo succeed as a vibrant and engaging place in the community. Despite being cleaned, rebuilt and the neighbouring spaces slowly filled with interesting restaurants, cafés and shops, the Plaza itself remains vacant and unused on nearly any given day. Not everyone was unfamiliar with the name of the place; acquaintances and interview subjects with a background in planning or development in Nanaimo knew immediately which location I was talking about. This reflects an interesting aspect of the project discussed in detail later; that the successful uses of the site tend to be by municipal bodies and other larger organisations. The naming, development, and use of the space has been highly programmatic, and the aesthetic reflects the influence of an unsophisticated local government rather than local communities such as the vibrant arts culture in the city or Nanaimo's resource-based roots. Instead of approaching the issues facing the Plaza through a typical site analysis and inventory, a line of questioning based on aesthetic inquiry and the respondents' experience was used. The goal was to come to a nuanced understanding of the landscape through various stakeholder interpretations rather than a catalogue of features or metrics set out in public policy. A set of quantifiable goals may be useful and well intentioned but are not a guarantee of success in public placemaking.

In addition to being the site of this case study, the Diana Krall Plaza is intended to be an urban magnet, refocusing the identity of the town from the suburbs back into the

urban core. In Nanaimo, the only limits that have historically been imposed on sprawl are those defined by topography. While the city's natural features provide a saving grace, the rise of and dependence on the automobile, and the ascendance of modernism, have determined its design and layout in urban planning. In a 2004 TED talk, James Howard Kunstler gives a vivid description of suburban development as, "the insidious cartoon of a country house in a cartoon of the country." While Kunstler is famous for getting a strong reaction, both positive and negative from geographers, planners, and policy makers, he demonstrates a unique understanding of the problems of urban sprawl. He describes sprawl using aesthetic language, as a cartoon – an inauthentic and mimetic vision of traditional values and landscapes. The site chosen for this case study is such a space. It is a cartoon of a public plaza, and a mimetic vision copied unsuccessfully from the great cities of Europe. There are other problems associated with sprawl, including negative and far-reaching environmental and economic impacts. While these aspects are not the focus of the study, they are part of the context of the questions asked in this thesis and its investigation of urban placemaking efforts. It is the area of aesthetics, often overlooked in favor of mechanistic urban planning approaches, that will be used to provide insight into socio-spatial processes that reproduce these spaces, and the practices, including New Urbanism, that work to counter these effects.

A Phenomenological Approach

The theoretical components of this thesis will consist largely of a review of existing academic literature on the role and uses of aesthetics in geography, planning and placemaking. The synthesis of this information and issues facing the case study site form the core of the research questions, drawing on earlier researchers' theories, case studies

and findings. The case study undertaken as part of this thesis confirms and expands on this synthesis, using experiential data gathered in the field. In order to express the validity of the arguments made based on experiential or empirical data, the methods of gathering and interpreting data must be chosen carefully. In this instance, the methodology must be suited to gathering qualitative data from human subjects and interpreting the data in such a way as to carefully and accurately present the experiences of the research participants. The methods must also serve to bolster the theoretical arguments presented and demonstrate the validity of the aesthetic-phenomenological approach to placemaking and landscape interpretation beyond the immediate context in which the data were collected. The fieldwork in the Diana Krall Plaza involved spending time in the space as an observer taking photographs and notes, and a series of ten interviews with site users, urban designers, and city planners involved with enacting the plaza. The interviews were semi-structured and focused on a set of questions regarding the participant's aesthetic responses to the urban design and artistic features of the plaza. As there is no signature experience or overarching reason to visit the space, asking questions that focus on aesthetic reactions allowed for an approach that valued individual, embodied experience.

Heidegger's existential-phenomenological arguments regarding the nature of technology, dwelling and authenticity are a good place to start investigating the value of placemaking efforts such as New Urbanism, the role aesthetics play in the planning process, and the ways in which particular aesthetics come to be enacted upon the urban landscape. Because phenomenology depends on experience to elucidate phenomena, the method of seeing multiple, limited viewpoints provides grounds for making claims about the understanding of a phenomenon beyond a completely subjective perspective. Critics

of sprawl and proponents of phenomenology find common ground in their rejection of modernism's emphasis on order and efficiency at the expense of human-centered designs, developments and processes. This is not to say that modernism is unconcerned with the human being, simply that it redefines the highest goals of society as conformity, order, and obedience. The technological worldview, according to Heidegger (1977), is implicitly dangerous, as it disconnects people from the real world and the nature of things, including the nature of our own humanity. In taming and ordering the world, we come under the impression that things, including people, exist simply as objects or resources to be arranged according to our desires. In general, the practice of planning focuses on specific measurable and deliverable goals such as security, efficiency, community, or connectivity, and not philosophical abstracts such as the alienation of humans from their humanity via subject-object relations between each other and the world. Existential-phenomenology as a method of data collection and interpretation, along with the synthetic background developed in this thesis will demonstrate that in fact, the success or failure of a place does depend on the experience and relationship a person or group of people have to it.

Case Study Context: Development in the Nanaimo Region

Nanaimo is a medium sized city of approximately 90,000 people in the Nanaimo Regional District, on the east coast of Vancouver Island, roughly 150 km north of Victoria. Nanaimo is the third-oldest city in British Columbia and enjoys a rainy but temperate climate for most of the year. Its moderate temperatures and high levels of precipitation give the region its unique temperate rainforests, which contain some of the world's oldest cedar trees. Despite having a relatively small population, Nanaimo

stretches for 16 km along the Georgia Strait. This is one of the reasons that, according to the Regional District of Nanaimo (2008, p. 24), cars still account for over 87% of trips made for work within the city, while transit accounts for just over 2.5%, below the provincial average of 3% for regional centres as reported by the Government of British Columbia (2008, p. 5). Although there are many recreational and mountain biking trails, and a strong cycling community, cycling accounts for just under 2% of all work commutes. This spatial extent along the north-south axis, longer than most cities of its population, is due to the way Nanaimo is situated between the ocean and the Vancouver Island Ranges. The most recognisable of these features is Mount Benson, a 1000 meter peak that forms the western edge of the city. The distance between the ocean and the steep slopes leading up to the mountain varies. In some places it is as narrow as 3.5 km, and in others as wide as 5 km. The low densities resulting from the spatial extent of the city have resulted in an underdeveloped transit system that, in turn, contributes little to encourage increased moderate urban density or the development of vibrant neighbourhood centres.

In this region, patterns indicate that low-density residential development will continue to be the norm. Given an annual growth rate of approximately 2%, and noting a shift in the makeup of total housing stock showing single-family housing dropping from 60% to 57% of the total, Nanaimo will continue this form and pattern of growth to the remaining undeveloped land (Economic Development Office, 2010). With this growth in mind, and the need to remain competitive as a desirable place for families to live and do business, Nanaimo completed a 10-year planning process in 2008 that resulted in the new Official Community Plan (planNanaimo), and has embarked on a series of smaller scale

neighbourhood plans. While the Plan does not make specific reference to New Urbanism, the objectives and policies are very similar to those stated in the Charter of the New Urbanism. They include urban growth management, sustainable community building, social enrichment, a thriving economy, a protected and enhanced environment, and improved mobility and services throughout the city. While these goals were arrived at through a process of public consultation and council committee meetings, it remains to be seen whether they will be met without significant changes in the legislative and development landscapes of the city.

A plaza alone cannot meet the goals and guidelines of New Urbanism, nor can it address the growth pressures described in the Regional Growth Strategy. This site was chosen because it is the centerpiece of Nanaimo's ongoing efforts at downtown revitalisation, and its design is influenced by the policies set forth in the OCP, the Downtown Plan, and the official Downtown Design Guidelines. As such it represents an embodiment of the goals and values laid out in these plans, including those that overlap significantly with the vision of New Urbanism. The Downtown Plan is based on three strategies: increase the number of people living downtown, position the area as a centre for arts and culture in the city, and increase the number of people working in the downtown area (City of Nanaimo, 2002, p. 4). It is clear that the success of the plaza, as it represents a sizable portion of the downtown core, is integral to the ability of the city to meet these goals, and likewise achieving these goals will have a positive impact on site use. According to the plan, the pedestrian scale is a unique and important feature of the downtown area, and the "sense of community in the Downtown is experienced on narrow winding streets surrounded by low-rise buildings" (City of Nanaimo, 2002, pg. 13). The

plan emphasises other New Urbanist goals, which include promoting the street as public space, maintaining the historical character of the region, creating strong transit and pedestrian linkages, and encouraging mixed use live/work housing.

Contrast the scale and features of the Diana Krall Plaza with the exhortation that “new development should be encouraged which enhances this character” (p. 45). The goals and actions described in the Downtown Plan are distilled further into specific policies in the Downtown Design Guidelines (2008). These guidelines bring more specific New Urbanist visions to the broader goals of the RGS and OCP, including the importance of streets as shared space, public, green, and open spaces, and increasing densification to allow pedestrian-oriented features and attractions to succeed. These goals and others are to be achieved through careful and clever urban design, which the guidelines define as, “the conscious and intentional composition of the main physical elements that make up a city” (City of Nanaimo, 2008, p. 11). The guidelines borrow language from Lynch’s (1960) *The Image of the City* in describing how their vision for good urban design will be enacted: “The formal tools of urban design include the manipulation of five essential components: the edge, the pathway, the district, the landmark and the node” (p. 11). It is interesting that this approach, originally developed as a way to interpret the urban landscape in the face of the inability of modernism to articulate its purpose in the built environment has resulted in this imposing, anachronistic interpretation of the European plaza as public space.

Outline of Chapters

This introductory chapter will be followed by two chapters that will contain the theoretical and practical backgrounds for this study, as well as the synthesis that forms

the core of the aesthetic-phenomenological approach to place. Like many studies on placemaking, this thesis is concerned with the urban design and physical structure of successful places, with a particular focus on the realm of aesthetics. At the heart of this project is a concern for developing an understanding of ways that critical theory in aesthetics and geography influence the physical outcomes of urban landscapes. The attention given to theory in this study presents both opportunities and problems. On the one hand, consideration of the existential, phenomenological, and aesthetic processes that shape place allows for a discussion that transcends the mechanical, calculative approach of *if we build 'x' then 'y' will happen*. On the other hand, of course, grounding a study of place in the language of meaning and experience exposes the findings of this project to relativistic concerns about their validity. Recognising that pure nihilism is not an ethos that applies well to daily life, we can acknowledge the necessity of perspective while studying the ways in which common meanings are created and shared. The challenge lies in constructing an argument for place based on experiences and meanings that are not only shared beyond the individual, but are in a way transcendent.

Chapter 2 begins this work by presenting the historical and academic contexts that this study both borrows and expands upon. It will introduce a thread that will weave through the rest of the thesis: how to reconcile the tension between two competing views of aesthetics in geography. The first, based on Jane Jacobs' urban critiques, will discuss the genesis of, problems with, and responses to the phenomenon of urban sprawl in North American cities. In particular, the influence of modernism and the impact of the automobile on the design, construction, and orientation of suburbs will be considered. The second perspective is based on the relationship between the arts and dwelling in

Heidegger's works, and will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. Sprawl is often considered a dirty word for many reasons, some practical and some ideological, and this chapter will discuss the negative social aspects of sprawl in theory and practice. One reaction to the influence of modernism on neighbourhoods and cities that has captured the imagination of the public and of public servants is New Urbanism. Much of the theoretical approach in this study results from making explicit some of the ideology implicit in New Urbanism. New Urbanism is not without its critics, and their criticisms will be addressed to see whether they are justified in the context of this project's case study, and whether they can be overcome by other theoretical approaches.

The influence of New Urbanism is widespread and the role it plays, even when unmentioned, in community plans such as Nanaimo's demonstrates its utility as a jumping off point for understanding the enactment of urban landscapes. But how ought it to be approached critically? Jacobs' statements about cities and art offer a clue but are concerned more with structures of power and a certain pragmatic humanism than a theoretical engagement with the *good* and the *good city*. A counterpoint to Jacobs is Heidegger's exhortation to (or recognition that we by nature) dwell poetically, a statement with clear aesthetic implications, but one that is also explicitly spatial and bound to the earth. In order to examine Heidegger's argument and construct a conceptual framework for this thesis, Chapter 3 will begin with a genealogy of aesthetic approaches within human geography, and their relationship to the wider history and scholarship of aesthetics. Heidegger's criticism of the technological worldview will be compared with Jacobs' concerns with modernism and its impact on city form, function, and human connectivity. Heidegger is concerned, particularly in later works, with the *right relation*

between things, that things should be neither dominated as subject or object, but understood, inasmuch as it may be possible, as simply the things that they are. This concern is demonstrated most clearly in his discussion of technology, and his response is illustrated best in his understanding of what it means to *dwell* as a human being on the earth. These arguments and concepts form the core of an aesthetic-phenomenological discussion of landscape that will enable a new critical avenue in studies of placemaking and planning, in particular shedding light on the New Urbanist approach to aesthetics and placemaking.

Existential phenomenology is an ideal theoretical framework to discuss the nature of aesthetics and place, and is also an effective methodology for collecting and interpreting data that is relevant to the theoretical investigation into the relationships between dwelling, aesthetics, and successful placemaking. Chapter 4 will describe the specific methods used in this thesis, including interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. An important task in this chapter will be to defend the use of existential phenomenology as a theoretical background and method of inquiry in this study despite the application of these approaches to non-representational and more-than-representational realms. The chapter will also discuss the data collection methods used in this study, and describe the unique research tools used in phenomenological investigations. The topics discussed in Chapter 4 will relate to earlier discussions of planning history, successful places, and the use of phenomenology as a hermeneutic, not simply as a descriptive tool. The approach used in this thesis is transcendental in the sense that it describes the search for and creation of shared meanings and values that constitute the non-physical aspects of place. Unlike non-representational theories it will

not attempt to transcend the representational realm to arrive at a model of the practices that enact places. Every description is already an interpretation, and this thesis will present its case study bearing in mind that the space being studied is interpreted through embodied, lived experiences.

Next, the results of thematic data analysis will be presented and discussed. In addition to interview data gathered in the field, the study site will be described through researcher observations, maps, and photographs, and discussed in the context of relevant city planning documents such as the Nanaimo Official Community Plan, and various neighbourhood plans. The conceptual framework synthesised and discussed in the previous chapters will be referred to once again, this time in order to be tested against the findings, and as a way to explain in a more generalisable way the successes and failures of place that make themselves known. The interview data gathered from those who participated in the study will be presented thematically, using descriptions of experience in the space to describe how they came to be there, what physical attributes were noted, what aesthetic features were encountered, and what aesthetic and emotional reactions the participants had to the space. These viewpoints will be supplemented with the opinions and experiences of experts and planners familiar with the site. In concluding the thesis, key findings will be summarised, and areas where future research would be valuable will be discussed. Participants in the study were given an opportunity to recommend changes to the plaza, and these discussions generated a wide range of ideas, with some striking common elements. The potential for future study is not limited to simply improving one public space in one town. The aesthetic-phenomenological approach to space warrants further theoretical investigation, and I believe it will prove to be useful to other

professionals and academics interested in the experience of space and place. There is room in the literature of phenomenology and geography for an approach that takes seriously the potential of non-representational theory, while wrestling with the challenge of understanding the processes of creating shared, communal meanings. Due to the time limits imposed on this study, it has been impossible to follow a project from inception to completion and analyze the aesthetic choices and interactions between place, public, and planners. Having been demonstrated that the aesthetic-phenomenological approach to place is valuable as a critical tool for landscape studies, it would be interesting to explore its utility as a tool for public consultation early in the planning process as well as site selection and analysis.

Chapter 2: The “Gospel” of New Urbanism

Introduction

This chapter will begin by discussing the conditions that precipitated New Urbanism, demonstrating that it is indeed good news in response to some of the specific dehumanising aspects of low density, sprawling developments. The roots of New Urbanism’s response to the proliferation of urban sprawl can be traced back to a number of changes in urban development during the 20th century. These include reactions to modernism within architecture and planning, activist responses to heavy-handed urban renewal projects occurring in many large North American cities, and the rise of landscape phenomenology in geography with its particular focus on relationships between people and places. New Urbanism has taken up this mantle, developing its theory in response to the challenges faced in 20th century planning practice and declaring in its charter that it stands specifically against “the spread of placeless sprawl” as part of “one interrelated community building challenge” (Congress, 1996). The charter’s introduction also addresses racial and economic segregation, environmental sustainability, heritage in the form of historic sites and buildings, and the flow of capital away from central cities as related aspects of the placemaking and community building challenge. Since its inception in the late 1990s, New Urbanism has been criticised for reproducing old forms, increasing economic segregation, and contributing to urban sprawl. I shall address these challenges by demonstrating that New Urbanism, while an imperfect and incomplete

response, is nevertheless an important and worthwhile tool for developing experientially rich and meaningful places in our postmodern context.

In particular, I present New Urbanism as both spatial theory and planning practice by situating it within its historical context as a response to the failures of the modern city. These failures were not simply the failures of form to perform a desired or beneficial function, but were failures of Modernism to generate a positive normative theory, one that connected ideals of the good city with its actual enactment in the landscape. One of the most lasting effects of Modernism in North American cities is sprawl. The legacy of sprawl gave rise to many reactions from social, environmental and civic groups, including the contested practice of New Urbanism. While New Urbanism and the related practices of Smart Growth, landscape urbanism, and transport-oriented development have grown in popularity in the last two decades, their successes have been open to debate and criticism even as advocates seek to more clearly define the nature and scope of these planning traditions.

Some urban scholars offer definitions of New Urbanism that contain implicit critiques, describing it as a practice driven by visual preference rather than values such as equity or social justice. For instance, Grant (2005) writes that “new urbanism presents a new image of the good community” (p. 3), clearly linking New Urbanism’s understanding of the good community with its aesthetic and formal preferences. However, Grant also criticises New Urbanism for what she perceives as an obsession with universal principles, arguing that this demonstrates a lack of theoretical rigor. According to Grant (2005), “Universality assumes commonality” (p. 11), resulting in a tendency towards essentialism that is both out of touch with post-modern understandings

of what it means to be human, and works to re-create power inequalities in urban space. She argues that in promoting New Urbanism as a cure for the social and technological ills of urban environments, “‘Universal truths’ and notions of essential ‘human nature’ serve the interests of power: they deny diversity and trivialize dissent as ignorance” (Grant, 2005, p.77). This critique can be true of any process or theory that is tasked with determining *the good*, either in terms of the good city, the good citizen, or good design. Other planning paradigms that have supplanted the modernist tradition, including the critical political economy approach, “take an explicitly normative position concerning the distribution of social benefits” (Fainstein, 2000, p. 28). Developing a normative approach not a side effect of idealism being corrupted by practice, rather, Talen believes that “New Urbanism offers a *normative vision* that ... planning requires” (as cited in Grant, 2005, p. 17).

Does the New Urbanist community agree with this definition, and self identify as a normative planning movement? Discourse on the identity of New Urbanism reveals that it is more concerned with communicating its essential ideals rather than presenting itself as normative cure-all. In many of the debates on the value and utility of New Urbanism, proponents have tended to use two tactics. First, a common refrain is that the project being criticised is not actually New Urbanist, or is an incomplete version of it, and second, that New Urbanism is simply a movement designed to forward a particular architectural style. In a 2011 article intended to move the discussion beyond name-calling and mischaracterisations, Andres Duany (2011) describes New Urbanism as an “informal movement of ideas, techniques, projects and people” (para. 2). New Urbanism is not based around a small group of celebrity architects or academics, or a rigid system of

urban ideology and morphology, but rallies its members around its “primary mission ... the reform of suburban sprawl” (para. 6).

The Charter of the Congress of New Urbanism describes the problems presented by sprawl on multiple social, economic, and environmental levels. New Urbanism’s mission-based definition allows it to integrate what is seen as the best of other planning traditions, including avant-garde and modernist approaches. Critics point to this flexibility as an ideological weakness, arguing that it reflects a lack of rigour, while others see it as a pragmatic benefit, drawing strength from many other paradigms, resisting professional and academic silo-ing in pursuit of their goals. This chapter will discuss New Urbanism as it relates to its antecedents in city planning and other responses to sprawl, including the impact of Jane Jacobs on the evolution of urban design preferences. I will also describe specific critiques of the movement in theory and practice. Particular attention will be paid to New Urbanism as a design movement, addressing the reasons that New Urbanism relies so heavily on aesthetics as part of its approach, the dangers in doing so, and aesthetic criticisms from outside the movement. Focus on New Urbanism as a design-oriented placemaking practice provides the grounding for the conceptual framework of this thesis. This conceptual framework develops an approach to evaluating place, and to an extent placemaking techniques, that is based in an argument that the Heideggerian concept of dwelling should lie at the heart of the goals of New Urbanism, and that investigating the aesthetic-phenomenological response to place provides unique and valuable critical insight.

The Modern City and its Origins

New Urbanism's most obvious predecessors are the City Beautiful and Garden City movements. It is important to understand that beyond superficial architectural similarities and concerns with the interaction between humanity, nature, and technology, each approach is a reaction to issues of the time, and an embodiment of prevailing cultural values. In particular, the City Beautiful movement advanced the idea that the city could actually be a place that celebrates aesthetic value, rather than a place of aesthetic, moral, and social despair. Beautification was connected intimately to the idea that social order could correct the course of moral decay that the upper classes saw occurring in the American landscapes of work and industry. Over the past two centuries, new technological innovations have changed and challenged the shape of the city. Each epoch sees practitioners push to enact new planning values, and retreat from unintended consequences. New Urbanism's vision of the city is a response to the problems of the modernist city of the past century, and continues to evolve in the face of challenges resulting from its implementation. While it does modernism a disservice to conceive of it as a monolithic influence on culture and design, the reaction of placemaking movements in geography and urban design has focused on the critique that much modern planning and design is based in an obsession with function over form.

Cities produced by earlier design movements, such as the City Beautiful and Garden City movements, addressed issues of environmental degradation, a disconnect with nature, and the deterioration of existing cities. While there were many limited successes, these attempts presented their own challenges in the form of increased suburban sprawl, high costs of development, and segregation of land uses. These

approaches were concerned with the surface appearance of the city, arguing that good civic order and social equity are partially the result of beautiful spaces. Unfortunately the efforts of many of these developments resulted in simply relocating the problems of society to areas where they could no longer be seen, entrenching the social status quo. In contrast to the earlier focus on landscapes of beauty and harmony, the Modernist movement sought to address many of these same problems by updating the infrastructure and amenities of cities that no longer functioned well. Many Modernist developments utilise the maxim that form ought to follow function as a means of selecting appropriate designs for urban environments. The obsolescence of older approaches to city planning was accelerated by the influence of the automobile as well as the demands of citizens and consumers for increased efficiency in accessing amenities and products that they desired.

The modernist city is characterised by streets and neighbourhoods that reflect the search for abstract or underlying principles of urban design rather than integration with the sometimes-unpredictable nature of human life. These approaches to urban design privilege order and structure the city in an attempt to pattern it on an underlying view of nobility as embodied by orderliness and regularity within the chaos of daily life. This illuminates an implicit purposiveness and teleological understanding of design and architecture as agents for social change and moral authority. Le Corbusier (1987) bases his philosophy of urban design on this view, noting with some pride that “man governs his feelings by his reason; he keeps his feelings and his instincts in check, subordinating them to the aim he has in view” (p. 67). Without careful planning, Le Corbusier believes cities will foster a way of living that is less than human, a city of “happy go lucky heedlessness, of looseness, lack of concentration and animality” (p. 68). He argues that

well-ordered design encourages active citizenship, writing, “the square plan was in conformity with the dignity of the Roman citizen” (p. 68) and brings contemporary cities into the discussion by declaring that:

we must have the courage to view the rectilinear cities of America with admiration. If the aesthete has not so far done so, the moralist, on the contrary, may well find more food for reflection than at first appears ... the straight road is a reaction, an action, a positive deed, the result of self-mastery. It is sane and noble. (p. 68)

The art and architecture of modernism reflects these principles, and these new views on city planning and placemaking changed the face of the city.

Grant (2006) notes that modernist landscapes are generally high-rise and high-density developments, enforcing land use segregations and a hierarchy of roads (p. 33). Modernism also places value on using appropriate materials for construction. Which material may or not be appropriate is, of course, a question of perspective. The choice of material represents an embodiment of modernism’s concern for efficiency and technological optimism. Many modernist structures use high tech construction techniques and materials such as concrete and steel, and these materials are often left untreated. Adornment and good design are not contrary to the principles of modernism, but the function of a space and materials used in its construction take priority. It must be used only to call attention to the purpose and function of the building, and not to mask it through inappropriate embellishment. A functional building, true to its materials, in this line of reasoning, needs no modification, finishing or polishing. The best modernist buildings were often well made, particularly when compared to current commercial structures. Many buildings still use the materials innovated during the modernist era, motivated by some of the same reasons, such as the low costs of concrete and steel beam construction. These buildings differ from the best examples of modernism in that

economics are usually the only reason for choices made in their design and construction, and as a result they contribute to the perpetuation of buildings and regions that lack character and serve no greater public good. Of course, the influence of modernism continues to manifest itself in many places, particularly civic and institutional structures as well as in neighbourhood design. These instances tend to embody the neo-liberal ideal of government non-intervention in the private realm of development, while ignoring the larger ideology of modernism.

Sprawl

The most lasting legacy of the past century of urban planning is sprawl. Sprawl poses many challenges to the city and spurred the responses of many 20th century planning models before providing the impetus for New Urbanism. Sprawl is the phenomenon of car-oriented, low-density development, and it is a trait shared by many expanding suburban areas. It is recognisable surrounding city landscapes by “leapfrog or scattered development, commercial strip development, low density, and large expanses of single-use development” (Ewing, 1997, p. 108). Low density, single use development necessitates continued dependence on automobiles to connect people’s homes to their places of work and entertainment. This dependence has two effects: increased greenhouse gas emissions and other pollution from cars, and decreased opportunities for spontaneous social interaction as neighbourhoods become less and less a pedestrian realm. Even though the repetitive patterns of development offer homebuyers efficiency, security, and opportunity, they “rarely offer the sense of place and belonging that had rooted his [sic] parents and grandparents. Houses alone do not a community make” (Oldenburg, 1989, p. 140). Canadian geographer Edward Relph (2007) describes this “labyrinth of endless

similarities” (p. 121), as placelessness, a force that works against the ability to create meaningful social connections and experiences in a neighbourhood or region. Some pessimistic futurists go as far as to declare that, “the suburbs are doomed, especially those E.T., *California-style suburbs*” (Coupland, 2010, emphasis in original).

If the American Dream was ever a fairy tale, we have not lived happily ever after. Soule (2007) writes of the suburban ideal, that, “this idyllic vision is being corrupted as the bill comes due for servicing the suburban dream” (p. 264). Everything in the modern experience depends on the availability of cheap oil to manufacture and transport all of our consumer goods and food supplies as well as to mobilise an increasingly dispersed workforce. Single use residential areas in particular, depend on the ubiquity of the car and often exist as a net financial burden on city budget lines. Suburbs are nothing new, rooted in the revolution of the streetcar and its impact on urban landscapes, and encouraged through social policy and regulation that encourages private home and car ownership. As streets have widened over time, streetcar systems have become less pervasive, and cars have been able to move faster and more freely, relegating pedestrians to sidewalk areas. As Orlando traffic engineer Ian Lockwood says, “if you design a street like a gun barrel, drivers will drive like bullets” (as quoted in Curry, 2007, p. 42). This is not only a contemporary concern; as early as the 1920s sociologists were interested in the effects of the automobile on suburban social fabric. “Middletown”, published by Robert and Helen Lynd in 1929, details their observations of changes that increased mobility brought to Muncie, Indiana, noting shifts in social mores regarding religious habits and the independence of young adults. While suburbanites generally get relatively cheap houses and property, the neighbourhood’s social fabric, the environment, and the city, through

high servicing costs, end up footing the bill. Even the trend of building “McMansions” in well off suburban areas where owners take advantage of cheap land prices to build houses that rival urban dwellings in cost impose a burden on the city that results in a net revenue loss. In Nanaimo, for example, residential development is heavily subsidised through much lower property taxes compared with commercial zonings, and DCCs (Development Cost Charges) typically only cover a portion of installing services in a new area.

In North America, urban sprawl has its roots in the post-war building boom of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Returning servicemen used newly established government incentives for houses and education to purchase many new homes. David Harvey (2008) suggests that there may have been a political motive behind this investment in suburbia; a person with a mortgage is unlikely to engage in revolt. This view reflects a *regime of accumulation*, motivated by utopian ideals and “closely linked to capital accumulation through a project of Fordist modernization characterized by rationality, functionality, and efficiency” (Harvey, 1989, p. 253). While Europe was rebuilding its central cities, North America was growing at a rate that was, at times, over twice as fast as Europe. New jobs in construction provided steady, rewarding employment, and the need to fill these new houses with goods conditioned society to consumption on an unprecedented scale. Women were separated from the labour of building the city and the work they had undertaken during the war, expected instead to fill a new niche as homemaker and primary purchaser of household goods. This growth, combined with new developments in economies of scale such as those demonstrated at Levittown, enabled suburbia to begin growing faster than at any other time in history. Breugmann (2005) notes that, “postwar suburbanization and sprawl were different in scale, but not really in kind from what had

gone on before” (p. 43). He continues, “the shift from mass to individual and from public to private transportation happened because, given the management practices and available technologies, it allowed ordinary middle-class citizens the kind of privacy, mobility, and choice once only available to the wealthiest citizens” (p. 45). The importance of this difference in scale, in the size and style of buildings, and width of roads, became apparent. At the same time, ageing and inefficient infrastructure led to the collapse of industry in many central cities, and a growing number of companies moved their operations to cheaper lands in the suburbs. Shopping malls also began to spring up in the suburbs, shifting retail activities away from the urban core (Breugmann, 2005). Sometimes these mall were the result of sprawl, and sometimes shopping centres anticipated and precipitated sprawl, working as magnets for development on the urban periphery.

Sprawl persists for some of the same reasons it appeared as an urban form in the first place. The desire for security, privacy, community, and the display of affluence afforded by land ownership has motivated homebuyers for decades. In some ways it is not a questions of why sprawl persists, but a question of why “so many people would have chosen to live uncomfortably on top of one other in walled cities for such a long time when there was attractive land all around the city” (Breugmann, 2005, p. 109). The rapid shift from urban centers to the suburbs was made possible in part by changing technologies, demographics, family structures, social attitudes, and their impacts on real estate economics:

As the baby boomers started to mature, average household size fell, and unprecedented affluence meant that these smaller family units were able to afford themselves more living space ... the reason for the divergence in development

patterns between the United States and Europe was the simple fact of numbers and degree of affluence. (Breugmann, 2005, p. 42, 43)

Despite the financial burdens that providing services such as sewer and water to the suburbs place on cities, low density, single use developments are often the only type of growth feasible under the exclusionary zoning systems common in most municipalities. Forward thinking developers hoping to create mixed use and pedestrian friendly neighbourhoods must work with city councils in a time consuming and expensive process of creating development permits in order to allow progressive developments that incorporate New Urbanist principles to be realised. James Kunstler writes that:

It is literally against the law almost everywhere in the United States to build the kind of places that Americans themselves consider authentic and traditional. It's against the law to build places that human beings can feel good in, or afford to live in. It's against the law to build places that are worth caring about. (1996, p. 109)

Existing zoning, based on a tradition of segregating land uses, must be modified and approved repeatedly by local governments in order to foster progressive community building developments. Alternatives exist, including performance and incentive-based zoning, as well as form-based codes such as those favoured by New Urbanists, but despite recognition from planners and academics, Euclidean zoning remains entrenched for reasons of legal precedent and ease of use. In fact, Parisians have a term, “*zonage à l'américaine* – zoning by income” (Sante, 2010), which highlights the differences between mixed use, pedestrian-oriented zoning that has historically prevailed in Europe, and the segregation of uses that is all too common in North America.

The views of architect Vincent Scully illustrate a contemporary shift in attitude towards modernism in planning. This was demonstrated over the course of 30 years, beginning with his introduction to Robert Venturi's 1966 work *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, where he praised Venturi “for embracing the complexities

and ambiguities of urban experience that Le Corbusier sought to make more clear and simple” (Shibley, 1998, p. 82). Nearly three decades later, in 1995, this sentiment was galvanised, as he condemns the failure of modernism. Scully introduces Peter Katz’s (1995) *The New Urbanism: Toward an Architecture of Community* by “describing [modernism’s] devastating consequences on the urban environment stressing that the canonical modernism of the middle part of this century could not provide the community that was needed” (p. 82).

Part of the response to modernism’s failure to foster community is found in the role that streets and sidewalks play. Jacobs (1961) notes that her concern is not with design *per se* but with recognising that “when we deal with cities we are dealing with life at its most complex and intense. Because this is so, there is a basic esthetic limitation on what can be done with cities: *A city cannot be a work of art*” (p. 372). The New Urbanists, drawing on Jane Jacobs’ legacy, see the ‘complexities and ambiguities’ that take place on streets and sidewalks as essential to fostering social interaction, civic pride, safe neighbourhoods, and walkable urban areas. This view stands in stark contrast to Le Corbusier’s (1987) ideal modern street, which “in the true sense of the word is a new type of organism, a sort of stretch-out workshop, a home for many complicated and delicate organs, such as gas, water, and electric mains” (p. 71). To extend the metaphor of the organism, the organs or cells notably missing are human beings themselves, referred to only in passing as traffic. It is this capitulation to efficiency and organization at the expense of the human element that Jacobs (1961) finds so disturbing. Approaching the city in order to make a coherent sensible whole out of it, however beautiful the plan or representation may be, is not only bad for the city, it “is a life-killing (and art-killing)

misuse of art” (p. 373). Jacobs explains that art is not inherently bad, and appreciated the role that art and image can play in unifying a neighbourhood. Yet, she critiques the process by which art is created as being unsuitable for creating vibrant cities. The modern planning approach to cities, intent as it is on bringing order, parallels the process of creating art:

Art has its own peculiar forms of order, and they are rigous. Artists ... *make selections* from the abounding materials of life. ... To approach a city, ... as if it were capable of being given order by converting it into a disciplined work of art, is to make the mistake of attempting to substitute art for life. (Jacobs, 1961, p. 372)

Selecting a plan or description of city form that some find pleasing or efficient from all the possible variations necessarily deprives others of their ability to act freely in highly programmed urban environments. The teleological imperative and purposiveness of the modernist approach to the city becomes transmuted into a moral imperative, promoting a particular view of citizenship and the good city. But are the visions of post-modern planners and activists not born out of the same desire to solve perceived social problems, and therefore subject to the same criticism?

New Urbanism inherited from Modernism a desire to discover universal planning principles. A critical difference between contemporary advocates of mixed use, design-based planning such as the New Urbanists, and previous modernist designs is that the former prizes human interaction and experience over the order and efficiency of the latter. Relying on this argument as justification for using only neighborhood scale, community-driven approaches to the city opens up other avenues of criticism. Mumford (1986), in his 1961 *New Yorker* review of Jacobs’ *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, acknowledges that, “She understands that the very life of a neighborhood depends upon the maintenance of the human scale” (p. 192) but reacts with theatrical horror to her

statement that cities ought not to be treated as art. “The citizens of Florence, Siena, Venice, Turin will please take note! ... What has happened is that Mrs. Jacobs has jumped from the quite defensible position that good physical structures and handsome design are not everything in city planning to the callow notion that they do not matter at all” (p. 194). In the sardonically titled review, “Mother Jacobs’ Home Recipes for Urban Cancer,” Mumford demonstrates the tension that exists between proponents of organic street life and a well-ordered built environment. He takes this line of thought further, conflating “its [the city’s] purposeless materialism, its congestion, and its insensate disorder—the very conditions she [Jacobs] vehemently upholds as marks of urban vitality” (p. 192) with the complex, casual, and sometimes random encounters that foster community life and form the root of Jacobs’ arguments. While Mumford rightly criticises Jacobs’ view that cities cannot be artistic, he misses the philosophical thrust that cities cannot be created as master-planned art objects in and of themselves. In doing so, he tacitly endorses the idea that well-ordered planning results in a well-ordered citizenry, and that rather than serving a higher purpose of engaging people with each other and with other places, “good physical structures and handsome design” ought to be pursued for their own sake and the beneficial social effects will naturally make themselves manifest.

New Urbanism Emergent

Urban thinkers such as Krier (1984), Duany and Plater-Zyberk (2000), and Calthorpe (1993) all respond to the totalising and dehumanising effects of modernism on the urban landscape. Some plans privilege environmental sustainability, some democratic participation, and others hearken back to an ideal family or community structure, all aspects of urban life that various planners believe is absent in suburban sprawl. Although

most cities and many progressive planners recognise the economic and environmental costs associated with sprawl, these developments are often the only type of growth permitted under the exclusionary zoning systems common in most municipalities. Soule (2007) expands on this thought, writing that the rapid expansion of sprawl “shouldn’t be surprising, since our land use regulations signal the market that that’s what is expected” (p. 264). The codes represent a rational, industrial worldview that, through the process of aestheticisation, normalises social practice. An urban form that becomes taken for granted suggests norms of use and practice. In this case, modernism has resulted in the production of certain urban systems, and now that these have become normalised, they encourage dwellers to accept modernist ideology and practice as natural. The result is that suburbanites, who self-identify with the exclusive aspects of commodified landscapes, begin to assume that suburbia is perhaps the best, or even the most natural, way to develop human settlements. Duany and Plater-Zyberk (2000) point out that these types of developments ignore local and historical contexts, and that, “unlike the traditional neighbourhood model, which evolved organically as a response to human needs, suburban sprawl is an idealized artificial system” (p. 4). The key words here are ‘idealized’ and ‘artificial,’ as creating abstract universal examples or plans is a totalising process, and by becoming aestheticised, the abstract becomes accepted in place of a more engaged way of dwelling.

New Urbanist proponents identify key aspects of sprawl that contribute to the way in which suburbia displaces human-centered dwelling with comprehensive abstract artificial systems, and offer specific design-based goals and guidelines as a response. Duany and Plater-Zyberk point to the priority given to cars in planning and development,

and restrictive municipal guidelines as the main sources of threat to the human habitat and the erosion of suburban civic identity. In addition to the negative social aspects of sprawl, the deference given cars in the planning process creates a system of feeder roads and arteries connected to isolated cul-de-sacs that is actually less efficient in terms of congestion than traditional grid-based town plans. Segregating land use also leads to economic segregation based on neighbourhood housing values. Social stratification is exacerbated by the desire of residents to purchase taste and status through landscapes that have been reduced to commodities by the aestheticisation of a rational, technological worldview. This limits the potential for social interaction due to the lack of access to elite spaces for those unable to participate, and lack of pedestrian spaces for those unable or unwilling to participate in an automobile-oriented landscape. (Duany and Plater-Zyberk, 1992)

The *Charter of the New Urbanism* was developed in 1996 by a group of architects, designers and planners that took the name of *The Congress for the New Urbanism*. As noted earlier, the group's charter describes the spread of sprawl as a main obstacle in the challenge faced by community builders and planners and stands for "the reconfiguration of sprawling suburbs into communities of real neighbourhoods and diverse districts" (Congress, 1996, para. 2). New Urbanists also provide an answer to critics of urban sprawl who declare suburbia unsustainable due to the projected rise in the cost of oil in our current post-peak period. By encouraging diversity in land use and prioritising mass transit and pedestrian activity over the automobile, suburbs can continue to be viable in spite of rising fuel costs. In examining the form and character of built spaces through a critical lens of goals and values, the Charter lays out principles that aim

to revitalise neighbourhoods through the inclusion of mixed use, walkable areas that connect to specialised districts and corridors to other places, the importance of walking and proximity to daily activities, a mix of housing types and pricing, parks and civic spaces, effective public transportation, and environmentally sensitive implementation (Congress, 1996). The movement goes beyond these principles and provides detailed planning examples of how to lay out mixed use, pedestrian friendly, and transit-oriented spaces that incorporate the public realm. In a 2010 interview, Andres Duany notes “the *raison d’etre* of the original New Urbanism has been expanded and embedded into the environmental movement” (Redmon, 2010, para. 4). What can be considered an ideological weakness of the movement, using appealing urban design to package a wide variety of social goals, can be identified as an organisational strength. Although the goals of New Urbanism can change if challenged by competing paradigms or more effective approaches, a commitment to good urban form, in whatever context, allows the movement to continue to be appealing to policy makers and urban residents.

An Imperfect Paradigm

The ideas of New Urbanism are a crucial part of creating the accessible, people-centered neighbourhoods that are essential components of healthy cities and regions. Although much good work has been done, there are several critiques that can be raised against it in practice. New Urbanism runs the danger of being as totalising of a discourse as the Modernism that it opposes. Shibley (1998) traces the lineage of New Urbanism back through its chief proponents to the anti-modernism of architect Vincent Scully, who taught many key figures in the New Urbanist movement. In this understanding New Urbanism is a reaction to the totalising effects of modernist philosophy in planning and

architecture. Shibley also makes the point that as a fundamentally utopian set of principles, New Urbanism is also by nature a totalising approach. This means that New Urbanist developments can fall prey to the same dangers as modernist approaches. These include a lack of space for difference within the dominant culture as well as continued economic and cultural segregation within towns. The statement, apocryphally attributed to Alex Krieger, that New Urbanism is merely “Sprawl in Drag” lends the eye of critical aesthetics to this critique. If New Urbanism simply perpetuates existing patterns, then its design features serve to deflect critical examination of the social and economic relationships reproduced in suburban landscapes across North America. In his review of Kunstler’s *Home From Nowhere*, Starnes (1998), notes that he “set out in this review with prejudices regarding the concept of New Urbanism ... My attitude toward New Urbanism was ‘so what else is new?’” (para. 17). New Urbanism may not be a panacea for the problems facing cities today, but it is nonetheless a “vital and urgent need to search out our urban ethos and urban settings and demand new directions which will restore civic and civil life” (Starnes, 1998, para. 17). What makes New Urbanism unique in its approach to the city is not its focus on form, environment, public life, or the pedestrian realm, but that these priorities have developed out of such a search for an “urban ethos” that will revitalise cities, towns, and neighbourhoods.

New Urbanism draws on a specific vision of historical neighbourhood lifestyles where “neighbors, walking, come to know each other and to watch over their collective security” (Duany & Plater Zyberk, 1995, p. 23). It proposes that the disparate, segregated elements of the modern city “should once again be assembled into traditional towns” (Duany & Plater Zyberk, 1992, p. 23). This form draws on nostalgia for the old American

Main Street, the picturesque New England village, and the well-ordered but highly unequal antebellum South. All these approaches are grouped together under the moniker of Traditional Neighborhood Design. The problem with relying heavily on this design aesthetic is that “the so-called tradition used in the neotraditional movement [is] largely invented” (Till, 1992, p. 710). This poses two very significant problems for Traditional Neighborhood Design: it is no longer sensitive to the physical and social context that the development takes place in, and it further serves to separate those within from those without. As Till (1992) argues, “implicit in the neotraditionalists’ claim to the past, therefore, is a geography of ‘otherness’ – a constructed hierarchy of place which legitimises territorial boundaries and regional identities as being normal” (p. 710). This claim of difference puts multiple challenges to one of the key principles of New Urbanism: that it is a bad idea to create economically segregated housing stock. First, space becomes a medium for exposing or enforcing difference, rather than one where diversity is explored, either communally or individually. Second, it implicitly undermines New Urbanism’s argument that design can overcome inequity by creating aesthetically similar places for people of different economic cohorts. Using traditional upper class standards as the common denominator when approaching the design of New Urbanist neighbourhoods implies that those without the same rarified taste or means are somehow socially elevated through these spaces.

Such planners deny the value of any contributions to the social fabric that may be made by other economic classes and exclude those who do not fit in what is primarily a European historical and aesthetic narrative. Indeed, as Harvey (1989) argues, urban spatial practices “in any society, abound in subtleties and complexities. Since they are not

innocent with respect to the accumulation of capital and the reproduction of class relations under capitalism, they are a permanent arena for social conflict and struggle” (p. 256). The suburbs may not be so benign and secure as they are made to appear, particularly if, as Grant argues, “we have shifted from a modernist paradigm in which we concentrated on function over form to a practice that increasingly privileges form as a mechanism to attract investment” (2005, p. 11). The commodification of the suburban lifestyle exemplifies dangers inherent in claims to “common good” and problems that come along with attempts to institutionalise a particular vision of the good city. As more and more urban experiences, including the look and feel of one’s neighborhood become commodified, the mechanisms of flexible accumulation isolate those with power and influence from risks associated with housing, externalising those costs onto aspirational homebuyers rather than more wealthy developers. Harvey accuses New Urbanists of promoting “the idea that the shaping of spatial order is or can be the foundation for a new moral and aesthetic order...the movement does not recognize that the fundamental difficulty with modernism was its persistent habit of privileging spatial forms over social processes” (1997, p. 2). While there is a clear and present danger in the commodification of our lifeworlds, New Urbanism recognises that certain places provoke particular aesthetic responses in their inhabitants. Some of these responses are highly personal and individual, while others can transcend the feelings of a single person and facilitate meaningful connections and experiences across a city, culture, or community. It is a worthwhile goal to search for urban forms that allow for positive social and aesthetic responses to place. One can disagree with the underlying economic rationale and

philosophy of New Urbanism, while still appreciating the dialectical space between culture and the environments that contributes to social change.

Questions surrounding the efficacy of design-based approaches to solving urban issues may be questions of degree. A pretty city is no guarantee that it will generate a resilient and equitable social structure, but poor urban design can hinder or prevent cities and regions from reaching these goals. In response to these concerns, and Grant's (2005) suggestions that New Urbanism's "commitment to democracy is weak" (185), we can note that New Urbanism has been at the forefront of revitalising and using certain participatory planning techniques, such as the design charrette. This method of accessing a community's ideas and visual preferences often happens early in the public consultation process. Due to New Urbanism's commitment to the belief that good design can aid in building environmentally and socially sustainable communities, these meetings often focus on questions of layout and aesthetics rather than site-specific environmental or social concerns. While New Urbanism is concerned with the latter, the charrette process lends itself to the descriptions of physical forms. The social and environmental benefits of a particular form must be articulated either by an educated presenter, a concerned citizen, or included as text accompanying visual materials. Once the early processes of consultation are complete, New Urbanism tends to follow the top-down model commonly used in implementing developments. Duany defends this, echoing Mumford's critique of Jacobs, noting that "while democracy does most things well, I think we need to confront the fact that it does not make the best cities. And that the cities that were great were rather top-down. You know--Paris and Rome, the grid of Manhattan" (Redmon, 2010, para. 17).

New Urbanism offers a unique interpretation on community planning and the value of direct democracy. Grant (2006) argues that, “New Urbanism presumes that good design obviates the need for further citizen participation” (p. 72), and that this leads to a dismissive attitude which allows New Urbanists to overlook concerns within the community. Duany would agree that good design can allow planners to overcome certain types of resistance, but would do so in such a way that participation is enhanced, rather than restrained. Speaking to a group in an address to the Preservation Foundation at The Colony in Palm Beach, he says, “What taints democracy is when you get a biased, vested interest to tilt it. I suspect the people who show up [to public meetings] are in some measure a vested interest” (Rogers, 2012, para. 11). He believes that planners and cities that possess strong visions for their communities are often thwarted by a vocal minority that does not constitute “the community” as it relates to proposed developments. This reflects New Urbanism’s understanding of the public as something that is created and is most vibrant at the human scale, on neighbourhood streets. While special interest groups may form part of a larger legislative public, they do not form the public as embodied by the local community. New Urbanism offers quality urban design as a tool to overcome resistance from groups outside the community in order to focus on the concerns of those most affected by the development. They believe that because good urban design mitigates dissatisfaction with one’s urban environment, it deflects other criticisms before they are fostered. The look and feel of a development, including impacts on traffic, green space, and open access to people of varying economic strata are tied directly to an owner’s conception of the value of a property. If one’s aesthetic preferences are met, many other issues seem less important.

Critics of New Urbanism point out that using high quality design as a way to garner support for their ideas simply serves to perpetuate sprawl while ignoring larger issues. Proponents note that the visual and social appeal of their projects allow them to deal with environmental issues that might otherwise be ignored. In Duany's experience, "democracy leads inexorably to traditional architecture" (cited in Grant, 2006, p. 169), indicating that the traditional forms used most often in New Urbanism are not simply part of a design agenda, but reflect the context that New Urbanist projects are promoted in. While Duany firmly believes that top-down approaches are necessary to create good urban design, he contends that the role of planner comes with other responsibilities: "We need to educate" (Redmon, 2010, para. 18). To charges that this may seem elitist, it can be argued that the process of public council meetings with community input is simply an ersatz form of democracy. Most of the people likely to attend such meetings are neighbours of proposed developments, or live nearby. They are not a representative sample of the community outside of the council room; they are a special interest group.

New Urbanism has a role to play in filtering the positive ideas from the negatives ones that become apparent during public consultation: "If you unfilter what people want – they don't want poor people, they don't want income diversity, and they don't want shops anywhere near them and they don't want rapid transit and they don't want streets that connect and they don't want anybody bicycling past their yards and they don't want density" (Redmon, 2010, para. 18). This is a form of benevolent meritocracy in which an experienced elite tells a community that they understand their goals and desires, and that they can offer skills and expertise to improve their cities. Yes, New Urbanism leans on nostalgia, and yes, New Urbanism may rely on authoritarian and utilitarian approaches to

implementation, but it must be recognised that its practice is, in fact, extremely pragmatic. While its pragmatism is reflected in its concern with bridging the gap between the traditional realms of academia and practice, this thesis argues that the ideology of pragmatism is not up to the task of completely describing New Urbanism and its goals. Part of the next chapter will be devoted to discussing ideological approaches that may be compatible with New Urbanism's view of the good city.

Criticisms of being too reliant on nostalgia are not the only ones that New Urbanism must defend itself against. It has been noted that New Urbanism may not be as successful as it wishes in overcoming class distinctions, but critics point out other shortcomings in absolute economic terms. Ellis (2002) notes that as “real estate markets are exquisitely sensitive to consumer choice” (p. 270), then if New Urbanism was as good as its proponents claimed, the marketplace would have made it much more successful than it has been. As Ellis argues,

This superficially persuasive argument obscures a more complex story. Since World War II, low-density, auto-dependent urban form has been aggressively subsidized by the US government, aggressively marketed as the highest rung on the ladder of life, and endorsed as the only modern alternative by professional land planners, transportation planners and developers. (p. 270)

This development environment makes it extraordinarily difficult for New Urbanism to persuade consumers and the so-called free market that it offers a viable, if not better, alternative to traditional land use patterns. As previously noted, not only is the real estate market stacked against New Urbanism, but historical zoning procedures have made it illegal in all but name in most North American jurisdictions.

The opponents of New Urbanism, however, offer other critiques that undermine this argument. Meredith (2003) summarises one common argument: “a residence in their communities comes not only at a high absolute price, but also at a premium over similar

properties in the market area. One study found that New Urbanist homes cost eleven percent more than their market equivalents” (p. 492). The critics cannot have their cake and eat it too. In this instance, the market demonstrates that the lifestyle offered by New Urbanism is indeed something that is valued by many consumers, and indicates that those opposed may be using this argument to bolster their own economic or ideological opposition. In this political and economic landscape it is little wonder that New Urbanism has not been the cure-all many were hoping for in regards to the blight of urban sprawl. If recent economic history has taught us anything, it is that rather than being out of touch “with the social and economic realities of the modern world ... [shaped by] the automobile, cheap energy, telecommunications, new building technologies, multi-national corporations, and globalised trading spheres” (Ellis, 2002, p. 206), New Urbanism is more relevant than ever as it seeks to provide ways of coping with rapidly rising energy prices and social effects of splintered and disconnected lives, all precipitated by increasing reliance on transportation, communication technologies and inter-regional trade. It meets these quantitative planning criteria in developments that also provide an aesthetic connection for residents, laying the groundwork for meaningful and memorable social interactions, and the free exchange of thoughts, ideas, and histories on the streets, resulting in an active, engaged public.

One indication of New Urbanism’s ability to adapt to and navigate future concerns is the evolution of its ideology. Originally encompassed by a Charter that promotes a set of topologically-oriented approaches to neighbourhood development and regional organisation, and implemented primarily in neotraditional greenfield development, the CNU has moved to address concerns of landscape urbanists, the

environmental movement, and urban renewal advocates. The CNU (2008), noting that “a set of operating principles is needed to provide action-oriented tools for addressing the urgent need for change in the planning, design and building of communities” (para. 3), adopted the “Canons of Sustainable Architecture and Urbanism” as a “companion” document to the 1996 Charter of New Urbanism. Where the Charter addresses policy, systems, and topology, the *Canons* are concerned with the phenomena and nature of habitation, the temporal dimension of its physical embodiment, and the importance of the relationship between locally significant styles of development, and broader regional contexts, as well the larger global ecosystem. This demonstrates a certain pragmatism towards achieving the larger goals of the Charter, but it is a pragmatism rooted in existential humanism and not technological utilitarianism.

Chapter 3: Aesthetics, Dwelling and the Good City

Approaching New Urbanism through Heidegger's Critique of Aesthetics

The task of this chapter is to develop a theoretical framework that will serve two purposes. First, it will provide a way of understanding the resilience and appeal of New Urbanism, offering a philosophical response to criticisms that it promotes inequity and normalises structures of privilege through its reliance on neotraditional design. It will also demonstrate that the practice of New Urbanism can be understood through an existential-phenomenological lens, providing a rigorous theoretical justification for relying strongly on elements of design and creating a fertile common intellectual ground with academics and other researchers in the social sciences. The lack of such connections between the Ivory Tower and the practice of New Urbanism has been a significant criticism in discussions of the movement. I argue that framing the goals of New Urbanism by studying the phenomenon of place and approaching placemaking through dwelling will enrich both the practice and critical examination of New Urbanism. The second function of this framework is to provide a background for the argument presented in the next chapter, that in addition to creating an existentially engaging theoretical defense of New Urbanism, a phenomenology of dwelling and aesthetics can contribute to a methodology for accessing meaningful information about the nature and quality of urban environments.

In the same way that Chapter 2 described the milieu within which New Urbanism arose, this chapter will begin by discussing the influence of aesthetic thought on

geography, placemaking, and ideals of the good city. The question will then be asked, is placemaking, and by extension the New Urbanism grappling with fundamental existential issues in addition to the pragmatic, utilitarian problems faced by urban planners? I believe that it is, and argue that current approaches to planning face the same dangers that Heidegger (1977) warned about in *The Question Concerning Technology*. For Heidegger, this dualism can be explored by discussing the difference between art and aesthetics as ways of viewing the world. These ways of relating to the world open up a way of seeing development as a struggle between creating spaces of demanding as opposed to spaces of letting-be. It may seem counter-intuitive to argue that design based approaches to planning, particularly New Urbanism, are valid ways are creating meaningful places in light of Heidegger's critique that aesthetic approaches to the world reinforce a dualistic subject-object relationship. Nevertheless, I argue that the concern with form in New Urbanism can be better understood as representative of the role of Art, rather than aesthetics, in Heidegger's terms. Living *poetically* and approaching the building of New Urbanism as though it works towards *dwelling* lets us understand the goals of New Urbanism in existential-phenomenological terms. This is important to developing a theory of place that is meaningful to both academics looking for a non-structural framework through which they can discuss the nature of good urban design, and to placemaking practitioners looking for criteria useful for evaluating plans and existing places.

Aesthetics have played a key role in creating and disseminating geographical knowledge by way of descriptive text and images. Despite this, the investigation of aesthetics as a keyword and process of importance to the geographer has been largely

(though not completely) confined to landscape studies and has been used to demonstrate different understandings of the dialectic between human beings and the landscape, either man-made or natural. Schwartz (1996) argues that aesthetics, and particularly photography, are a “visual embodiment of the process by which the 19th century mind received, organized, and constructed knowledge about the world” (p. 35). The word ‘Aesthetics’ was coined in the 1750s by Alexander Baumgarten, a neologism based on the Greek word *aesthesis*, though the Greeks themselves never had a concept of aesthetics (Thomson, 2010). Aristotle uses this word to describe both “what we should call ‘perception’ and also what we should call ‘sensation’” (Hamlyn, 1959, p. 6). Prior to this innovation, philosophers and artists still debated the ways by which art could be created and judged, and discussed the nature of beauty. These early discussions endowed the current understanding of aesthetics with the implication that discussing art and beauty engages the faculty of judgment. We do not perceive things in a passive, noncommittal way, but respond to things based on whether or not the things and sensations we perceive are beautiful or pleasurable. Medical and physical science has provided many comprehensive answers to the pre-Platonic question of how sense is formed in the body, thus we are left with the ongoing question of discovering the means by which we make judgments of aesthetic value, or how do we know what is beautiful and good? As geographers, it is important that our discussions of aesthetics recognise their historical aesthetic contexts, and their place within the wider tradition of aesthetics in philosophy, the arts, and city making.

The Need for a Geography of Aesthetics

Theoretical questions about the nature of beauty and aesthetic judgments are valuable, but purely philosophical approaches, particularly classical arguments that rely on an underlying essence of a thing, do not always engage well with the enacted physical reality of built and natural environments. The tension between the philosophy and practice of art in the discussion of aesthetic response and embodiment foreshadow more serious post-structuralist, situated epistemologies. Kennedy, Sell, and Zube (1988) describe the “sensitive travellers,” some of the earliest writers about the physical world in the modern tradition as inspiring early geographers, noting that “early geographic writing abounds with aesthetic description of the physical world being explored” (p. 34). The colourful, descriptive language used by early geographers such as Alexander von Humboldt and John W. Powell is not merely precise, clinical or detached, but evokes a response in the reader such as the scene would have had to the viewer, describing the interplay of light, colour, and land as interactive and codependent. Tuan (1989) exemplifies a nuanced, humanistic geographical response to aesthetic theory, arguing that aesthetics depends mostly upon the initial sensory response one has to things or places, noting that, “The aesthetic experience is largely a matter of pleasure of the senses,” which response depends on, “and can perhaps be endlessly extended by, association, memory, and knowledge” (p. 234). This extension of aesthetic discrimination beyond the response of simple pleasure is what constitutes taste. “Tastes may be collective, or intersubjective, or subjective,” writes Porteus (1996), “but their verification is always subjective” (p. 21). If we are told that a landscape is beautiful we can take another person at their word, but cannot experience the beauty of that particular landscape until we stand in its midst. It is

worth noting that some modern art dispenses with traditional ideals of beauty, and seeks only to be judged on aesthetic, i.e. perceptive or sensorial, impact. It is with this extension of the aesthetic experience into the realm of taste that the philosophy of aesthetics has been concerned, and this lays at the root of both moral and transcendent claims of beauty. Taste-making, as it extends to creating communities, public spaces, and urban art, and the critical value of aesthetic responses to place are key areas that this thesis will contribute to the broader literature of geography.

Aesthetics have historically played several roles in cultural and landscape geography. These are, in short, critical and interpretive approaches, aesthetic optimism, and occasionally utopianism. In the 1700s an idea emerged that landscape was something that could be appreciated aesthetically, and not simply as an object or setting against which people go about their daily labour. The interest in the ‘picturesque,’ a removed appreciation of landscape that “aestheticized nature and naturalized art, encouraging the idea that they have a common mode of appreciation” (Berleant and Carlson, 2007, p. 17), developed independently of the rise of the term *aesthetics*. Aesthetic thought of the time nonetheless reflected the growth of interest in the picturesque, and both were concerned with the response of the individual to aesthetic, picturesque, or sublime experiences. Talking about landscape in terms of the picturesque can also demonstrate other roles aesthetics have played in geography. Critical and interpretative approaches to landscape ask how people relate to certain landscapes as well as each other within the landscape. These approaches also look at the different aesthetic responses people have to landscape, not in terms of the quality of the response, but their differences, similarities, and the processes that engender them.

Central to Heidegger's aesthetic critique is a concern that we have conflated individual experiential or emotional aesthetic appreciation with the impulse to create and appropriately appreciate art. The focus within certain approaches to landscape on appearance only, such as the contemplative or experiential value of old ruins or vast farmland, ignored the plight of those who viewed the same scenes without the position of privilege. Wylie (2007) shows that the aestheticisation of landscape is difficult to avoid even in landscape geography, noting that J.B. Jackson "repeatedly stresses and explores the role of landscape as a *symbolic* as well as a material resource – landscape as a source of and repository of myth, imagination and symbolic value and cultural meaning" (p. 44). This demonstrates both that landscapes of resource or imagination only really come into being when interacting with humans, and that Heidegger's warnings about technology apply to symbolic landscape when viewed as a resource, in addition to the extractive physical industries that he describes. Landscape described as a symbolic or cultural *value* also demonstrates the process of aesthetic commodification.

Placemakers must resist the temptation to generalise about the people that will inhabit the spaces that they design and create. There are dangers present in the tension between the need for a site design to have broad appeal and the importance of acknowledging the individual people that make up the community. Developers risk that by limiting the acceptable identities in a space, people will not make a meaningful connection, and that by attempting to appeal to a generalised social identity no person that has chosen to be affiliated with a particular identity or subgroup will be motivated to inhabit the space. By engaging with particular groups and their aesthetic preferences, perhaps more memorable and meaningful places can be created. Apart from motives of

political correctness, there are other reasons why aesthetically meaningful places have not been more present in the landscape. In his discussion of extractive industries in Iceland and the “Aesthetic Politics of Landscape,” Benediktsson (2007) notes that “critical geography has in recent years tended to sidestep the admittedly complex issue of landscape aesthetics” (p. 204). He provides four reasons for the decline in favour among researchers of aesthetic approaches to landscape (p. 206-208). First, landscape as scenery provides too simplistic a view for academic research and not enough meaning to describe personal encounters with nature. Second, an aesthetic approach to landscape ignores the political, historical, and linguistic meanings associated with landscape. Third, a visual understanding of landscape presumes a certain detached objectivity resulting in the modern tendency to view nature as standing reserve or urban areas as tourist commodity or positional good for residents. And last, “the fall from grace of the visual paradigm in landscape studies has been reinforced by a forceful criticism of geography’s longstanding ‘ocularcentrism’ from a feminist standpoint” (p. 208). Matless (1996) points out that a natural aesthetic has historically been part of promoting systems of values, noting in regards to the Council for Visual Education in 1940s England, “The visual culture of landscape and citizenship must be understood as part of a wider design for life” (p. 433). This design for life promoted educating the “uneducated taste of the great majority” (p. 433) and tied the qualities of an outdoor aesthetic to those of a good citizen, and in doing so promoted a masculine engagement with nature over more feminine ideals of beauty and spatial practices in order to “mark out the aesthetic from associations with the ‘soft’ or ‘cissy’” (p. 435).

Benediktsson (2007) argues that in order to foster a connection to nature beyond its potential for extraction, “A political geography of landscape is needed which takes aesthetics seriously, and which acknowledges the merit of engagement and enchantment” (p. 203). Likewise, those engaged in placemaking must take aesthetics seriously if people are to identify with their neighbourhoods and public places with the same “engagement and enchantment”. To create such successful places, planners must engage with the “lifeworld, the taken-for-granted pattern and context through which people conduct their day-to-day lives” (Knox, 2005, p. 2). They must take into account the identities of those who will use a place with the result that in addition to the attributes of order and efficiency, places will be infused with, “above all, a sense of belonging, affection, hospitality, vitality and historical and cultural continuity” (p. 2). The aesthetic critique provides many opportunities for critical engagement with the evaluation of places in terms of beauty but more importantly in terms of the success or failure of a place to engage inhabitants. There is value in this criticism, but there is more in providing an alternative way to practice placemaking by engaging and working with a particular group or groups that identify with a place, rather than continuing in the objectifying top-down traditional planning practice. Re-enacting the past will not restore the aspects of it we wish to preserve, instead it will turn places into mausoleums. Places must allow people to create and share new meanings and embody new practices that reflect their individual identities while remembering the local historical context and integrating with the existing physical and natural environments.

Aesthetics and the Good City

The New Urbanist response to these issues, though arguably incomplete in practice is nonetheless part of the inheritance of a tradition that has sought to remedy social ills through the design of the city and neighbourhood. As a relatively recent historical example, the 18th century growth in the appreciation of landscape as ‘picturesque’ influenced urban design in major centres. The contemporary neo-classical revival in architecture brought to the fore classical Greek conceptions of beauty. This reflected the shift that occurred during the renaissance from medieval theological aesthetics towards a conception of beauty situated in the classical ideals drawn from the contemplation of nature, consisting of “wholeness (*integras*), harmony (*consonantia*), and radiance (*claritas*)” (Porteous, 1996, p. 19). In addition to harmony, proportion and other classical components, neo-classical aesthetics recognised that “things which were non-uniform, lacked variety, or seemed disproportionate (such as deserts or mountain ranges) still aroused the emotions” (p. 20). From a critical perspective, this distinction is extremely important. It moves the realm of judgment completely into the sensible, and differs from the classical and medieval perspectives that beauty is an absolute, and that people have the faculties to judge what is beautiful. Although this understanding of aesthetics has progressed into a subjective framework, many approaches to the city still contain a vision of the ideal city. In the middle ages, these ideals were conveyed by the “symmetry of city-form typified, for example, by the perimeters of new towns or newly founded colonies, often fashioned after the square or the circle” (Akkerman, 2000, p. 267). The tension between the subjective ideals and the value placed on rationality and efficiency in modern culture has played out in urban design theory as well.

As Akkerman argues, “The planned town of the 20th century, an outcome of urban design since early modernity, thus recapitulated ancient notions of cosmic harmony as an archetype of the Ideal City” (p. 268). For many planners the ideal city has gone hand in hand with the ideal citizen. Determining who is the ideal citizen, and what is envisioned as the ideal city, is a process that reflects the differing levels of involvement in the democratic process. While planners in the mid 20th century may have been deferred to as experts, today’s political climate demands at the very least a token level of engagement between the city and its citizens. The varying levels of consultation and citizen involvement in New Urbanist and other planning paradigms leave them vulnerable to criticisms from activist and special interest groups that may have definitions of the public realm that differ from the definitions used by planners or other stakeholder groups. In the same way that the study of aesthetics is dogged by questions of power and influence when it searches for a universal definition of taste, so too do any attempts to describe the character and design of the *good city*. Current non-representational approaches to the city and post-structuralist studies of placemaking place little importance on the meanings present in the landscape, instead, they are more concerned with how embodied experiences are performatively enacted. While this approach sheds light on the processes and participants that shape the city, I argue that meaning is essential to placemaking. Without making reference to specific forms or designs, Heidegger’s notion of *dwelling* offers an existential approach to place and meaning that can be used to create new criteria for the good city, criteria that I believe New Urbanism is capable of promoting.

M. Norton Wise (2007) describes how urban design and the urban citizen intersect. He writes about the German architect Karl Schinkel, in whose work “usual neo-classical ideals of balance, harmony, symmetry, and reason combine with an image of civic humanism and cooperative work” (p. 9). These ideals were incorporating into the design of public space in order to “provide public spaces that would shape the experience and consciousness of a newly cosmopolitan citizenry” (10). The point of concern with this work is not that it seeks to improve the city, but that the cosmopolitan aesthetic becomes naturalised. Critics tend to question the methods and means of achieving these improvements, and the term “cosmopolitan” itself is contested. Is Schinkel allowed to define the term in context of his own designs, is being cosmopolitan a state of nature, or virtue to be aspired to? Schinkel’s work provides a historical example of the way Lefebvre’s “representations of space” and “representational space” interact. As an architect and painter, Schinkel’s oeuvre consists of both representations of space, which refers to the

conceptualized space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent – all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived. (Lefebvre, 1991 p. 38)

and representational space:

space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’ but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who *describe* and aspire to do no more than describe. (p. 39)

Neither space takes precedence over the other, but use of the terms *conception* and *perception*, essential elements of aesthetic experience, reveal a tension between the two.

Representations of space prioritise the conceived, rational, and imaginative, which are all domains of thought. Representational space, even though it is concerned more with

directly lived spatial experience, demonstrates a reliance on perception as inhabitants, users, and artists interpret and describe the human landscape. Lefebvre points out that systems of representation are not an innate quality of physical space, but are worked out through the symbolic use of physical space.

Schinkel's paintings and architectural drawings are part of the process of embodying a particular political conception so it may be realised physically, and may be cloaked in the symbolism of daily practice and public participation. In order to find a way through the dualism that arises as imagination and interpretation battle for mental primacy, Lefebvre provides a third spatial archetype, that of spatial practice. This understanding of space connects the mental and social realms to the physical world. It is the interface and horizon between society, as constituted by embodied individual actors, and the space that a society produces and is itself reproduced by. "It produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38). Spatial practice reflects the political economy and ideological values present in a society, and consists of our daily associations with spaces and places that are individually situated, but located in an actual physical context. Lefebvre writes of this spatial triad that all three elements are necessary in an analytical approach, as "Relations with two elements boil down to oppositions, contrasts or antagonisms" (p. 39). A space must be understood outside of the binaries of mental/physical, perceptual/conceptual, imagined/experienced, and even immanent/transcendent if a complete as possible understanding of it is to be developed. This chapter develops an aesthetic-phenomenological method of approaching space in this way.

The Haussmanisation of Paris in the mid to late 1800s demonstrates similar connections between the role played by aesthetics in the planning process, and the reproduction of spaces that mirror visions of the good city and citizen. It also marks a watershed moment in design, and foreshadows the 20th century rational and harmonious city:

The signature of Haussmann's new design, the destruction of central Paris by the introduction of wide boulevards, now epitomized the ideal of the surprise-free city, geared towards the machine rather than the person, seeking an equilibrium rather than a prospect for challenge in the accidental, and conformity rather than occasion for adventure in the unforeseen. (Akkerman, 2000, p. 283)

It could be argued that this represents a turning point in urban aesthetics that has rippled down through history, particularly in North America where a mechanised economy opened up vast new areas to development and energised the political will to realise projects such as Robert Moses' parkways in New York City. A machine-oriented urban fabric will seek the equilibrium of all objects in space and the optimisation of all available energies, including human beings, who become something to be ordered and arranged, rather than beings whose life worlds should be filled with possibility. Two design elements in Haussman's Paris illustrate this. First, the wide boulevards not only provided clear fields of cannon fire, as noted by many of his critics, but also reflected motives that were "aesthetic, bureaucratic, and economic" (Jordan, 2004, p. 94), resulting in:

careful distinctions made between rich, less rich, and poor neighborhoods. The only other project with a strong strategic component—the system of streets on the Left Bank that surrounded the Panthéon neighborhood—was the Third Réseau, the last of Haussmann's transformations, and its purpose was to quarantine a potentially dangerous neighborhood rather than to attack the insurgents. (p. 94)

The changes to Paris' layout were not just the reflection of pre-existing cultural conditions, but served to create and legitimise economic stratification. This effectively

limited the day-to-day spatial activities of much of the citizenry, and actively excluded them from participation in particular public and legal realms. Haussmann also intervened in Parisians' spatial practice through his use of monuments. In this project, monuments are not simply an essential part of the neo-classical aesthetic, but serve a functional purpose in knitting the city together: "Those streets linking monuments or places both opened the city and created urban itineraries that remain fundamental" (Jordan, 2004, p. 94). Pathways between areas open to the better off classes became indelibly written into the landscape.

In addition, Jordan (2004) points out that the new streets and monuments that had been built were done so without regard for context and meaning of existing monuments. A new urban aesthetic was created in order to naturalise and legitimise an economic and social order. Some existing monuments, such as the cathedral of Notre Dame, were incorporated into the new urban framework, though through the restructuring of the physical urban fabric it was "freed of the barnacles that had clung to it for centuries" (Jordan, 2004, p. 94). The concerns of today's New Urbanists – enabling the ideal urban citizen, the restructuring of public policy, and the restoration of urban centres, are nearly a mirror image of those that motivated neo-classical development, and echo the historical neglect of non-western conceptions of good community. There is still a focus on public participation and active citizenship, but it has been recognised that treating humans as objects to be ordered according to a particular vision of social or economic efficiency will not create the degree of stability and social-experiential interaction that many cities and regions desire. Instead, we turn to Heidegger's existential phenomenology as a means to

describing appropriate relationships between human beings and their environments that can inform a New Urbanist theoretical orientation and an approach to evaluating place.

The Age of Technology

Heidegger, borrowing a phrase from the German poet Holderlin, writes, “poetically man dwells” (1951, p. 265). This statement is at once aesthetic and spatial, arguing that we dwell in a bounded physical space, and that dwelling is practiced *poetically*, as opposed to technologically. A technological approach to dwelling is at the heart of the existential problems of modernism with which Heidegger is concerned. In order to understand how the arts “may expressly foster the growth of the saving power” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 35) as a response to this existential threat, we must first get to the root of the dilemma from which the arts will save us. Technology has specific aspects and modes of being which make it different from other ways of revealing. Heidegger’s views of art and aesthetics are grounded in his understanding of ways of being and revealing, and his existential concerns with technology must be described in greater detail before developing his aesthetic critique further. Using technology as the dominant lens through which we approach the world fractures the web of potentiality and intersubjectivity that enables us to relate poetically to things and other people. According to Heidegger, the danger in approaching the world technologically is that it alienates things from their nature. We become unable to properly relate to the object and other people in our world. People themselves become objectified; understood not in human terms, but in terms of resource or utility. How does this come to be? Dreyfus and Spinoza (1997) note that, “[a]ccording to Heidegger, our nature is to be world disclosers. That is, by means of our equipment and coordinated practices we human beings open coherent, distinct contexts or

worlds in which we perceive, act, and think” (p. 160). In this, Heidegger overlaps with later post-structuralist thinkers, understanding that we cannot take for granted a uniform, absolute world. Rather, we disclose our necessarily limited world by acting, creating, and engaging it through social and technical practice.

Art is engaged as the saving power in its capacity to reveal, for “revealing lays claim to the arts most primally” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 35). Technology is but one of many ways that human beings disclose their worlds, though in the modern era it has become the dominant lens through which people interpret the world. By means of an ontological analytic, Heidegger describes the processes of co-creation between human beings and nature by which objects, even natural objects, come to be disclosed in the world. This unconcealing that he terms *poiesis* is a bringing forth or revealing. The danger within technology reveals itself when we question the way technology operates. Heidegger makes two key observations. First, he asks us, “But suppose now that technology were no mere means?” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 13). In other words, is the instrumental definition of technology inadequate in describing the way that technology works to reveal? Heidegger believes that it is. Understanding technology as instrumental is not incorrect, but incomplete. Technology is unique, and its mode of revealing is unique to the modern era in that it:

has the character of a setting-upon, in the sense of a challenging – forth . . .
Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve [**Bestand**]. (Heidegger, 1977, p. 17)

Human beings have used the ability to order nature into standing reserve to great advantage, but realising that technology is not merely instrumental, and works towards its own ends, reveals this existential dilemma. Man, while involving technology as a means

of disclosing his world, “pursues nature as an area of his own conceiving, he has already been claimed by a way of revealing that challenges him to approach nature as an object of research” (p. 21).

This is problematic in a general sense as there are philosophical and ethical objections to objectifying human beings, and while these are based for the most part in the vestiges of Enlightenment humanism, postmodern and poststructuralist theories also oppose the treatment of people and things as objects. Modernist approaches to place and placemaking imagine that place is something that can be called forth out of the built environment and set to order as resources that can provide specific benefits or outcomes such as efficiency and order, or even the human spatial virtues of safety, community and home. The resulting landscape aesthetic is one that enacts values of efficiency and order, individuality and privacy, in the built environment. Thus, exhortations to the saving power of art and the poetic nature of dwelling are explicitly spatial responses to the way the modern “man” orders the natural and built environments.

The Greek word *techne*, from which we derive the contemporary English word *Technology*, “is the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsman but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. *Techne* belongs to bringing-forth, to *poiesis*; it is something poetic” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 13). *Techne*, as it belongs to *poiesis*, encompasses the entire process of bringing forth some new thing; from an idea taking root in the maker or artisan, the tools used, and the skills wielded in their service. *Poiesis*, or bringing forth a thing into being, implies that it is being brought, or revealed, from a state of un-being. Greeks called this revealing *aletheia*, which was translated into Latin as *veritas*, the root of the English word ‘truth’, implying the facticity or taken-for-

grantedness of a certain thing, rather than indicating any moral judgment based on integrity or fidelity. Heidegger notes that truth is commonly understood as correctness of the representation of an idea. In coming to understanding the use of *aletheia* in relation to the essence of technology, it may be useful to consider it as the antithesis of occulting, or the hiding or removing of a thing from experience.

Ziarek (1998) argues that there is a “tension between technology and aesthetics, between *techne* and *poiesis*” (p. 163). This struggle between ways in which *aletheia* operates to disclose (life) worlds is a competition for ideological supremacy. The victor for much of the 20th century, while not uncontested, has been technology. Instead of a revealing that is particular and momentary, technology demands that every-thing be constantly present. This has given rise to the normalisation of order and efficiency as moral values, demonstrated in the previous chapter’s critique of modernism, and the assumption of science as the dominant worldview and only authoritative method of answering questions about the world. Peter Berger (1966) writes that:

Worlds are socially constructed and socially maintained. Their continuing reality, both objective (as common, taken-for-granted facticity) and subjective (as facticity imposing itself on individual consciousness), depends on *specific* social processes, namely those processes that ongoingly reconstruct and maintain the particular worlds in question. ... Thus each world requires a social “base” for its continuing existence as a world that is real to actual human beings. This “base” may be called its plausibility structure. (p. 119-120)

A plausibility structure is held intact through force relations, and is enacted socially whenever claims of knowledge, truth, or understanding are made. It is necessary that this happens unconsciously, as the plausibility structure is the framework in which we take a certain thing or idea for granted, or accept a certain way of being as normal and good. It has been the job of human geography since the post-structural turn to dismantle, or at least illuminate, these structures in terms of power relationships. In doing so, many

researchers are implicitly advancing their own post-modern moral framework based on subjective meanings, individual experience, and personal autonomy.

There are two defining characteristics of the way that technology reveals, and both pose existential dilemmas. Lovitt (1977), in the introduction to his translation of *The Question Concerning Technology*, writes that “Modern technology in its essence is a ‘challenging revealing,’” and that this challenging orders nature into a “fundamentally undifferentiated supply of the available ‘standing reserve’” (p. xxix). Challenging removes an object from the realm of existential freedom that other types of poesis or letting-be would allow. As far as it goes with *things*, this kind of objectivity is not *necessarily* a bad outcome, but we have already seen that technology works to order people as standing reserve as well. While this no doubt could help one deal with existential dread, having one’s identity and future removed from the realm of possibility, and being ordered and identified as a certain type of person with boundaries on one’s purpose and action, precludes the ability to have meaningful identity-constituting experiences. Insofar as existentialism can be said to propose a moral structure, letting people become who they are and will be is at the heart of it. Describing standing-reserve as being “fundamentally undifferentiated” hearkens back to Kierkegaard’s concern with leveling. Leveling is a way of being “into which nothing can penetrate, in which everything sinks, powerless” (Kierkegaard, 2010, p. 51). This is a sort of proto-nihilism into which even experience and identity *sink*, erasing the possibility for the individual to create meaning through thought, experience, or understanding.

This is not a rallying cry for the recognition of some kind of objective truth; it is in geographic terms a call for places of letting-be. Nietzsche’s positive nihilism can be

interpreted as an extension of Kierkegaard's search for meaning in individual commitment, but Dreyfus (1995) contends that this is a circular argument, "thinking that we once had values but that we do not have values now, and that we should regain our values or choose new ones, is just another symptom of the trouble" (p. 293). Heidegger believes that we should be most interested in learning how to *be*, and "thinking about our deepest concerns as values *is nihilism*" (Dreyfus, 1995, p. 294). Elden (2004) describes the historical basis of this way of thinking, writing that "Descartes importantly suggests that all problems in geometry can be reduced to the length of some straight lines, to the *values* of the roots of the equations, thereby turning space into something that is quantitatively measureable, calculative, numerable" (p. 92, emphasis mine). The use of the word value differs in each of these references, understood variously as moral values, desires, and measurements, but each demonstrates that assigning values is an ordering, acquisitive approach to the world. From this come the modern motivations for bringing the realms of experience and bodily interaction with the world into the rational domain of the mind, and the preference for order and control over possibility and individuality.

Regarding Heidegger's concern with space and ontology, Elden also writes that, "Technology, taking the world as a substance which can be ordered, planned, and worked upon – instead of worked with – is a direct consequence of Cartesian metaphysics, and is the condition of the possibility for modern science, mechanized forms of agriculture, the holocaust, nuclear weapons and other forms of control" (p. 92-93). Heidegger's response is to propose that if there is to be seriousness and meaning, rather than merely pleasure (also an element of his aesthetic critique), then it must be drawn from our everyday shared social practices. As Dreyfus (1993) puts it "Heidegger argues that our cultural

practices can direct our activities and make our lives meaningful only insofar as they are and stay unarticulated, that is, as long as they stay the soil out of which we live” (p. 294). Leaving some things mysterious and unexamined resists the nihilistic impulse to think about meaning and experience in terms of value and order. Thinking imaginatively in terms of the built environment, considering homes, neighbourhoods, and public spaces as the “soil out of which we live” lends a poetic weight to the argument for spaces of letting-be, not of control, efficiency or immovable identity.

The coming of age of technology traces somewhat familiar Promethean themes over history. As Heidegger (1982) notes early in his career, “Man is what lies at the bottom of all things” (p. 28), and indeed, although technology, like fire, is not merely instrumental, it has been brought forth by humanity, and has been used in the service of man. In many ways *The Question Concerning Technology* can be understood as a history of the study of ontology in the Western tradition. Dreyfus & Spinoza (1997) highlight the importance of this history, commenting that for Heidegger, “an understanding of being is what makes it possible for us to encounter people and things as such,” and that following five other cultural epochs, each characterized by a particular way of being and revealing, we have entered “a final epoch which he called *the technological understanding of being*” (p. 160). Understanding the way that technology works informs an understanding of the way that people encounter each other in the world, and is therefore an implicitly embodied and spatial concern. As the previous quotation from Heidegger indicates, he believed earlier in his career that technology could be understood somewhat simply, that man could use it as a tool to dominate and challenge things according to his own desires, “as if man were a subject in control and the objectification of everything were the

problem” (p. 160). In later years, his position becomes more concerned with the way that technology itself operates, not as a tool of man, but as a way of being in and of itself, which presents the particular dangers already discussed. He writes:

Modern technology, as a revealing that orders, is thus no mere human doing. Therefore we must take the challenging that sets upon man to order the actual as standing-reserve in accordance with the way it shows itself. That challenging gathers man into ordering. This gathering concentrates man upon ordering the actual as standing-reserve. (1997, p. 19)

Like fire from Olympus, technology may be used to benefit man, but complete control remains elusive, and technology may actually work in unanticipated ways. Continuing to use fire as an example, we see that approaching it instrumentally, as something that is used to perform a certain task such as creating heat or energy, then the philosophical problem is simply one of relating to all things as though they are objects to an arbitrary subject. This view discounts humanity’s long relationship with fire, and the subtleties of its physical, social, and psychological impacts. Technology, which itself challenges and operates outside of the desires of man, and upon man despite any act or intention of man, poses the danger of eliminating the agency of objects, and also reduces man to yet another object.

Art and Aestheticisation

Heidegger does not despair over technology, nor could he be considered a luddite. A hopeful current flows through *The Question Concerning Technology* with Heidegger (1977) drawing attention to Holderlin’s passage,

But where danger is, grows
The saving power also (p. 28)

and concludes with the thought that “revealing lays claim to the arts most primally” (p. 35). The saving power that grows where danger is may be understood as the possibility

for a new way of being and relating to things outside of the Cartesian subject-object metaphysics. Intersubjectivity is at the heart of creating meaning in a world that challenges power structures, and provides the basis for art to work as a way of revealing that transcends technological nihilism. In this challenge to structure, and advocacy for a new way of relating to space, lies the kinship between the seemingly antithetical statements of Jacobs and Heidegger. Both the artistic and technological outlooks enable humankind to create, shape, and reveal, but in one lies danger and in the other salvation. The nature of scientific inquiry is to discover repeatable principles from observations and experiments in nature. “As a matter of principle science ‘abstracts’ from the given to arrive at a neutral ‘objective’ knowledge. What is lost, however, is the everyday life-world, which ought to be the real concern of man in general and planners and architects in particular” (Norberg-Schulz, 2007, p. 127). Stanley Rosen writes that, “if knowledge is enlightenment, and science is knowledge, it follows that to be enlightened is either to endure self ignorance or to undergo reification” (1993, p. 4). An overly technological worldview disconnects us from understanding the essence of things, and simultaneously reduces human being to objects. Heidegger (1977) writes that “thinking in terms of values is radical killing” (p. 108) and Thomson (2010) expands upon this line of thought, arguing that we are “moving from modern subjectivism to late-modern enframing of reality insofar as we understand and relate to all things, *ourselves included*, as nothing but intrinsically-meaningless ‘resources’ standing by for endless optimization” (p. 22). The feminist theorist Donna Haraway (1988) calls this a ‘god trick,’ the illusion that we can gain a complete and total calculative or rational understanding of the world by standing separate from it. This trick, or illusion, is that we can delude ourselves into thinking that

there is a universal knowledge or understanding that can be discovered from an objective, outsider position and can be used to serve anybody.

Summing up his views on the history of aesthetics (as opposed to art) and social practice, Heidegger (1992) says succinctly, “Ruthlessness towards tradition is reverence toward the past” (p. 414). No luddite, he recognised that the practices that used to grant meaning and enabled dwelling will no longer do so, but remembering that we can dwell, and endeavor to live meaningfully has value both in the pragmatic reward of a life well lived, and the transcendent benefit of providing a coherent ontology and epistemology – a recourse to learning what can be known, and how we can come to know these things. Exploring his understanding of the differences between the roles played by aesthetics and art can provided a situated, spatially meaningful conception of meaning and authenticity as they pertain to place. Earlier in this thesis it was pointed out that Heidegger believes that aesthetics should not form the basis for our relationships with people and things in the world as it fosters inauthentic connections caused by the experiential distance between subject and object. He does not “deny the reality of the subject/object relation but, rather, points out that our experience of this subject/object relation *derives from* and so *presupposes* a more fundamental level of experience, a primordial modality of engaged existence in which self and world are united rather than divided” (Thomson, 2010, p. 17).

The nature of art is such that it helps reveal rather than conceal possibilities, and sets things to *being*. In contrast, a purely aesthetic mode of relating to the world promotes the fiction of objectivity and values things simply according to pleasure of the senses, ordering embodied experience as commodity or standing reserve. A fundamental

characteristic of a work of art is that it participates in the *aletheia*, or the unconcealment of the truth of the thing it represents and the work of art itself. This does not contradict a situated, anti-essentialist approach to knowledge. Art represents the emergent thing depicted by the artist, and the simultaneous withdrawal of that thing in accordance with its nature, allowing the work of art to operate existentially through its relation to time and context. As Thomson (2010) explains, “For Heidegger, the fact that there can be no revealing without concealing (and vice versa) is a necessary feature not just of perception or cognition but of intelligibility in general” (p. 52). Art does not simply provoke a sensation in the viewer. Instead it is experiential, relying on perspective, context, and the situated understanding of truth and beauty. Because cities, like works of art, are created, they also have the capability to reveal if approached thoughtfully, but may also objectify their inhabitants if they are seen merely as a resource or technological instrument.

This negative reaction to the aesthetic experience, though the experience itself may be pleasant, can be understood as a kind of aesthetic pessimism. Aesthetic optimism and pessimism are described by Rodrigo Duarte (2007) as an “‘aesthetic of aesthetics’ ... the kind of satisfaction – not necessarily aesthetic – that aesthetic itself produces in the reflexive activity” (p. 1). In contrast to the pessimism evident in Heidegger’s critique of aesthetics, students of landscape have tended to take a more positive view of the aesthetic experience. Duarte (2007) notes that “this is mostly due to the fact that the pleasure experienced in the aesthetic evaluation may be – and normally is – accompanied by intellectual resonance” (p. 2). We see this develop historically in geographic thought, from the sensitive travellers who took pleasure not only in their reactions to landscapes, but also in the process of appreciating and documenting landscapes, to contemporary

planners, activists and landscape architects that find edification in the activity of appreciation.

Creating Commodity through Aestheticisation

The subject-object duality enforced by modern aesthetic appreciation can affect and be exploited by those who create and modify the suburban landscape. In addition, encouraging inhabitants to view the human environment aesthetically has the potential to turn landscape into commodity. Relating to landscape becomes a spatial practice in which one asserts one's social position and regards both the built and natural environments as something to be subjugated and then separated from. The possession of taste, or a socially acceptable aesthetic, becomes something to be aspired to, not something that may be participated in equally across social strata. The Marxist critique is fairly explicit in this understanding of the use of aesthetics: by placing a value on aesthetics, we allow things that become aestheticised to take on a new role as positional goods in a social framework. There is an additional, implicit nihilist critique as well, based on Heidegger's conception of enframing. Relating to a thing through its aesthetic qualities enables a worldview based on ordering and optimisation of things as resources for aesthetic experience.

From the perspective of those with the means and ability to explore the landscape as an activity of leisure, landscape appreciation became a means to distinguish one's class. Duncan and Duncan comment on this distinction, noting, "landscapes serve as scarce positional goods charged with an aura of the particularity of place" (2001, p. 387). Duncan and Lambert (2002) describe landscape as "constellations of such symbolic objects linked to places and social identities through values of 'distinction,' 'authenticity,' 'community,' and 'heritage'" (p. 269). These values represent moments of

judgment that constitute taste when they are in line with societal norms. When our social identities are linked to possession and consumption, “the aesthetic plays an important role in depoliticizing class relations. Class relations as constituted by power, authority, and production practices are aestheticized” (Duncan and Duncan, 2001, p. 387). Social aestheticisation, or the normalisation of certain shared preferences, results in social situations where only those who share similar tastes, and those who do not interrupt the expression of these tastes, are able to participate fully. Differing levels of access to places and commodities become taken for granted. When aesthetics create or maintain these types of landscape, “those with incompatible identities or aesthetic practices are denied access to certain places” (Duncan and Lambert, 2007, p. 269). The desire to enhance one’s social standing symbolically persists, with lower classes aspiring to the lifestyle of the elite. “Thus what were once 18th century aristocratic tastes for smooth lawns and adorned private carriages,” argues Porteous (1996), “have become the commoner’s Sunday morning burdens of cutting the lawn and washing the car” (p. 7). This example illustrates a spatial practice that acknowledges the need to maintain social standing, but hides the fact that such a suburban landscape excludes those unable to participate.

Aesthetics have played a variety of roles in shaping the physical space and spatial practices of the city. While the originators of these various movements and projects used aesthetics as a creative tool in service to their ideologies, historical-geographical scholarship has used aesthetics as a critical tool for making clear the powers and principles that have shaped the city. In studies of contemporary landscapes, Duncan and Duncan’s (2001) work on the use of the language of environmentalism describes how the *wilderness aesthetic* is something that is not naturally occurring. This aesthetic is created

and preserved as a means of regulating access to space, and as a means of demonstrating elite social status by defining and acquiring landscapes as positional commodities. In “The Aestheticisation of the Politics of Landscape Preservation” (2001), Duncan and Duncan note that “The seemingly innocent pleasure in aesthetic appreciation of landscapes and the desire to protect nature can act as a subtle but highly effect mechanism of social exclusion and the reaffirmation of elite class identities” (p. 387). While the subject of their case study is an elite enclave of the modern landed gentry, the same process by which aesthetics normalises social hierarchies also applies to more progressive types of development. Duncan and Lambert (2002) also describe the way that aesthetics reinforce dualities by studying perceptions of the city as a frontier, a horizon between safety and danger. In the middle of the uncivilised wild and the inauthentic decadence of civilisation, the urban frontier, realised by new approaches to city building such as New Urbanism in Seaside, Florida, offers an exclusivity and an upper-class social identity to prospective residents. It is important to note a few processes at play in this case. First, the acceptance of traditional white elitist spaces including architectural styles from the antebellum South that become “neutralized through the process of aestheticization” (p. 286), thereby “obscuring the power relations that characterized [it]” (p. 286). Second, the design aesthetic naturalises and legitimises spatial exclusion in the form of exclusivity. “The link between exclusiveness and exclusion is critical to understanding the contrast between the ideal ‘space’ and the actual ‘place’ of Seaside” (p. 286). The commodities of exclusivity and authenticity can only be practiced through spatial, symbolic, and economic exclusion. The Congress of New Urbanism promotes economic class integration, community, and a connection to the past and heritage of

places, but the aesthetic critique reveals that “the promotion of neo-traditional places as exclusive relies on a series of aesthetically encoded exclusions in the landscape” (p. 287).

The exclusion and stratification that is the result of enacting certain types of aesthetic projects demonstrates another role that aesthetics plays in producing idealised urban landscapes. Seeking to create optimal urban forms acknowledges a level of ideological utopianism, and the utopian aesthetic possesses a characteristic environmental or technological optimism. Porteous (1996) points to the way that certain landscape aesthetics have contributed to the objectification of the natural environment as part of the cause of its unsustainable exploitation. He proposes a worldview where “an ethic of environmental humility will join with an aesthetics of environmental harmony as a central focus in our lives” (1996, xviii), as a way of relating in a meaningful and sustainable way to the planet, and notes that, “if the philosophy of aesthetics cannot help us understand our reactions to environment, we will clearly have to turn elsewhere...” (Porteous, 1996, p. 23). Porteous is correct in saying that aesthetics can illuminate aspects of our relationships that we take for granted, but overlooks or underestimates the way in which aesthetics sets up a subject/object binary between perceiving people and objects.

Dwelling Poetically

Extending the aesthetic approach through an understanding of Heidegger’s ‘Dwelling’ can help resolve this. The aesthetics of Hausmann’s Paris represented a type of technological optimism. In this new Paris:

airy, exposed arterial thoroughfares created a new standard of an emerging metropolitan environment where access to air and sun came in response to current discoveries that traced the propagation of disease to local causes such as dirt, overcrowding, lack of sunlight and deficient air circulation. (Akkerman, 2000, p. 283)

The military applications of the new Paris streetscape have already been mentioned, but the ways in which design seeks to solve social ills also show the form of the city that those in power would like to establish. Aesthetics also provides a third, alternative approach for geographers. In addition to engaging the environment and the city optimistically, being used as a tool to naturalise social structures, and as a valuable critical approach that reveals taken for granted ideals and processes in the production of urban environments, aesthetics is an approach we carry with us that frames our interpretation of place. In *Landscapes of the Mind* (1990), Porteous talks about various “-scapes” related to sensory perception. His chapters on “Homescape,” and “Escape,” offer alternative ways of understanding the concepts of home, away, and journeying that have become normalised in spatial practice and social discourse. Home, community, security and a sense of place are all used to promote new places and urban developments, offering relief from the need to don a public persona and instead allow for a holistic, authentic identity to be expressed.

Porteous (1990) contributes some nuance to the understanding of home as “something not wholly positive, however. It can in its security, its routine, its well-knownness, become a prison” (p. 107). Being at home ceases to be equated with being at rest, and if our experience of home is particularly negative, it can colour our perceptions, and therefore aesthetic judgments, of other places. The novelist Graham Greene was criticised for describing nearly all his destinations negatively, projecting “A mental landscape of boredom, failure, distrust, betrayal, and despair, reflected in a physical landscape of run-down city streets, squalid dirty collars, stained beds with crumbs” (p. 108), onto his travel narratives. Porteous links this to Greene’s understanding of home,

the brown-belt, post-industrial cities of middle England: “Greene’s constant use of the symbol of the corrupted child suggests a further reason for travel, a distaste for the ‘civilised’ world that actively promotes such corruption, or is at best indifferent to it” (p. 129). Again, an aesthetic understanding of place leads to a horizon between wilderness and authenticity, and a corrupt and divided civilisation without a deeper understanding of how aesthetics can be used to link people positively to places.

In contrast to the aesthetic response to objects and places, which reinforces a subject-object duality, Art depends not on limited individual perspectives, but relies on shared communal understandings. Where Nietzsche (1974) declared, “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him” (p. 101), Heidegger implores that “Only a god can save us” (cited in Sheenan, 2010, p. 45). This historical progression of thought demonstrates the act of nihilism; losing the ability to appeal to transcendent or systemic structures in order to find meaning. The existential response is that while the old structures have lost authority and old practices can no longer satisfy a search for meaning, new but distinct communal practices, not mimetic or nostalgic, can provide a framework for shared meaning. Taylor (2007) characterises the shift to the modern, secular era as one which “for the first time widened the range of possible options [of belief], ending the era of ‘naïve’ religious faith” (p. 19). As with faith, so have we lost our naïvete as it concerns other pursuits of knowledge, and so much for the better. The way aesthetics works to normalise inequity and the constructed nature of many social phenomena are two ways that this thesis integrates this radical hermeneutic. Heidegger might have agreed with Taylor’s assessment that knowing how belief is formed has not changed the desire to understand how best to dwell or live full lives, and that the modern

era has marked a change from exterior, transcendent sources of meaning and authority to immanent, interior, and highly individualistic ones (Taylor, 2007, p. 15).

Heidegger recognises that appealing to traditional authority is a dead end, but argues that the dead “God” is the lost structures of meaning that leave a void in experience, and therefore only a “god” of shared meaning can save us. Dreyfus (1995) writes that this creation of meaning and communal experience “which later Heidegger calls ‘truth setting itself to work’ can be performed by a work of art” (p. 356). Art, for Heidegger, is both the *work* as enactment, and the *working*, the embodiment or process by which common meanings are created and shared. Ziarek (1998) elaborates on truth, removing it from the “metaphysics of representation, correctness and adequation. Instead, truth manifests itself in how art ‘works,’ ... Defined in this way, poetry is found not only in poetic texts, or in literature, but also in visual art, architecture, music, etc” (p. 167). Understanding art as an enacted object, and as something that reproduces the forces of its enactment by way of strengthening cultural meanings, finally opens the door for a non-elitist approach to discussing what constitutes a work of art, and paves the way for a situated and communal way of authentic dwelling.

Heidegger’s phenomenological theory of art makes possible an articulation of dwelling. While it is grounded in a certain ontology that presupposes the strength of existence that things possess and the ability to collectively comprehend these things, it nonetheless opens the door to new ways of building and sharing communal meaning that do not rely on external authorities. Art works and is worked communally to reveal shared truth, and dwelling, which through building is also an act of *poiesis* or revealing, a letting-be of truth in the built environment. An existential approach to place would be

impossible without this understanding. Places become and beget places within the same physical space as meanings are negotiated through shared interaction and physical enactments. “To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 149). What this means for New Urbanists and planners is that new places cannot be created by force, but must be allowed to develop. It is revealing the potential for possibility that allows places to evolve into dwellings. This brings us full circle to the way that tradition and the past are related. Sometimes presuppositions must be cleared away in order for something new to take hold. Stuart Elden (2001) elaborates on Heidegger’s earlier assertion,

In other words, the ‘tradition’ as received in the present covers over the past. This notion of deconstruction is therefore far from negative: it is an uncovering, a de-structuring, an archaeology of the levels of interpretations, the layers of sedimentation that have obscured the issues at stake, the matters themselves. (p. 13)

Tradition is no more authentic than any other kind of experience, and understanding truth may depend more on thoughtfully experiencing the present and scraping the detritus of interpretative history off the pressing issues of the day. If we are able to live in this poetic, revealing way, “Heidegger suggests, we will find ourselves *dwelling* in a postmodern world permeated by genuinely meaningful possibilities” (Thomson, 2010, p. 76, emphasis added).

How then can we understand what it is to dwell or to be at home? Is a certain type of facility required for dwelling, and are indigent people somehow alienated from the ability to dwell? Scholars such as Ingold (1995), Mukhopadhyay (2006), and Heidegger (1978) agree that no, there is no particular structure that is prerequisite to *dwelling*. Conversely, simply possessing a structure is no guarantee that its owner will dwell with it. What can be said about the character of dwelling? Heidegger (1978) writes that “*The*

fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing. ... something positive and takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own essence, when we return it to specifically to its essential being” (p. 327). While it may sound anti-existential to discuss the essence of things, what Heidegger is describing is the opposite of an eternal, unchangeable understanding of essence. The letting-be, letting-become, and the revealing that characterise poiesis and poetic dwelling do not presume a particular essence, but that an individual essence will be developed and revealed if allowed. Sparing is inextricably related to freedom and peace, and stands in opposition to ordering and enframing. Mukhopadhyay (2006) describes a resident of Calcutta, who, though poor by most measures, nevertheless considers himself fortunate in his proximity to the holy river, and his good fortune that he is better off than those who cannot sit under their own shelter and eat food prepared by their wives (p. 224). His sense of privilege, though limited, and his pride in his family and the place he lives demonstrates a dwelling unfamiliar to most North Americans. “And this sense of dwelling, the desire to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, is better viewed as a relentless and quotidian struggle rather than an idyllic, lyrical, bucolic equilibrium” (Mukhopadhyay, 2006, p. 225). While we have linked dwelling to New Urbanism in this study, and despite its association with gentrification, it should not be assumed that the dispossessed do not, or cannot dwell in these spaces.

Dwelling is not limited to particular places, but requires that a place offer protection and possibility for the nature of a person or thing to be revealed. A dwelling ought also to inspire its inhabitants to care for it and cherish it. This is of course a very privileged economic position to take in regards to meaning and human nature. In many

places people are bound by the necessity of work as described by Arendt (1958), or by circumstances that do not enable them to possess the types of aspirational structures that are typically considered home. Inequity may pose barriers to creating new dwelling-places in some instances, but these are still something that ought to be aspired to. Dwelling is experienced individually but mediated communally and has positive implications for communities beyond the immediate one in which development and design plans are being implemented in the placemaking process.

Aesthetics, Place and Identity

New Urbanism places explicit emphasis on transforming technological spaces into human-oriented places, and therefore implies that successful places must be situated within a particular social and physical context. Although New Urbanism moves away from making universal claims about the ideal city, it still promotes a particular view of what the good city, town, or neighbourhood ought to be. A situated perspective is necessary in order for a planner or researcher to articulate the value of a particular ideology, and helps describe the relationships between people and places in a way that transcends the problems of subjectivism. Lefebvre (1991) writes that his conceptual triad of the perceived, conceived, and lived spaces that produce and are produced by culture,

loses all force if it is treated as an abstract 'model'. If it cannot grasp the concrete (as distinct from the 'immediate'), then its import is severely limited, amounting to no more than that of one ideological mediation among others. (p. 40)

Similarly, the investigation into which social values and power relations are produced in cultures must take into account the spatial context. Though culture does not depend completely on the physical environment, as material determinists would posit, it is not

entirely independent of it. Elden (2001), commenting on Heidegger's conception of space, writes that,

The whole Cartesian approach to space is founded upon this notion of bodies extended in space, but Heidegger here suggests this concept was not found in early Greek thought ... The Greek understanding of place is far closer to experiential than mathematical. (p. 32)

This critique of the disembodied, abstract view of space that New Urbanism works against shows just how entrenched the Cartesian, rational understanding of space is in the western worldview. It shows the reasons why Duany, Plater-Zyberk, and other New Urbanists strive to design new communities that work against such cultural and physical abstraction in daily life. The idea that we can apprehend the world in this way and experience it meaningfully is the result of the aestheticisation of the scientific worldview. It suggests people are able to stand separate from other objects or landscapes and gain an objective understanding. In order to avoid this illusion of pure objectivity, Haraway (1988) says that we must realise that objectivity is simply a totalising and preferred perspective on the world:

So, not so perversely, objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision. This is an objective vision that initiates, rather than closes off, the problem of responsibility for the generativity of all visual practices. (p. 582)

Only by acknowledging a limited perspective can designers and planners make decisions that reflect the good desired by urban dwellers:

Indeed, whereas the guiding principle in the design of ideal cities had historically rested on the various notions of the equilibrium, one of the aspects of late modernity has been the cognizance of the urban disequilibrium: the authenticity in the ugliness, discordance and insanity of the city. (Akkerman, 2000, p. 281)

Relying on classical understandings of nature, harmony, beauty, and truth can be appealing inasmuch as these approaches enable us to lean on eternal, essential things

rather than having to engage faculties of judgment and discernment in making decisions about landscapes that we ultimately must be accountable for. Prioritising perspective does not mean conceding to a relativist worldview, but enables critical engagement and justification for place-sensitive, people-centered decision making.

New Urbanism can answer the challenges of relativism and aestheticisation by making explicit or reconfiguring its goals and objectives around the existential concerns of relating meaningfully to other people and the world of physical objects. Aesthetics as part of urban design, along with place and identity exist in a relationship that is at the centre of successful places. The inability of strictly modernist developments to foster spaces of possibility and potential, on an individual or collective level, gave rise to critical tools that examine spatial representation, including the metaphor of city as text and as something that can be interpreted by experts. While this approach is much more hermeneutic than ontological, concerned with the meaning of things in the landscape rather than describing the nature of a thing, the interpretation is visual and experiential, and as such provides ideal points of data for aesthetic approaches. Phenomenological approaches have dealt with the raw experience of such an interpreter or reader, and postmodern and non-representational theories locate the interpreter and their knowledge within a network of actions and affects. The aesthetic critique asks by whom and for whom was a particular aesthetic enacted, and whether the resulting place or landscape permits existentially meaningful possibilities. Rather than approaching landscape as a representation of value and meaning, this approach seeks answers by examining the experiences of people in particular places.

Part of the reliance on past forms of cities and neighbourhoods is based on a belief that those places were somehow more conducive to authentic experiences for those living there. In *Planning the Good Community*, Jill Grant (2006) writes that “a close reading of *Suburban Nation* reveals a preoccupation with ‘true’, ‘real’, and ‘authentic’ neighborhoods and places throughout the text” (p. 53). This is a problem when it has been argued that much of the tradition present in New Urbanism is in fact manufactured. Grant (2002) notes that in many Canadian New Urbanist projects the “new ‘towns’ are in danger of becoming caricatures of a real community” (p. 78). Given that aesthetics has traditionally worked to naturalise social conditions and the subject-object binary, how can New Urbanism approach the authentic? The story of a community is something that is continuously reproduced through a dialectic with, or the working-out of, a work of art. Dreyfus (1995) argues that “For everyday practices to give meaning to our lives and to unite us in a community, they must be focused and held up to the practitioners” (353). Initially creating a work of art is not the meaningful act. When the work of art represents something practiced or an ideal held by a community, whether it is via traditional storytelling means or more avant-garde approaches, it opens that thing up to reflection by the wider community. In many cases, works of art highlight and reinforce positive social practices, but many other works, including entire movements such as Dada or Surrealism, force a society’s inheritance of evil or absurdity into the public discourse. These stories are the stories about each other that we tell to each other, continually co-performing individual and collective identities. Dreyfus (1995) sums this up, “Heidegger calls this interpretive function ‘truth setting itself to work’, and anything that performs this function he calls a work of art” (353). In this view, both specific enactments of public art

and New Urbanism, as well as an artistic approach to the city as a whole, recognise the role that art plays as a locus for community. We tell each other our stories, and participate in new ones through public art, and well-considered urban design becomes a means by which communities may be encouraged to interact. The use of traditional neighbourhood forms, which have evolved over the past century, is an integral part of our urban story. In fostering and revealing these types of developments, New Urbanism is a placemaking paradigm that aspires to dwelling.

Chapter 4: Methods and Methodologies

Introduction

In studying and illuminating the challenges to placemaking posed by modernism and the technological worldview, the research tools we use must rely on different theoretical and practical approaches than those that have resulted in the problems to which we are responding. The ills of sprawl and the depersonalisation of urban spaces cannot be remedied through the same processes that created them. Kaplan (1964) describes this phenomenon, “I call it the law of the instrument, and it may be formulated as follows: Give a small boy a hammer, and he will find that everything he encounters needs pounding” (p. 28). Modernism made the city efficient in many ways, and services in many cities have never been as comprehensive. These approaches have also entrenched gaps between the very rich and very poor, created many ugly urban developments, placed unsustainable burdens on local environments and economies, and created spaces void of existential possibility. As Lewis Mumford wrote in 1928, “in their desire to plan and design on modern lines for the modern man, some of the continental designers have already caricatured the possibilities of our present mode of existence, and in providing for the modern, have forgotten the man” (p. 297). Approaches to urban design such as New Urbanism, which work to shape both the physical and social aspects of space demonstrate that good urban placemaking and design is linked to positive personal existential and experiential interactions with places. Existential issues require different investigational approaches than examinations of quantifiable phenomena such

as density, traffic patterns, or service delivery, and cannot be solved by doubling down on commitments to efficiency and utility. While it may be in the best interests of planners and politicians to occasionally take a disinterested approach to the design of places within their cities, the success or failure of individual places depends on the interested, embodied perspectives of the people who dwell there.

Indeed, the architectural response to modernism was as much as ethical one as an aesthetic one. Many recognised the revolutionary and reactionary ideas present in the existential and phenomenological work of scholars such as Heidegger, for whom “the material inadequacy of housing in the modern world was but a sign of a deeper metaphysical crisis” (Woessner, 2003, p. 29). Addressing these crises spurred the development of new approaches in architectural theory and practice by those who saw the degradations of the World War II as the result of an alienating Modernism. The aesthetic-phenomenological approach to place, which this thesis has developed based on the existential (as opposed to transcendental) phenomenology of Heidegger, works contra the forces of technologism that dominate the shaping of and dwelling within the physical world. These forces seek to order and reconfigure with the result that, “everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise to one final delusion: It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself....*but* thus can never encounter only himself” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 27). In their stead, successful places seek to *let be*, and encourage *dwelling* over ordering. Heidegger argues in response to technology that, “revealing lays claim to the arts most primally; so that they for their part may expressly foster the growth of the saving power” (p. 35). The phenomenological method, which will be elaborated on below, seeks to reveal rather than

interrogate, and is thus deeply related to dwelling and poeisis. According to Yi Fu Tuan (1974), when we can no longer reach out to the world, what we lose “is the gentle, unconscious involvement with the physical world that prevailed in the past when the tempo of life was slower” (p. 96). It is neither an aesthetic indulgence nor clinging to an imagined romantic past to recognise that an overly technological worldview disconnects us from understanding the essence of things, and simultaneously reduces human beings to objects.

The Importance of Method

This thesis is not a disinterested, depoliticised description of the phenomenon of place. It focuses on one place in particular, describing it through the experiences of site users, and evaluating it based on a conception of public space and the good city using existential and phenomenological ideas. This study explores the genealogy of the *Good City*, and how aesthetics and design can contribute to new conceptions and implementations of the city that remedy the existential ills of modernism. One site in particular will be studied to determine the degree to which its success or failure has been influenced by its design, aesthetics, and opportunity to engage meaningfully with the space. Researchers in geography and sociology concerned with these questions need to acknowledge that their studies depend on the investigation of human experience and meaning, necessitating a familiarity with a variety of philosophical and methodological approaches. McDowell (1997) writes that, “Recognizing different ways of knowing does not mean abrogating responsibility for distinguishing between them” (p. 124) and that geographers need to develop “Principled Positions” (p. 125). It is from these principled positions that a researcher can make a claim to knowledge in the face of the “quagmire of

relativism” (p. 124) that is encountered when research recognises the affects that human agency and interpretation have on it. The current academic milieu poses a challenge to this, as those who are reluctant to identify with an ideological or theoretical perspective are seen as more sophisticated. It is not an act of naïveté to choose such a position, rather it is the result of careful research and self-reflection. The geographical questions and arguments presented in this thesis are rooted in cultural and social phenomenon including neighbourhoods, placemaking, and pre-modernist approaches to urban design. These topics are implicitly about values and how judgments ought to be made. The unique intersection of each research participant’s values and experiences, as well as an understanding of placemaking informed by the geographical and philosophical literature reviewed earlier, will guide this case study. It is the role of this methodological framework to reliably access and describe these places and experiences.

Existential-phenomenology is one approach that provides a meaningful framework for interpreting life experience, and though it does not presuppose any moral categories, the facticity of our embodied experiences and identity renders pure moral relativism unsuitable for living a meaningful, authentic life. In contrast to other postmodern philosophical approaches that attempt to address the danger of meaninglessness caused by relativism by positing a real, extant world that is apprehended primarily through our senses, existentialism does not prioritise sensory data over experiential data, and thus provides a more philosophically robust means of interpreting social symbols and phenomena. A human geographer must be able to make value judgments about findings, and recognise their agency as researcher, the agency of the research subjects, and critique the meaning and relevance of purely positivist data. Sajay

Samuel (2011) says that, “if we can’t critique objectivism, then I become a theory” (Cayley, 2011). By this he means that if the only way to understand the world is through strictly scientific terms, I become an abstraction, rather than a meaningful individual. If the only choices available as a researcher are to ignore myself, or become a meaningless object, then I am faced with an existential crisis. Samuel says that we can overcome this crisis, and find a critical vantage point from which to critique science by reclaiming reason, experience, and common sense. He defines common sense without resorting to romanticism and irrationalism, as “a faculty that permits judgment” (Cayley, 2011). This experiential approach allows us to move beyond explanations that serve only to explain the how of things to what Schiller described as “nourishing intellectual activities with the realities of life” (Cloke, 1991, p. 60).

Phenomenology as Methodology

Existential phenomenology is a philosophical approach that aims to connect and blur the distinctions between rational, internal knowledge, and the knowledge gained through experiencing the realities of the world outside of our selves. Because phenomenology is concerned with the individual experience of a thing or phenomenon, some critics characterise it as being a relativistic approach, which has a negative affect on the perceived validity and the ability to make generalisations about phenomena or experiences from knowledge gained through this approach. It is ironic that the positivist approach has contributed more to the rise of relativism in culture due to its recognition of only certain, scientific approaches as valid. This has removed areas of experience such as ethics and aesthetics from the realm of the knowable or meaningful. Phenomenology, although more concerned with specific interactions than structuralist approaches, does

not go so far as to say that reality is ultimately unknowable. Quite the opposite, the phenomenological approach from pure consciousness works as a critical tool for revealing the assumptions we carry, with the goal of describing in totality the essence of things and processes. Indeed, Seamon (2000) highlights two assumptions at the heart of the existential-phenomenological approach, a view of “Person and world as intimately part and parcel,” and “A Radical Empiricism”:

In this sense, phenomenology supplants the idealist and realist divisions between person and world with a conception in which the two are *indivisible*--a person-world whole that is one rather than two. A major phenomenological challenge is to describe this person-world intimacy in a way that legitimately escapes any subject-object dichotomy. (para. 26)

Heidegger goes as far as to posit an ontological structure, or underlying reality, that exists apart from consciousness – quite the opposite of a solipsistic philosophy (Walmsley, 1974, p. 102). It is this reality, this thing-ness apparent in our lives and interactions that pose us challenges in thinking about knowledge and research in geography.

In his *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant described this difficulty, and in his mind, failure to prove the validity of knowledge gained or mediated through the external world as the ongoing scandal of philosophy. One way that structuralist, post-structuralist and post-modern theories have avoided dealing with this is to acknowledge that subjectivity is always present in apprehending the world. Things that exist, exist only by virtue of being created or made up by common agreement, including knowledge of the world beyond our bodies. Because existence and knowledge are culturally mediated properties, their production is fertile ground for theorists concerned with power, access, and justice. That many things in our world are recognised as constructed, yet also contested (and worth contesting), illustrates that “the ‘real’ and the ‘really made up’ are synonyms” (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 9). “If life is constructed,” asks Taussig

(1993), “then how come it appears so immutable?” (p.xvi) Phenomenology responds to this by centering our understanding of ourselves and other things within our own bodies. We perceive through our bodies which weave us together with the rest of the world. For Heidegger (1996), the “ 'scandal of philosophy' is not that this proof has yet to be given, but that *such proofs are expected and attempted again and again*” (p. 196). It is time, Heidegger believes, that we centre our philosophies of being, our ontologies, not on the internal life of the mind or on mental processes. We must be aware that, as Merleau-Ponty (2002) wrote, appropriately for geographers, “there would be no space for me at all if I had no body” (p. 117). Contra Descartes, it is not our mind or our rationality that we may wholly rely on, but, to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty, it is our bodies that are always there for us. This awareness encourages us to trust and share our knowledge and experience of the world.

Why then not base the theoretical framework of this thesis in Non-Representational Theory, characterised by “a concern for the practical, embodied ‘composition’ of subjectivities” (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 8) instead of existential phenomenology? NRT, like existentialism, is concerned with practice and the experience of the body in relation to other things. It describes how intersubjective practice creates and enforces the symbols and meanings we encounter, though it is less concerned with the value of these meanings themselves. A key reason I have integrated existential phenomenology into my approach is that I believe it is better suited to the questions presented in this study, and a fresh engagement with Heidegger will enrich further post-structuralist explorations into place and placemaking. While NRT and other newer theoretical approaches look to the way that meanings emerge from the performances of

various human and non-human actors, this study is concerned with meanings as things in and of themselves and not merely as the by-products of other interactions. These approaches have forwarded Foucault's project of understanding the relationships between knowledge and power as constructed things into the realm of meaning and symbolism. Rizvi (2005) argues that "Foucault actually wrote spatial histories" (p. 178), recognising that spatiality and temporality are not binary opposites. This may be the key idea Foucault refers to when he describes Heidegger as the "Essential Philosopher," and Elden (2002) agrees, writing "[p]lace is historical: history is platial" (91). Relegating interpretation and representation to a level subordinate to process and practice deproblematizes the question of how we ought to determine *the good* as it relates to human life, dwelling, and city building, and misses an opportunity to reflect on representations themselves – the working out of the work of art. Although Foucault would agree that history is a construction, recognising the temporal dimension of places and practices is of equal importance to the topological, relational approach of NRT. The act of doing history or genealogy recognises that our humanity, the *being* of being human, is entangled with both the where and when from which we come. Meanings matter, and their historical weight influence place and practice.

While, like NRT, this study is concerned with the "composition of subjectivities" (Anderson & Harrison, 2010, p. 8), a Heideggerian conception of meaning in the built environment takes an approach that doesn't rely on the maxim that "certain organisations of objects in space, *do not* 'express' or 'stand-for' certain cultural meanings, values and models ... rather they are *enactments*" (p. 9). Instead, this approach is based on an agreement to take meaning seriously, to acknowledge it as thing of being, and to discuss

the ways that art and place both work to mediate meaning communally, and also require a sense of meaningfulness in order to fully come into being. One way that phenomenology avoids relativism is by acknowledging that, “Meanings are fully rarely private, ... phenomenological man is unavowedly social. His life-world is an intersubjective one of shared meanings, of fellow men” (Ley, 1976, p. 505). Intersubjectivity and the recognition that reality may exist beyond social or cultural comprehension allows phenomenology to provide a unique perspective in a world dominated by positivism while maintaining a philosophical grounding that allows researchers to defend the validity and applicability of their data. Seamon (2000) provides further grounds to accept the findings of phenomenological research:

the phenomenologist *pays attention* to specific instances of the phenomenon with the hope that these instances, in time, will point toward more general qualities and characteristics that accurately describe the essential nature of the phenomenon as it has presence and meaning in the concrete lives and experiences of human beings. (para. 14)

So far, this thesis has avoided the language of generalization as it relates to its findings. Its value lies not in the discovery of universal, unifying codes of practice, but in the essence of specifics that can inform future decisions. Instead of saying, “this is the way all things are,” we can say, “this is the way that these things are, and have become.” It becomes impossible to avoid stating beliefs on what best practices for life entail. In regards to Heidegger’s early work, Woessner (2003) writes that he “had always maintained, especially in *Being and Time*, that his philosophical work was prior to ethics, that one could only confront the question of ethics after properly settling the question of Being” (p.26). In later work, such as *The Question Concerning Technology* and the *Letter on Humanism* (1944) we clearly see a development in thought regarding the fullness of life, stemming from his earlier ontology. This thesis, in its limited scope, works to

develop an understanding of the places, people and things being studied, and come to a method of evaluation based on Heidegger's existential questions.

Data Collection Methods

Despite the attention paid to developing a rationale for using a phenomenological approach to studying place, describing a particular course of action still presents certain difficulties. This thesis is not interested in *place* only as an abstract concept, but also in the description of one particular place, the Diana Krall Plaza. While the research gathered in this case study contains more than one perspective, it is important to remember that these experiences are not the phenomenon being studied. These experiences, mediated bodily and communicated through thought and language, form the basis for coming to as complete an understanding as possible about the phenomenon being studied. This collected experience, as a whole, also becomes a phenomenon that is worth investigating. With this in mind, data collection can be approached in such a way that will encourage people to share meaningful information about their experiences of place, and then expanding on these descriptions by relating them to sense and memory. The ways in which these aesthetic experiences are formed, and the meanings associated with positive and negative experiences of place provide insight into the reasons a particular placemaking effort might succeed or fail. The questions and topics for discussion with interview participants have been created carefully in order to remain true to the phenomenological approach to place, and demonstrate a new investigational perspective that will prove useful in both planning and evaluating place and placemaking efforts.

Sampling for this project will be bounded spatially due to the nature of a place-specific, locally contextualised case study. Relph (1976) provides a useful working

definition of place, “the static physical setting, the activities, and the meanings – constitute the three basic elements of the identity of places” (p. 41) that can be referred to when bounding the case study site. It is important to acknowledge that this definition is only a starting point. It refers to an idealised static physical setting, which in practice may have borders that are permeable and fluctuating, and physical and social characteristics that are changed via discourse with the place users embodied practices. Relph’s definition acknowledges that place is necessarily and inextricably bound to meaning and experience. Although it may be considered dated by post-structural researchers, it importantly recognises, through its reference to meaning, the historical nature of place. The areal delineation in this definition serves as one of the three frames that Steeves (2000) suggests when organising sampling. He writes, “there are numerous ways of organizing a discussion on sampling; one way is to consider the phenomenon of interest in one of three frames: the experiences of place, the experiences of events in time, and ways of talking about experiences” (cited by Cohen et al., 2000, p. 46). These frames correspond nicely to Relph’s three constitutive elements of place that were previously mentioned. The basic elements of place as described by Relph do not prescribe any one type of action, and allow for any number of types of social practice and participants within the context of a particular physical setting. With this in mind, my sampling will be purposive in nature, rather than random, and bounded to a specific physical area.

The selection of interview participants was driven by the case study’s concern with the description and meaning of specific spatial and experiential phenomena. The main research instrument used in the study is the phenomenological interview, designed to access the experiences and spatial memories of interview subjects. These subjects

include people from various stakeholder groups including site residents and users, site developers, and city officials. In addition, my own perspective as a researcher, and a resident of Nanaimo for over two decades, have been a valuable asset to the project, and my own goals, values, and conceptions of the *Good City* and good design informed by research and review form part of the framework and motivation for undertaking this study. This data includes my own first person observation notes and photography. “Very often the phenomenological researcher uses the first-person, existential, and hermeneutic approaches in combination,” writes Seamon (2000, para. 101), and that is true of the research undertaken in this thesis. The existential research approach has already been mentioned, and two of the groups, site developers and city officials, also overlap into what is traditionally the realm of the researcher, the hermeneutic-phenomenological research approach. Normally when urban landscape is approached as text, “the creator of the text is not typically available to comment on its making or significance” (Seamon, 2000, para. 90). In this study I have been fortunate enough to interview people involved in the legislation and design of the case study site, and their perspective and experience provide valuable intersubjective corroboration of my own, as well as the experiences of the other interview subjects.

Husserl, one of the fathers of phenomenology helps us describe the phenomenological method for gathering and analyzing data, by defining phenomenology as “the descriptive science of the essences and actions of consciousness” (Sadala & Adorno, 2001, p. 285). Consciousness enables awareness of things, including an awareness of our own feeling, thinking selves. We are aware of being and otherness, and of the interactions between our selves, our bodies and minds, and things that are not *us*.

We are aware of our selves, and that which is not our selves, but are in some ways co-creators of our consciousness and the meanings that we ascribe to things as individuals and communities. By intentionally focusing consciousness on our relationships with other beings, we can begin to recognise our preconceptions and biases, and attempt to bracket them out as part of the interpretive process. The goal is not to remove our own consciousness from the analysis in order to place us in another person's subjective shoes, but to allow us to try and reach a more complete understanding of a phenomenon using descriptions and experiences informed by multiple consciousnesses. Phenomenology is unique in that it does not claim to be able to understand the essence of every object in its totality. Rather, it accepts the existence of a preconscious world and recognises that consciousness is only conscious when there is something to be conscious of, and therefore the complete understanding of an object's essence is something that must be achieved intersubjectively. Indeed, a phenomenologist ought to have no desire to make the same claims to objectivity that characterise a positivist approach to research. I strongly agree with Harvey and Holly (1981) when they write that, "if phenomenological geographers do not constantly keep in mind the philosophical origins of phenomenology as a radical critique of positivism and scientism, then we are likely to find ourselves participating in some mongrel methodology that gives us numerical models of topophilia or experiential expositions of urban systems" (p. 112-113).

The Phenomenological Interview

The main research method unique to phenomenology is the phenomenological interview. It is similar to the semi-structured interview used in other human research approaches, though it differs in understanding the researcher's positionality with regards

to the interview subject. As a researcher, the goal of this type of interview is not to inhabit or mimic the perspective of another person, but to access that person's experience in such a way as to shed some unique light on the place being studied. Some scholars question the validity of the interview as a data gathering technique, and state that, "there is no such thing as objectivity in social science research. Rather they argue that all research work is explicitly or implicitly informed by the experiences, aims, and interpretations of the researcher" (Valentine, 2005, pg. 112). The phenomenological approach addresses this criticism by taking the view that, given a pre-existing, and understandable world, the interviewer must enable the subject to feel free to impart a detailed description of their experiences. For this reason the researcher and subject must be seen as equals during the interview process. While both researcher and subject are equal in terms of validity of experience, the phenomenological researcher will often be in an asymmetrical power relationship with the subject. It is the researcher that has the most to gain from the relationship, as access to multiple experiential descriptions will help the researcher understand the phenomenon in a more complete way than any individual subjects or participants. While the phenomenological interview uses descriptive questions similar to other methodologies, researchers using this methodology are cautioned against using "why" questions. This is because these questions encourage interviewees to think causally, rather than experientially, and, "can be perceived as requests for rationalization and can engender feelings of prejudgement and defensive responses" (Thompson et al., 1989, pg. 138). Instead, Thompson et al. (1989) suggests follow up questions designed to help the subject elaborate on their experience. Rather than asking why something happened, it is helpful to describe an experience that describes the thing happening.

Questions that deal with abstraction and symbolisation, as well as those that imply causality, are not useful. The former creates a layer of abstraction between the interviewee and the reality of their lived experience, and the latter moves the dialogue from the realm of the phenomenological to the Aristotelian, unending question of “why?” These types of questions belong in a positivist approach, where the ability to abstract from repeatable, experiential data is essential to the process of inductive generalisation.

In this case study, participants were first asked how they arrived downtown, by foot or by car, what their purpose in downtown was, and then finally, what their pathway in or around the plaza was, and what aesthetic features stood out in their memory. Follow up questions asked why participants thought these were important, what feelings the site aesthetics invoked, and finally whether they felt at “home” in the development. If the participant was a planner or designer and had a deeper immersion in the study of urban form and history, they were asked additional questions regarding the rationale behind the implementation and the reasons for the success or failure of the plaza. There was no one definition of home used in the study, rather it was defined and explained by each participant. Discussion often turned to the unintended topic of how they physically felt in the case study site. This ought to remind us to keep in mind that we, and the subjects of this case study, are not *merely* consciousnesses observing the world around us. We are bodies – limbs, organs, and memories moving through space, in and out of balance with other objects in space. Patterson (2009) recognises this challenge, and states that this is fertile ground in the new geographies, and that “the ‘nonrepresentational’ or the ‘more-than-representational’ must find innovative ways to transcode, evoke, or somehow make thematic those underrepresented, assumed, unproblematised realms of everyday,

embodied sensory experience” (p. 563). In this way, Heidegger can supplement work done by researchers working with Non-Representational Theories in placemaking by bringing back to the table a focus on existential topics and questions of meaning.

Interpretation of Findings

Analysis and interpretation of the phenomenological interview differs from traditional qualitative analysis. Normally an interview may be open coded and analyzed to reveal the presence of themes in both edic and emic categories. The phenomenological method works to reveal the essences of things by focusing on the meanings and experiences of the subject in their own life-world, and therefore “relies on the respondent’s own terms and category systems rather than the researchers” (Thompson et al., 1989, p. 140). Thompson et al. (1989) also lists two other foundations of the phenomenological approach to interpreting data. First, the autonomy of the text, and second, bracketing. It is phenomenologically important that the text of the research data, or interview transcription, be considered autonomous. Any attempt to externally verify the respondent’s experience moves the line of questioning from “what” happened, to “how” or “why” it happened. An autonomous text ought also to be free from any theoretical interpretation that creates a layer of abstraction between the respondent’s experience and the understanding of the thing itself. Finally, bracketing is necessary in order for researchers to remove their own experiences and meanings, also known as edic categories, from the initial approach to the data. Acknowledging that any particular experience of a place or object is only a partial experience of that thing, Seamon (2000) writes:

reliability can only be had through what can be called *intersubjective corroboration*--in other words, can other interested parties find in their own life and experience, either directly or vicariously, what the phenomenologist has found in her own work? In this sense, the phenomenologist's interpretations are no more and no less than interpretive *possibilities*. (para. 116)

The specific methodological approach to interpretation consists of phenomenological description, reduction, and analysis, as outlined by Sadala and Adorno (2003). The description of a phenomenon consists of the raw interview data, assuming that the phenomenological stance, termed the *epoché* (Sadala & Adorno 2003), has been maintained during the interview. To achieve this, the researcher must focus on generating descriptions, and not explanations, of phenomenon from the interview subjects. The second step, phenomenological reduction, consists of three separate moments. First, the researcher brackets, or examines the experience data without allowing personal interpretations to interfere. Although difficult, the researcher attempts to read the interview data without a guiding interpretive framework. This process can be made easier by employing an interpretive group, though in this study I am the only investigator engaging directly with the data. Second, topics and themes are identified within the data, called *units of significance*. Finally, the researcher will examine the subject's own understanding of their experiences, an emic approach to determining significant data points. Phenomenological interpretation, the third step in the phenomenological method, consists of four phases: locating the visible and invisible elements of meaning in the subjects' experience, the "radical cogito," or attempt by the researcher to immerse himself in the experience, the "manifestation of preconscious phenomena," and the determination of the meaning that the particular experience holds for the research subject (Sadala & Adorno, 2003, p. 291). Following this interpretation, case study findings are analysed via the units of meaning located in each individual transcript.

Units of meaning are broader categories, of which the units of significance are the atomic elements. The researcher should then have an understanding of each subject's unique, idiographic experience. The final stage of construction moves from idiographic to a nomothetic analysis. This is not to say that this research will generate or shed light on the laws or theories that describe the relationships between being in the world, but will attempt to reach an understanding as complete as possible of the phenomenon in question. This is done by moving from an emphasis on understanding each individual perspective, to understanding what each individual perspective contributes to a greater whole. The goal of this transition is not to make an attempt at generalising from the individual data, but to more clearly describe the phenomenon that is being studied (Sadala & Adorno, 2003, p. 291). Units of meaning that converge across multiple data points are grouped into themes and then formed into broader categories in order to “cast light on the data gotten, on the knowledge and on the data to be studied related to the theme, looking for broadening the discussion and the understanding of the scientific knowledge's universe” (Sadala & Adorno, 2003, p. 291).

Chapter 5: Experiencing the Diana Krall Plaza

Introduction

This chapter will describe the field research performed in order to put into practice the aesthetic-phenomenological approach to placemaking developed in this thesis. It will demonstrate the value of using the notion of *dwelling*, a measure of human thriving, as the anchor of a criterion for making judgments about the success or failure of placemaking efforts. In addition, the case study provides a specific example, already rooted in place, of an enacted development plan. The interview data combined with first person research will develop as complete an understanding as possible of this development, the Diana Krall Plaza in downtown Nanaimo. The understanding imparted through investigations will enable site-specific recommendations that, because of the approach used in evaluating them, impart a deeper understanding of the physical and social processes related to creating a sense of place. I also aim to develop an understanding of both the study site as a phenomenon, but also of each participant's experience. The task of understanding, as opposed to generalisation (Patterson, 2009, p. 776), is to bring a "deeper level of awareness which arises from drawing close enough to a person to become a sympathetic participant within her lifeworld and to have her integrally involved in one's own" (Rowles, 1980, cited in Patterson, 2009, p. 775). While I cannot claim to have become particularly close with any of my research participants, the site under investigation, and the city in which it is found are both integral parts of the fabric of my own lifeworld, and the experience of interacting with them and exploring

these intersubjectivities have provided me with a deeper connection and more nuanced understanding of this place.

The results, experiences, and understanding gained in this process, and communicated in this thesis also illustrate potential directions for future research. The first section of this chapter will provide a brief background on the language and history of key Nanaimo city planning documents that have factored into the enactment of the Diana Krall Plaza. This square, a plaza in the heart of downtown Nanaimo, will be described in detail, drawing on the physical descriptions and experiential perspectives from the interview data. These documents are publicly available through the City of Nanaimo, and will be supplemented by first person research and photography. After readers have been familiarised with the specifics of the look, feel, and location of the site, descriptions based on the subjects' experiences will be explored. Various experiential themes are revealed, related in particular to the areas of dwelling and aesthetics discussed earlier in the thesis. This framework will be used in converging multiple experiences into units of meaning from which judgments about the way that successful placemaking depends on how well a development deals with existential and aesthetic concerns. Finally, this chapter will demonstrate the susceptibility of landscapes and places to investigation and interpretation through the aesthetic-phenomenological approach.

Community Planning in Nanaimo

Like all municipalities in the province of British Columbia, Nanaimo receives its authority to enact bylaws through the Local Government Act, particularly section 26 which deals with Planning and Land Use Management. The City of Nanaimo has used their powers to develop a number of documents related to land used, the most prominent

of which is the 147-page Zoning Bylaw no. 4500, dated June 12, 2012. As the bylaw is longer than this thesis, it will not be discussed in all its lurid detail. It is interesting and worthwhile to note, however, that the bylaw is introduced, after the requisite legalese, with these words:

WHEREAS the principal purpose of this Bylaw is to guide the natural growth of the municipality in a systematic and orderly way for the ultimate benefit of the community as a whole by ensuring that the various uses made of land and structures in the municipality develop in proper relationship to one another; (City of Nanaimo, 2013)

Already key words and phrases emerge. The bylaw's purpose is to guide the city's *natural* growth, and makes reference to the *systematic and orderly* virtues of modernism. Finally, it concludes that these tenets will allow the elements of the city to develop *in proper relationship to one another*. Despite the ideological hodgepodge of latent modernity and teenaged existentialism exhibited here, there comes an echo of Heidegger's concern for right relationship between things. This is supposed to develop a method and approach for creating a vibrant city. Whereas Duncan and Duncan (2001), as well as Duncan and Lambert (2002) criticised a wilderness aesthetic for naturalising certain class and political relationships, this paragraph naturalises city growth as an expected and virtuous outcome. It takes a historical trajectory, envisioned by most as a sprawling, technological, and paternalistic view of progress, and presents it as natural. Expansion is therefore normalised as the way that things ought to relate to one another, continually pushing outward and neglecting to look inward.

This attitude is preserved in Nanaimo's urban palimpsest. The 1980s and 1990s saw an increase in the focus of development on suburban retail shopping centres, and strip malls with large, big box anchor tenants. Rather than augment the downtown core, these spaces of consumption became, for better or worse, new neighbourhood centres.

Due to their size, most were built on undeveloped land outside the core of the city, and Nanaimo's upper-middle class purchased the suburbs that sprang up in this periphery. For the last two decades, proponents of urban revitalisation and the value of a higher density, community-oriented city core have had to battle the aesthetic of suburbanism – the idea that single family, cul-de-sac development is safer, more secure, a better investment, and forms better communities. The requirement for systematic and orderly division of land use is also aestheticised, and becomes axiomatic – order is natural, and therefore, as something that is the natural result of human beings creating the built environment, can be understood as a way of achieving the public good.

Lessons from many cities have taught us that systematic order does not necessarily equal efficiency, and is certainly no guarantee that a city or community will be a success. Bylaw 4500 offers many detailed descriptions of land uses and describes regions of the city in which they are appropriate. It may be that the zoning document has grown in size as it has attempted to deal with the wide variety of activity that a small west coast city attracts. From its burgeoning artist community, to its lobby of activists promoting small scale, urban farming, Nanaimo is an example of Euclidean zoning stretched to its limit. The 62 zones prescribed in the bylaw, not mentioning the hundreds of itemised land uses, demonstrate an attempt at nuance and variety in approaching zoning, but hardly epitomise efficiency. Nanaimo's Planning and Development department provides an "Overview of the Rezoning Process" document to applicants, outlining a best-case scenario of 8 months from application to approval. Developers I have spoken with over the course of this research have indicated that the time frame is typically much longer. While city council and the Plan Nanaimo Advisory Committee,

the two groups who must give approval to a rezoning or variance application, meet regularly, referrals and studies by internal and external agencies tend not to work well with the timeline set by council for first, second, and third readings, resulting in delays. And, as in most municipalities, a variance board is often reluctant to rush into approving an application for fear of setting a legal precedent that could be used by other applicants. Any progressive neighbourhood development project in Nanaimo therefore faces an uphill battle as it must navigate the legal requirements set out by city council, and decades-old preference held by many citizens for the insular, single-family status symbols owned by the well-heeled in Nanaimo's north end.

In addition to the zoning bylaws, development in Nanaimo is driven by the Official Community Plan (OCP) titled planNanaimo, and depending on the region within the city, various neighbourhood plans. Like zoning bylaws, the power to create OCPs is spun off from the province to municipalities by the Local Government Act. Where the zoning bylaw is guided only by the principles mentioned above – to allow the elements of the city to develop in proper relation to one another, the Local Government Act states that the OCP must provide, “objectives and policies to guide decisions on planning and land use management, within the area covered by the plan.” The OCP moves planning away from the more abstract approach of zoning towards a situated, local view of the city, requiring that the city include, at a minimum, approximate locations, amounts, types, and densities of various land uses. In addition, an OCP must address social and environment issues such as affordable housing and greenhouse gas emissions. In short, an OCP is a values-driven, visual approach to the city, similar to the City as a *Work of Art*, a highly managed, top down understanding the Good City.

The tools used in public consultation to help prepare a new OCP contain their own aesthetic bias. Design charettes are useful in educating the participating public about options, and presenting attractive urban design helps overcome objections to other project goals. They also reinforce an ocularcentric aesthetics, in which people are encouraged to embrace a dualistic worldview rather than an intersubjective, experiential approach to physical urban space. The process of mapping enforces its own aesthetic, which leads to an understanding of the city as a relatively homogenous system with differences recognised as a functional part of the whole. The cartographic aesthetic also naturalises an embedded calculative, rational valuation of the city, wherein the city is seen primarily as a spatio-economic engine. The concern with the regional context and goals of the OCP allows connections and design guidelines within the city to be understood as aesthetic linkages resulting in a kind of nuanced, slightly variable aesthetic of sameness. Whether or not this aesthetic approach to the city has positive or negative effects is very much up to the types of objectives outlined in an individual OCP. It depends on both the specificity with which it does so, and its openness to engage aesthetic, social, and community concerns which may not have been prevalent at the time of its adoption. In other words, do strategies in an OCP create territory or encourage the rise of places of being that relate to various subcultures within the city, and places of letting-be where multiple individual and social expressions of activity may be possible, and none are specifically required?

Nanaimo's OCP, adopted in 2008, features seven goals and a framework for achieving them. These goals are: Manage Urban Growth, Build a More Sustainable Community, Encourage Social Enrichment, Promote a Thriving Economy, Improve

Mobility and Servicing, and Work Towards a Sustainable Nanaimo. These statements are similar to the language used in New Urbanism's "Canons of Sustainable Architecture and Urbanism" (CSAU). The OCP must also relate to the Regional Growth Strategy (RGS), a plan adopted by the regional district, and not just the City of Nanaimo itself, and developed in cooperation with neighbouring regional districts. Like the OCP, the RGS differs from the tenets of New Urbanism in that its development was not motivated by a desire for social or environmental change, but a need to address these issues recognising their importance to the electorate, within a mandate to promote economic growth, and manage the physical growth of the region based on environmental constraints. The language used in the goals of the RGS is the most similar of any of these umbrella documents to that of New Urbanism, but it is continually bounded in the economic sphere. For example, the first three goals set the objectives "to limit sprawl and focus development within well defined urban containment boundaries," "encourage mixed use communities that include places to live, work, learn, play, shop, and access services," and "protect and strengthen the region's rural economy and lifestyle." These are not so different from the goals of New Urbanism to encourage mixed use, restructure public policy, and maintain the city's "fragile relationship with its agrarian hinterland" (Regional District of Nanaimo, 2003, p. 6). The fundamental difference, and I think a failing perpetuated by regional boosterism, is that while New Urbanism views these goals as part of the response to the challenge of building communities, local and regional government sees these goals, and indeed community building itself, as challenges arising from continued economic and physical growth, processes that have been aestheticised on the landscape to the point that to promote them is to promote the public good. While it

would likely mean political suicide, the mayor and council need to approach the future with eyes wide open, going back to first principles and ask what strong communities (in the aesthetic-phenomenological terms used in this thesis) will look like in Nanaimo. Zoning provides a useful service, but local government must always be willing to ask difficult questions that may not have certain answers about the nature of dwelling and use these tools in the service of enabling their citizens to lead fulfilling lives; economically, physically, spiritually, and artistically.

The Diana Krall Plaza

As it stands, the plaza is rarely used, and sees its busiest time of day just before 10AM on weekdays as people congregate outside the library waiting to avail themselves of its various internet, book, and restroom resources, or simply just to take shelter from

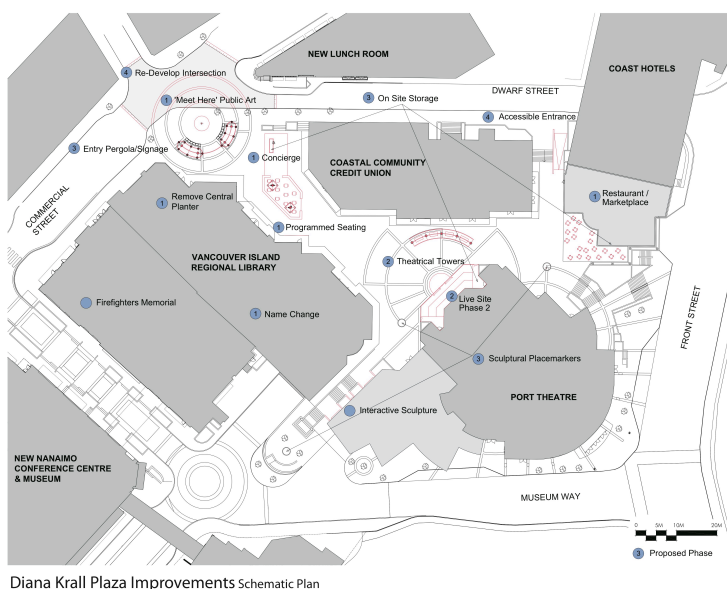


Figure 2 – Map of the Diana Krall Plaza (source: City of Nanaimo)

the weather. The entrance to the main space inside the plaza is formed by the intersection at the corner of Commercial and Wharf Streets. A long staircase leads from the south

corner of the plaza to the back entrance of the Nanaimo Conference Centre, and the vacant lot housing the missing hotel phase of the conference centre development. The east corner of the plaza exits beside the Port Theatre onto Front Street, with another small entrance exiting on the east end of Wharf St. The only entrance to the plaza that does not involve multiple sets of stairs is at the corner of Commercial St. and the aptly named Wharf St., which used to connect the business district to the docks in the late 19th century. In fact, the Diana Krall Plaza and the Port Theatre occupy land that would have been underwater at the time of Nanaimo's first city plan. While there is a piece of monumental public art near the entrance, as well as some concrete seating, once inside the plaza from the Commercial Street entrance, the only distinguishing features are a set of awnings inside and on the left hand side, and a rather pixelated jumbotron on the back of the Port Theatre. The rest of the enclosing facades are unadorned concrete and brick.

Site Perspectives

How then do local residents, downtown workers, planners, and visitors view the Plaza? Does it successfully embody the New Urbanist principles of mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented public space, and does it fit the historical narrative imposed on it as a modern version of the European plaza? In order for the plaza to achieve these targets, its physical attributes must encourage and allow visitors to form connections and memories via meaningful experiences, aesthetic or otherwise. The multiple descriptions of the aesthetic of the Plaza provided by interview subjects allow the experience of being in the space to be approached and described. There must be a dialectical use of space that evokes a sense of security and potential in its users, while they themselves feel a sense of ownership that results in their caring for and perpetuating the use of the space. What will

become clear over the course of this discussion is that the aesthetic, existential reactions of people to the Diana Krall Plaza are not limited to a passive, visual apprehension of the place. Rather, the aesthetic judgments are intimately connected to a somatic sense of self-in-place. The theoretical framework in Chapter 3 brought to light certain fears and concerns with approaching the world aesthetically; that this approach would reinforce subject/object dualisms and move away from deeper understandings of things and places. In contrast, what these interviews and this line of questioning reveals, is that the eye does not just receive an impression, detecting something outside of some Cartesian self, but grasps the world and is part of engaging things of the world in a state of at-handedness. In this way aesthetics moves beyond the primacy of vision, embracing aesthetic impressions as not only the interplay between eyeball and light, but as somatic – a folding of sight into the other senses, and the body into the world.

As a way of kicking off each interview, participants were asked what they were doing downtown, and how they got there. While there were many reasons given for being downtown or in the vicinity of the plaza such as work or tourism, with the exception of a few employees in the area, most participants responded to the name *Diana Krall Plaza* saying “what’s that?” Most were familiar with my descriptions of the physical attributes and location of the space, but the landscape, despite having the name *Diana Krall* embedded in the public art, does not provide any clues as to its name. The absence of visual communication in the space extends deeper, as the lack of ornamentation or functional items in the plaza makes wayfinding difficult and offers few clues of how the space ought to be used. Only one participant, David Forrester, an employee of the VIU

Alumni Association, whose office borders the plaza,⁴ described a pathway through the plaza, all others noted the fact that the plaza existed, and had seen the monument, but when confronted with the large empty space and empty facades, felt unsure of why they were there and decided to leave. One couple that was interviewed described how they were visiting the city, but had seen most of Nanaimo “in the car.” They had noticed the public art while driving on Commercial Street, and felt that they “didn’t have to go to the plaza, just wanted to see what’s up.” Unfortunately, not much, and they spent very little time in the square. In fact, at the beginning of the interview, which took place in a nearby café, when asked what they had noticed in the Diana Krall Plaza, they responded, “that one over there?” Despite making an effort to engage the space, they left without any understanding of what the plaza was or represented. The responses of locals weren’t any more positive, ranging from the vague, “why would I go there?” to the definitive, “I wouldn’t go there.” Even downtown resident Dave Witty⁵ sees no reason to make the plaza part of his daily pedestrian commute, and John Faires, an employee of a downtown retail store commented that, “If it wasn’t there it wouldn’t be used any less.” This is both a functional and aesthetic failing. While many see no practical purpose to engage with the space, there is also no aesthetic or contemplative value in it.

To investigate the lack of engagement with the Plaza, participants were asked to identify aesthetic features that stood out in their experiences. Unsurprisingly, while nearly all commented on the monument near the entrance, and the brick and concrete featured in the design, almost as many failed to notice the functional art in the space; the

⁴ Since the completion of this thesis, the VIU Alumni office has moved back to the university’s campus.

⁵ Dave Witty is the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) at Vancouver Island University, and the former director at UBC’s School of Community and Regional Planning

piano hammer awnings (fig. 3) and the oddly decorated storage unit used for events.

Expert opinion on the nature of public art ranged from an employee in the Development Approval Planning office in Nanaimo who noted that “the scale of public art can’t be wimpy, it needs to make a statement, and it needs to be controversial,” to the insight of a local landscape architect, who, commenting on the importance of the relationship



Figure 3 - Piano hammer awnings

between the character of a space and the materials used in it described it as “a real dog’s breakfast.” The monument being discussed is a piece entitled, “Songbird.” (fig. 4) To describe it with any subtlety is challenging, as the piece itself is extraordinarily literal. A tuning fork 24 feet tall and grounded in black and white brick representing piano keys is the song, and is topped by a bronze bird, ostensibly the eponymous “bird.” There is no opportunity for deeper aesthetic appreciation or contemplation, and nothing about the sculpture provides any reference to the local cultural context. If public art must make a statement or provide opportunity for interpretation and even controversy, the only statement or question raised by this installation is why the plaza was named after Diana Krall in the first place, a question asked by more than one participant. This sculpture fails

aesthetically by failing to reflect any communal or individual identity, and by neglecting through its sheer obviousness any opportunity for challenge or reflection. It is the type of public art made by committees of artistically unsophisticated citizens. Mark Holland, a landscape architect and interview subject, notes that Nanaimo is a town with an “artificially depressed artistic sophistication.” This is not to say that there is no artistic



Figure 4 - Songbird

community in the city and region. In fact the arts thrive in the city. But many of its professional artists and writers have taken residence on nearby Gabriola Island, which has one of the highest amounts of artists per-capita in the country. This results in artistic decisions being made by well meaning, hard working, efficient, and otherwise capable but unfortunately inartistic committees without the input of those whose talents and passions might spur the installation of art that is both challenging and experiential. A visiting couple was confused by the piece, unsure if it marked a musical or symphony district, or had some special but unexplained historical significance. They commented that it was “a bureaucratic idea of public art,” and asked, “is the artist local?” - more concerned that the art connected in some way to the community, rather than a celebrity.

This work is certainly not Heidegger’s “god that can save us,” failing to enable a space that creates and mediates meaning in a community. The monument does not facilitate dwelling, as it does not work to reveal the nature of the place, or make a place of letting-be where the potential for possibility in action and identity are celebrated. As it stands, “Songbird” offers little in the way of opportunity for aesthetic critique saving that it represents, at best, the attempts of a local government to commodify and capitalise on local cultural capital.



Figure 5 - Public library façade

In contrast to the lack of aesthetic response to the public monument at the entrance to the plaza, it is the featureless façades (fig. 5, fig.6) that provoked the most aesthetic, experiential, and emotional responses to the space. When asked to describe the aesthetic features of the plaza, most participants pointed out the brick and concrete facades of the surrounding buildings, noting that a lack of features made it “cold and sterile,” and “barren.” Interestingly, one respondent said he liked the use of brick as it

brought back good memories of his time at the University of Ontario, where the houses in the region tend to be older and use more brick than is seen on the west coast. Despite this, he described his impressions of the plaza as “hard and cold.” The use of brick, and this particular response, provides clues into the motives of the planners and developers of this space. When asked to describe the aesthetic of the plaza beyond simply the materials used, planner Gary Noble noted that, “architecture is supposed to facilitate a transition from historical to contemporary,” something hinted at by the designers through the inclusion of brickwork.



Figure 6 - Port theatre façade

Despite these good intentions, the resulting plaza is built on a “hilarious scale,” and people have an uncomfortable relationship with it. The relationship goes beyond a sense of dislike for visitors, and this is where the aesthetic critique becomes more valid. If the response to the aesthetic of the plaza were simply, “it’s ugly,” or “I don’t like it,” an

argument could be made that this line of questioning is simply reinforcing a binary subject-object relationship. In addition to the immediate aesthetic responses of “cold” and “unattractive,” interview subjects also described the space as “oppressive” and “alienating.” This sense of push and pull in the plaza is very interesting. In my introduction, I noted how the downtown core exerted a sense of gravity when you approach or enter it by car, and this contracts with the sense of expulsion and the desire to leave the plaza expressed by the majority of the study participants. In some ways this could be understood as the embodied senses of vestibular awareness, the sense of balance in one’s body, and proprioception, the sense of one’s body’s place in space. Both these senses contribute to the feelings of alienation experienced in the plaza. The plaza’s aesthetic creates a hyper-awareness of one’s own place in the space and this discomfort leads one to abandon the space to restore a sense of bodily balance. The composition of these senses is a topic of discussion among other researchers in geography such as Mark Patterson who notes that these senses generally cut across several sensorial systems, and that, “there is no such one-to-one correlation between receptors and organs for the somatic senses” (2009, pg. 770). In addition to the collection and interpretation of the data from multiple physical receptors, this data demonstrates that aesthetic responses play a role in forming the somatic senses and the intersubjectivities of a body in space.

The priority given to efficiency and cleanliness in the plaza results in people vacating the space once they have finished their business at the bank or library, rather than inviting people to participate in the space. Without other people spending time in the plaza and interacting socially, anyone entering the plaza feels trapped and invisible. This is not the positive, “eyes on the streets” social anonymity advocated by Jacobs, but a

sense of being alone that can lead one to feel vulnerable. One visitor remarked that “the first thing [she] felt was unsafe,” and David Forrester of the Alumni Association whose office borders the plaza noted that the female members of his staff were reluctant to spend time in the plaza alone. The success of this plaza as a space for dwelling, gathering, or for sharing and creating community experiences is not measured by degrees, but in terms of how completely it fails. It is difficult to find anything encouraging to say about such a threatening, inhuman space. By approaching this landscape through an aesthetic-phenomenological lens, the discussion has progressed beyond simple descriptions of the elements and processes that have gone into its design. This approach views the landscape critically, deepening the discussion by using questions about urban design and aesthetic responses to highlight systemic socio-spatial problems.

The concepts of home, building, and settlement are also linked closely to dwelling. While the plaza attains to dwelling through building, its more oppressive qualities make it unlikely to be considered a place of settlement, or identified with as a central part of a Nanaimo resident’s “home”-town. Recalling Porteous (1990), it is important to remember that the idea of home is not necessarily positive, but our perception of home influences our responses, aesthetic and emotional, to other landscapes. Whether we associate the idea of home with an oppressive, controlling place, or as something that we have cultivated and created, these are associations formed through sense and memory. In order to assess the success of the plaza in creating a space for dwelling, the interview subjects were asked whether they felt “at home” in the development, and to describe what aspects of the plaza corresponded (or not) to their idea of home. Interview subject Mark Holland suggests that it may be useful to borrow “a

concept from interior design of identity response in space.” This concept asks first, if there is a “preferred identity” reflected in the landscape, then by using the “living room principle” to ask, “could I live here?” to determine whether the space can actually accommodate the user’s lifestyle, and finally, is the space physically comfortable? These questions are asked consciously by planners and designers, and answered immediately and unconsciously by users of the space. If a space becomes positively equated with home, then the users will steward it. The questions suggested by Mark Holland reflect an implicit concern with *dwelling*, and an understanding of multi-sensorial body. They are centered on imagination, possibility, and the body’s place within a space. Successfully implementing this design approach will result in a space that “safeguards each thing in its nature” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 149). We have seen that dwelling safeguards things in a variety of ways. It protects the possibility of seeing and imagining one’s self in the space, folding the space and its uses into one’s identity. It protects the physical body, which cannot be distinguished in any meaningful way from a sense of self or interiority. Dwelling also safeguards that part of the human nature that thrives in caring for the dwelling place.

One visitor, when asked whether they identified any elements of home in the space, responded “there’s nothing to *make* home about it, no reason to sit, look, or stay” (emphasis mine). Relationships between people and landscapes must be interactive if they are to be meaningful, whether that means a landscape offers activities that attract certain users, or that the built environment simply presents an aesthetic that entices people to alter their pathways and include it in their daily lives for travel, socialisation, or contemplation and relaxation. Such features are often the result of bringing natural

features such as foliage and water into a space, and integrating engaging public art. The most interactive element in a landscape, should it prove attractive on an aesthetic, contemplative, or functional level, is the people who co-create the landscape – being appreciated and interacted with as part of the landscape while they themselves enjoy the environment. Another respondent commented that the only place there was a communal feeling in the plaza was by the hot dog guy who “created his own sense of community.” People are a key element of successful spaces in larger urban centres, and are notably missing from the Diana Krall Plaza. As the urban aphorist W.H. Whyte notes, “what attracts people the most, it would seem, is other people” (Platt, 2006, p. 38).

At a very basic level, land use planning creates places in the environment to see and be seen. Approaching placemaking in this way implicitly acknowledges that sight is best understood as a discursive, intersubjective engagement with the world rather than an objectifying, isolating gaze. Seeing and being seen, as the first stage of folding together ourselves into the world, an integrating new places into our lifeworlds is an important part of fostering social interactions, as well as individual responses to the landscape. It also pertains to dwelling as visually apprehending a space and the aesthetic response one feels to it allows a judgment to be made as to whether a space is a place of letting-be, or opportunity. Being seen, rather than being observed in a voyeuristic or carceral sense, allows a sense of society to form, and hopefully a sense of safety that augments the available opportunities. Appleton (1975) argues that “aesthetic satisfaction, ... act[s] as sign-stimuli indicative of environmental conditions favourable to survival” (p. 69), and calls this “prospect-refuge theory.” In addition to the descriptions provided by the interview subjects, do other methods of landscape study, approaching the landscape as

text, provide any information about the nature of the place? The emphasis on simplicity and clarity, save for some planar cornice work that trims the buildings, demonstrates the use of modernist design principles. In the same way that New Urbanist developments can



Figure 7 - Cornice detail

be criticised for being incomplete or for not following all of the tenets and guidelines, this design can be viewed as an incomplete modernism. With no clear indication of appropriate uses of the space, there is no starting point for the modernist maxim that form ought to follow function. According to one landscape architect, what has been enacted “fails to draw on post-modernism’s critiques of the failure of modernist architecture.” The reactions of visitors to the Diana Krall Plaza illustrate the theory that placemaking requires people to be present in a place, to see and interact with each other, and provide opportunities for reflection on shared history and experience.

Some participants noted that nothing tends to happen in the space unless it is programmed, either for a ceremony or concert or other event where the city or a community group brings people and equipment into the area. On a weekend as busy as Nanaimo’s famous bathtub racing celebration, visitors notice that the plaza remains remarkably free of pedestrians, as most people “make a beeline for the bars.” Even local residents note that if there are people in the area, “most are near the front. [there is] No

reason to come past the doors [of the credit union],” and that they personally, “don’t know how to use the space appropriately.” One respondent described the look of the space as “Soviet-style,” and elaborated that instead of creating a welcoming feeling, the design said, “let me show you how powerful this space can be.” The emptiness, to her, felt “sanitised,” as though the area used to be less affluent but was then cleaned and turned into a “controlled space,” one that telegraphs “it’s not yours, you can’t interact, you have no rights to the space.” Some subjects noted that the Occupy movement of winter 2011 was “the most use its ever seen”, but even at that only the front space was



Figure 8 - The Occupy movement in Diana Krall Plaza

highly used, with the back remaining largely empty during the day, except for tents.

While this follows a historical precedent of spaces of power being used by resistance movements for their symbolic or political value, one subject noted, “they don’t ‘do’

anything but occupy”. In other words even these subaltern utilisations are limited to simply *being* in the space. As there is no usual or expected pattern of behavior indicated through the aesthetics of the plaza, there is nothing there that can be subverted.

Units of Significance

These observations fall into broad thematic categories of site use, aesthetic efficiency, public art, and dwelling. While the Occupy movement may have inhabited the plaza, I do not believe that they engaged in *dwelling* there. It can also be argued that the so called *undesirables* that spend the day in the plaza, populating it while creating an atmosphere that is uninviting to others, also do not dwell in the space. This is not to say that they are singled out as not being allowed to dwell, simply that what happens in the plaza is not dwelling. The inability to dwell in the space is not a function of being poor or indigent. A variety of people have pointed out multiple reasons that they perceive the plaza as unwelcoming, and feel actively disconnected from participating in it. In addition, the understanding of dwelling presented in this thesis is not dependent on any particular dwelling or type of dwelling. Building, Dwelling, and Thinking are all equivalent in Heidegger’s titular triad, but *a* building does not provide any certainty that dwelling is possible or will occur. Unfortunately, identifying an aesthetic of homelessness or poverty as something that contributes to the decline of a place is politically fraught. While discussing solutions to these problems is beyond the scope of this study, it is worth noting that the New Urbanists address the issue of persistent urban poverty as a function of ghettoisation (Meredith, 2003, Congress, 1996). In this, they are in good company; activists such J.R. Fleming and the Anti-Eviction Campaign in Chicago argue that isolating the poor from physical, legislative, and social aspects of public life that are open

to well-off residents perpetuates and intensified the effects of poverty (Austen, 2013).

W.H. Whyte (1980) comments that “The biggest single obstacle to the provision of better public space is the undesirables problem” (156), but argues that there is nothing inherent in the condition of poverty that presents a challenge to dwelling. It is “the actions taken to combat them that is the problem” (156). Things like hardening benches simply provide highly localised spatial fixes, without addressing any further problems. Whyte (1980) says, “the best way to handle the problem of undesirables is to make a place attractive to everyone else” (156). While this leaves a lot of details to the imagination and perpetuates and “us vs. them” stereotype, it does provide a way to approach the design of public space with an inclusive rather than exclusive orientation.

New Urbanism has a clear idea of how to attract people to places, and these implementations affect both the surface of the design and the existential levels of place. Before suggesting how the plaza can be improved, we ought to understand the reasons for its failure to engage the people of Nanaimo as a place to be. The categories above: site use, aesthetic of efficiency, and public art each relate to one another, and to the plaza’s crisis in dwelling. To understand the failure to dwell, let us first take another look at the Occupy movement and the homeless site users. Dwelling involves an intersubjective relationship with place, a place where an inhabitant is allowed to explore being and identity, while at the same time fostering an attitude of nurturing back towards the place. Dwelling must also provide shelter, and it is clear that the Diana Krall Plaza does not offer physical refuge from the elements or any other things. In fact, Occupy protestors brought their own shelters in the form of tents and tarps. If someone got cold, they could phone home for more blankets, or send someone up the street on a coffee run. In this

instance, there was no dialog with the space that shaped it into a dwelling place. The plaza also lacks any opportunities to nurture the space. There is no participation suggested or allowed. Mukhopadway (2006) describes the care and cultivation of homes and dwelling places among some of India's poorest people as an act and desire to protect and preserve born out of struggle. The plaza offers nothing to struggle for, in an environment that offers no points of engagement. All users – not only the so-called undesirables, leave the plaza exactly as they found it. Blomley's (2004) work on gardening in public and marginal spaces in North America suggests that activity invokes territoriality, creating a sense of ownership and a personal connection to spaces. While Blomley's research is focused less on dwelling and more on the difference between public, private, and legislative conceptions of property, he does note the formation of a communal, emotional investment in place (p. 629).

The aesthetics of the Diana Krall Plaza were used as a point of entry into the experiences of people in the plaza, but it is also clear that the plaza's aesthetic offers no clues that such activities would be appropriate within it. There is no interaction with the forms and materials used to construct the place, and therefore no opportunity to participate in the two-way preservation of placemaking. A site use could be as simple as providing a pleasant pathway, a nice view, or a comfortable place to sit. The plaza's aesthetic, however, presents the space as one dedicated to efficiency. In this view, lingering in the plaza becomes an undesirable activity, which only undesirables end up doing. This design demonstrates Heidegger's concern with the subject-object duality that can be entrenched by responding to the world aesthetically. We ought not to completely ignore good design in favour of pure practice; rather, we need to recognise that design

has the ability to viscerally disconnect people from their surroundings, and conversely, good design can do the opposite. New Urbanism offers a definition of good design that differs from a Modernist approach in that it is not based on the idea that homes and spaces are merely machines for living. Integrating, simple, people-centered uses could encourage residents to become the life and decoration of the plaza.

Even in an otherwise stark development, quality public art could help attract people and engage them in fostering dwelling connections. Nanaimo made the effort, and spent the money to install a large-scale piece of public art, though most people indicate confusion as to its message or purpose. “Songbird” lacks any quality that would indicate it fulfills Heidegger’s notion that art ought to allow a community to share, question, and re-tell its own stories. Art, as representation, and with no judgment regarding aesthetic pleasure, also needs to reveal or allow something to emerge that reflects the character of a place or a people. In doing this, outsiders and visitors are told the story, and permitted to be part of the story in its interpretation and retelling. Urban design, public art installations, and simple site uses can all provide these valuable opportunities, currently missing in the plaza. The “Songbird” installation does not convey, nor is it susceptible to discussions about, the character or history of the City of Nanaimo, or of any of its communities. Although it attempts to conflate the concepts of island life and the arts, it fails in conveying any of the identity or history of Nanaimo as a resource-based port city, or of any of its dynamic food, art, craftsman, or music communities. In other parts of downtown, Nanaimo has experimented with temporary art installations that tend to be more abstract or conceptual. Spaces with these types of pieces, which may not immediately convey a story, become focal points of a new story created through

discussion and consideration of the art itself. Much like successful European squares, the story of the public art or statuary becomes undistinguishable from the story of the people or the place itself. This is unlikely to happen in the current incarnation of the Diana Krall Plaza.

The Once and Future Plaza

Public space in small cities, even in Nanaimo, does not have to be bland and un-engaging. Being spectacularly unsuccessful does not preclude it from being a focus of the community in the future. In fact, existing improvement plans for the Diana Krall Plaza site differ significantly from its current incarnation, and even while criticising it, most interview participants offered interesting suggestions for how to improve the space. A New Urbanist approach to revitalising the space could be an important first step in addressing urban sprawl in Nanaimo. Unfortunately, it seems that improving the space is no longer a priority. A document from September 2011, reporting on the status of major projects in Nanaimo, notes that in regards to plaza improvements, “Phase 1 of the project is now complete. Seating will be improved in the plaza in 2010 with movable tables, chairs and umbrellas” (Nanaimo, 2011, p. 4). Phase 1 refers to the public art project, “Songbird,” being installed at the entrance to the plaza in 2009, and this report, published nearly two years later copies and pastes from the previous year’s plan, forgetting to change the time frame. In fact, movable tables and benches with umbrellas have been installed in the plaza, though the site would have to be observed for several months to determine that they are indeed movable. Though they are moveable, these benches can only be moved by the city. No single site user would possess the strength to move these features, and as they are rarely moved, most groups would be unaware that they could

place them in other locations. The benches generally sit in the most sheltered or shaded section of the plaza, depending on the season. Because of the warm weather Nanaimo has been enjoying over the course this fieldwork, these tables have been moved from their previous setting beside Wharf St. closer to the entrance of plaza where they are able to take advantage of the shade provided by the trees close to the Songbird installation. Many of the people interviewed assumed that the tables and benches were actually permanent, perhaps because they are concrete and appear difficult to move. Although they can be moved, albeit with obvious difficulty, their design contributes to the understanding of the plaza as a place where things are controlled and sanitised, with even basic amenities rendered inhospitable by attempts to harden the space against transient or illegal activity.

The Diana Krall Plaza Improvement Plan features a number of laudable goals including:

- *Increasing pedestrian activity through and into the plaza*
- *Enhancing this space for special events*
- *Complementing the Olympic Live Site Screen*
- *Softening the hard landscape and improve aesthetics*
- *Incorporating public art elements into the design*
- *Considering Crime Prevention through Environmental Design Principles*
- *Visually linking the plaza to adjacent streets*

Many of these ideas are worthwhile approaches to fixing the issues raised by interview subjects, but it becomes clear that the only solutions actually under consideration involve additional programming in the space. It is important to increase pedestrian activity and there are associated benefits with doing so, but pathways without

destinations are useless. Likewise, the need to improve the aesthetics of the space is obvious, but not if it involves creating more unambitious, unengaging committee-driven public art. The main feature of the improvement plan, a theatre underneath the existing Olympic Live Site Screen, involves dedicating more of the landscape to a single use, and offers no seating that could be used casually outside of planned events and performances. The only unprogrammed seating suggested in the plan is tied to hopes for a restaurant or food service that would occupy underutilised space off of Wharf St. It is difficult to tempt a restaurateur to build in a space where the space in question is merely leased airspace, and where the land cannot be sold to a potential restaurant. For the last year the city has experimented with licensing a food truck, from the local “Smokin’ George’s” restaurant in this space.



Figure 9 - Smokin' George's food truck in the Diana Krall Plaza

Unfortunately for the restaurant, the spot is far away from the only pedestrian features at the front of the plaza. At this point, it is merely a hidden gem in downtown, and a destination for those in the area who know about it, but not enough of an attraction to revitalise its corner of the plaza, or even draw consistent lineups. Without this seating, the only other suggestion is that the city implement a concierge service in the middle portion of the plaza, providing, for a lounge fee charged to users, programmed private seating along with a staffed information and guest services desk. While this no doubt may be attractive to some, and may be designed to attract a certain type of user to the plaza, it does not address the experiential concerns brought up by the interview subjects in this study.

Suggestions for improving the plaza from interview participants, while varied, centered on two main themes. These concerns echo the New Urbanist ideas and strategies for creating great places, as well as the language of Project for Public Spaces, a non-profit inspired by the work of W.H. Whyte. First, many suggested that in addition to the current, programmed uses of the space, the plaza should be modified to encourage socialisation and provide reasons for using the space. While they acknowledge that the space worked well when programmed, there are no unofficial or personal reasons to make the plaza a destination. A key reason for this, according to one respondent, is that the designers “didn’t build any potential uses into the landscape. There is no natural seating.” Others note that the space is “uncomfortable to sit in, even on benches,” and that because there are “no encouraged walkways, it feels weird.” Again we see it demonstrated that approaching the space visually immediately moves to a discussion of the way that the user interacts bodily with the space. The aesthetic discomfort is indicative of further

existential and somatic discomforts. By reconfiguring the large, commanding space into several sub-spaces based on the obvious divisions seen in an aerial view of the site, and creating texture by adding “stuff” to the environment, the plaza could become a more appropriate place for socialising rather than corralling people for municipally mandated programming. In addition to a need for more seating and opportunities for socialisation, a theme emerges that argues that the city ought to incorporate more natural elements into the plaza. This is a more specifically aesthetic comment, bringing landscape appreciation into the list of appropriate, even expected, uses for public places. Instead of the “geological” or “metal aesthetic,” the unprompted definitions of modernism offered as descriptions of the space, users would like to see bits of green space included throughout. As it stands, the lack of legibility, and lack of aesthetically attractive features, mean that planners for events such as VIU’s convocation note, “Nanaimo has better places to hold events.” For example, even though VIU’s convocation takes place mere meters away at the Port Theatre, the reception is held down the street at the Nanaimo Convention Centre, as the plaza is “ugly and uncomfortable.” The desire for green space in urban public places harkens back to the reactions to early modernism brought on by the industrial revolution.

As Heidegger argued, pre-modern societies, namely the Greeks, recognised that meanings existed externally, but were mediated communally. He uses the temple as an example for sharing meaning throughout a community, anchoring people to a place, encouraging people to tell each other their stories, enabling, in a word, Dwelling. This paradigm persists in western culture until the industrial revolution when the seismic changes in urban landscape and economics prompt philosophical and political

reassessments regarding man's place in the world. Almost immediately, modernism begins collapsing in on itself, evidenced by Nietzsche's campaign against the structures of morality and the Romantic's quest for the sublime. The problem isn't that modernism is completely wrong in its ideals. Woessner (2003) writes that architectural modernism "arose out of a revolutionary progressive spirit" (p. 24), responding to a bloody, imperialistic century that had culminated in the First World War. For many, modernism was "an attempt to start over, to wipe the architectural and social slate clean ... [through] its commitment to workers' housing, to the social betterment of the population through rational planning and building." (p.24) This ideology was also at the vanguard of 20th century workers rights movements, and the push to provide better opportunities for the urban poor around the world. Recognising these positive values make it a more difficult to challenge the ethos of modernism on purely ideological grounds, though this thesis has demonstrated that it has been susceptible to many other criticisms. Moreover, the current study has looked frankly at the positive and negative results of New Urbanism, and argues that, on balance, New Urbanism practices and enacts a positive vision for the *Good City*, based on existential-phenomenological criteria.

Heidegger doesn't dispute that the technology that propelled the industrial revolution inspired Modernism as a way of confronting the problems of the age; in fact, he draws attention to it. He disagrees with the philosophical response of modernism, that meaning is found in structure and order, and would take issue with Nietzsche's arguments that value, once dismantled, can then again be reached by positing new values. These theoretical challenges to place do not merely critique the perceived inadequacies of earlier paradigms; they frame new opportunities for placemaking. Heidegger makes the

very post-modern argument that meaning is still important to people's lives, but rather than relying on externals, we can accept the consequences of modernity and seek meaning that is not only mediated communally, but created through art, dwelling, and community. In fact, all three are related and interdependent. Art becomes the "god that will save us," and through the artistic process of creating and revealing, helps to enable dwelling and provides a focal point for shared meaning and experience in the community. This is not so far removed from the Romantic's desire to understand the sublime. By Kant's definition, the sublime transcends individual experience and understanding, and by extension can be explored and shared communally. The impulse to include natural features in urban landscapes reflects the ability of these features to be approached by, and yet transcend, the individual. Those who are creating and renovating our cities need to face the challenge presented by recognising that existential issues, aesthetics, design approaches, and the emotional-somatic responses to place are all irreducibly connected and essential to creating successful places. We are able to rise to the challenges posed to placemaking, address the issues involved in revitalising a space such as the Diana Krall Plaza lies, and confront the challenges posed to *dwelling* by the technological worldview through the theoretical approach to space and research methods used in this thesis. These tools provide a way to make judgments about what constitutes *the good* through the use of *dwelling*, and a unique way to access and talk about peoples' spatial preference and experience through the language of aesthetics. While this may not satisfy those who take a radical post-structuralist approach to place, the aesthetic-phenomenological approach confronts the existential problems posed by modern landscapes and the postmodern desire for meaning apart from traditional structures of moral authority.

Chapter 6: Future Directions

Recapitulation

In closing this thesis I summarise the previous chapters that presented key findings of my fieldwork and the contributions of this study to the existing research and literature on urban geography. As discussed in Chapter 4, the scope and nature of the subject matter under study, the information collected and conclusions drawn are limited. It is limited first in its duration, second in its physical boundaries, and finally in the number of participants in the interview portion of the field studies. In addition, it has been necessary to limit the scope of the theoretical framework. Theories of meaning, experience, and of the body in space are part of a constantly expanding field of geographic inquiry. This thesis has engaged with current theories of placemaking, art, and experience, with a particular focus on bringing an understanding of Heideggerian *dwelling* back to the study of placemaking, approaching it using aesthetics as an entry point into the phenomenological investigation. While the current and constantly developing more-than-representation theories are also interested in the way we constitute ourselves through our bodies, actions, and words, these radically intersubjective approaches are more concerned with describing the dialectical moments that occur between actors, rather than the phenomenon or meaning that may be constituted. This thesis contends that meaning, whether mediated by an external authority or by a community, is an essential element of creating the types of experiences that typify successful placemaking efforts. The Heideggerian approach to dwelling and art has

proved to be useful bedrock from which to begin this discussion. As discussed in Chapter 4, the limitations of the study do not negate the value of the experiential data and the deeper understanding drawn from this phenomenological study of place and placemaking. In fact, these conclusions, derived from the interpretation of multiple limited perspectives, reveal several directions for future research and recommendations that have meaning and utility beyond the site specific context that generated them. The success and demonstrated utility of an aesthetic-phenomenological approach to investigating and evaluating urban landscapes encourages further and more detailed explorations in this area. There is much work that could be done in bringing an emphasis on dwelling and experience back into non-representational theories, and in turn enriching theoretical discussions of place with lessons learned through explorations of practice and performance. Finally, increased awareness of the importance of New Urbanism's existential-aesthetic concerns ought to result in more opportunities for places of letting-be to be created. Embracing these challenges will equip planners and developers who practice placemaking, or topo-poesis, to more successfully enact spaces of poetic dwelling in the urban and suburban landscapes.

Key Findings

The findings of this study fall broadly into three main categories. First, the case study and fieldwork undertaken over the course of this study clearly demonstrate the role that aesthetics play in the success or failure of urban development. This study specifically highlights the implicit theoretical framework of New Urbanism, demonstrating that this planning paradigm aspires to creating meaningful dwelling places. Second, the study confirms the value of approaching placemaking issues aesthetically. Aesthetic inquiries

provide interesting information about aesthetic preferences as unique phenomena. They demonstrate further value, as the aesthetic line of questioning provides a point of access to descriptions of experience, embodiment, and performance that provide useful information to planners and critics that go deeper than the surficial aesthetic evaluations. Building a theoretical framework on phenomenology and aesthetics also proved to be useful in designing research instruments and interpreting the resulting data. Much of the writing on using phenomenology as an interview technique is from outside the literature of geography, and building a set of questions around aesthetics helped to develop specific implementations of these techniques that are suitable for investigating placemaking phenomena. Third, this study has developed arguments and a theoretical framework that link aesthetic and existential qualities to the success or failure of places. The data gathered in the field study and literature review demonstrate the validity of connecting Heidegger's idea of *dwelling* to aesthetic phenomena, in particular the design of urban spaces. This makes the ideas presented in this thesis an excellent place to start developing an explicit philosophy of New Urbanism.

With regards to the Diana Krall Plaza it is apparent that an over-emphasis on programmed uses has resulted in a space that is unsuitable as a destination for spontaneous social interaction or aesthetic contemplation. As such, it has failed to become a place where community is fostered in the city. While a modern, hardened aesthetic might result in a space that is easy to quantify from a planning perspective, it leaves much to be desired experientially. Specifically, this place lacks destinations beyond the entrance and a reason to move through the space. It has no obvious or welcoming pathways and the scale of the surrounding buildings makes one feel that they

are intruding no matter which path they choose to take. Development plans have suggested a theatre installation with an integrated public lobby, but if these features are not programmed this plan will simply result in the space becoming empty and threatening. Over the two years the Plaza has been observed for this study, and my years as a Nanaimo resident, the primary users of the space outside of programmed events are homeless and addicted people, and without significant changes that will enhance its experiential and existential aspects this is unlikely to change. From an aesthetic perspective, the imposing architecture commits two infractions. First, the overwhelming sameness of the plaza's boundaries makes the space difficult to interpret in terms of navigation and use. Second, the vast flat boundaries of the plaza do not articulate any kind of openings, exits, or refuges, with the result that the buildings, though well constructed, fail to integrate with the ground level of the plaza on any kind of reasonably human scale. Finally, it is clear that site users value integration of the natural environment into public spaces. These would provide focal points and basic reasons to *be* in the space that are the beginning of dwelling.

The other lesson learned in this field study is simple but profound. People, when asked to describe their aesthetic experiences, will tend to provide extremely meaningful data beyond a simple indication of their aesthetic preferences. Questions that get at the heart of the aesthetic experience such as, "how do you use the space?", "how does the space make you feel?", "what do you notice about the space?", "how do you respond to art in this space?", and others provide nuance and possibility beyond simple queries regarding their opinion of a space (positive or negative), and questions geared towards programming. The aesthetic-phenomenological questions are much more useful than a

survey asking subjects to respond yes or no to questions regarding details about the space or its potential uses. What this clearly reveals is a desire among users of public spaces for places of letting-be, social possibilities, and ultimately dwelling.

Overcoming Limitations

Some researchers may question the value of qualitative research with accusations of poor research design and non-representative sample sizes. Leech and Onwuegbuzie write that reliance on such samples and studies, “seriously calls into question the extent to which findings and interpretations can be generalized justifiably from the sample to the underlying population.” (2009, pg. 882) They also note that the bulk of the articles they studied used small sample sizes, and nearly 30% of them attempted to generalise their findings beyond their sample. While the authors of this study were concerned about the validity of qualitative data as seen by its ability to generalise, I interpret this as evidence that demonstrates that dominant scientific discourse fosters a distinct lack of value for other types of knowledge. Seamon (2000) argues that this type of critique might be more applicable to other social science methods such as ethnography, which:

typically studies a *particular* person or group in a *particular* place in time; in contrast, a phenomenological study might begin with a similar real-world situation but would then use that specific instance as a foundation for identifying deeper, more generalizable patterns, structures, and meanings. (para. 19)

Yi-Fu Tuan (1971) would agree that qualitative methods can provide data meaningful to a larger population. He states that “geographical concerns are of two types: nomothetic and ideographic” (p. 182), and says these concerns correspond with intellectual and existential ideals. As human beings, we seek both order in the world, what Tuan calls the environmental or intellectual approach, and meaning, which we can approach existentially. The spatial and organisational topics that are at the forefront of urban

geography reflect the value placed on positivist, generalisable data and the nomothetic concern with the search for order in our surroundings. In contrast, this thesis is focused on the existential, ideographic approaches that can ascribe meaning within our circumstances, and provide criteria that can be used to make judgments about the quality of a place or development.

Future Research Opportunities and Recommendations

The success of using an aesthetic approach to investigate local spaces opens up many opportunities for future research. Of particular note are the types of responses to the Diana Krall Plaza given by different genders. The relationship between gender and visibility in public space has been addressed in other literature (Gle, 1997; Podmore; 2001. Mitchell, 2003; Harvey, 2007), and the aesthetic-phenomenological approach to place could build on this literature in a number of ways. Gendered approaches to aesthetics are not new, but understanding aesthetics and gender as they relate to perceptions of safety and community are an important potential avenue of research for geographers, planners and other researchers in the social sciences. These responses also refer to the way that participants understand their body to be integrated in space. Future studies would benefit from a deeper integration of an understanding of how the somatic senses, as they relate to our bodies in space, can be integrated into the existential-phenomenological concept of dwelling. This is part of creating a broader existentialism, one that integrates the importance of performance, experience, history, and meaning into landscape studies. The approach used in this fieldwork, and the potential research topics mentioned here, will also prove useful in studying other spaces in Nanaimo. I do not believe that this approach is limited to public space, but could and should be extended to

other types of commercial and residential development as a critical tool to analyze existing places, and as an important aspect of any public consultation undertaken in anticipation of new projects. An aesthetic-phenomenological approach to existing places, particularly examples of successful public space in Europe and North America, can also be used to add nuance to existing literature on successful placemaking that has tended to be focused more on morphology and amenities than aesthetic experiences of place.

One hopes that in the future, the Diana Krall Plaza will become a successful part of the community fabric in downtown Nanaimo. In order to do so, future consultation on development in the space must take into account the aesthetic response of site users. This will provide both a deeper insight into people's needs and a broader range of solutions. It is more valuable to ask "what would make a place feel welcoming and inviting?", rather than, "tell me your opinion on this specific use or feature," as current approaches, even ones that are focused on design such as Visual Preference Surveying, tend to do. Specific recommendations from this fieldwork include the implementation of features that are both functional and aesthetic, such as a fountain with integrated seating. Such features, when incorporating green space and other aesthetic qualities will become attractive, natural meeting places and destinations for shoppers, diners, and other visitors downtown. It is also critical that there be less reliance on crime prevention through environmental design. A hardened, unwelcoming space does deter certain types of crime, but it also means that the space is unattractive to everyone, not just criminals. With the space empty, one does not feel anonymous, which can be good from a social perspective, but invisible and unsafe. In practice, the hardened benches are not much a deterrent to the element of society they are aimed at. Antisocial behaviour will look to fill a physical

void, and the lack of local residents, downtown employees and visitors provides fertile ground for such activities creating a system that provides positive feedback to the negative image of the space in the public's mind. If the plaza gets busier and becomes a destination for social life and the arts, these problems will not disappear. It is likely that these issues will simply move to other areas, giving the plaza a chance for success. As it stands, when there are no programmed events in it, the plaza is simply an empty theatre or venue, and is off putting in the same way a large, dark empty space makes one feel small, invisible and alone. The plaza must become an engaging and safe place for it to succeed in the future, and approaching these questions aesthetically provides extremely useful information based in lived experience and perception. It is through engaging with this type of data on a planning and design level, rather than questions of efficiency and order, that planners in general and in Nanaimo specifically can make a positive difference in public spaces.

New Urbanism has proven to be a fascinating nexus of ideas in this study. It has been criticised within some academic circles for not having articulated an explicit philosophical orientation, and by other practitioners for being too focused on aesthetics. In return, it has criticised social theorists for being out of touch with placemaking as praxis, and other approaches to the city for neglecting factors that are essential to creating places that human beings want to *be* in. This study has demonstrated how the practice of placemaking relates to relevant theories such as existential-phenomenology and aesthetics, and touched on some more recent approaches including haptic geographies and the performative aspects at play in the success or failure of places. Although New Urbanism is nearly 30 years old, as it continues to mature it may prove to be an ideal

medium through which both academics in geography and philosophy as well as professionals working in planning and design can share ideas, aligning theory with practice. This is not a capitulation to the idea that practice must take precedence over theory, but demonstrates understanding that although the *being* of things is socially constructed in most theories, these things are no less real. Arguing that things and meanings are constructed does not absolve anyone of the responsibility to try to come to an understanding of the thing itself and the importance of meanings. The aesthetic-phenomenological approach to landscape acknowledges this, and demonstrates a unity between aesthetic and existential concerns and the concerns of placemakers.

Leaving the Plaza

During the time I was working on this thesis and conducting fieldwork, I worked at a shop downtown on Wharf Street near the plaza to supplement the university funding I received. Over the years the plaza became less oppressive and alienating to me, and I was less reluctant to cross it to access parking in the evening. It began to feel like a landmark signifying my favourite aspects of downtown; the best cappuccino in Nanaimo, some excellent food, and a place to sit at lunch when the weather turned nice. At night, especially in the winter, the large, light space with a narrow entrance felt like a partition against whatever unsafe aspects may have been present inside as I walked away from it to retrieve my car and drive home. Even so, whenever I visited downtown with family or friends from out of town and walked through the square connecting various sightseeing destinations, I always felt like I was an insider taking a shortcut, as any other pedestrian traffic would be moving around or away from the square, even if many people were moving between similar destinations. There was simply no reason, unless one had

knowledge and experience of the area, to venture inside. The square itself was never a point of interest or destination on our journey unless I was showing around people interested in city design, in which case we could stand in the middle of the space, as if sharing a joke. Before completing this project, I left my job downtown. I love some aspects of living in a small town, but also enjoy the energy of vibrant pedestrian districts in cities, and working downtown provided me a bit of a fix that living in the suburbs never really did. I would park my car, walk to work, and spend my break times and lunch hours walking to and from food places, or other meetings in the area. Since leaving, I only occasionally visit the area; I might have a meeting or a cappuccino craving. In these instances, I always park near the coffee shop and French bakery and spend very little time on foot. Because of my previous experiences, I no longer find the square oppressive, simply alienating and nonsensical and my journeys by car or on foot typically avoid it. My own use of downtown, drinking coffee in a bustling shop or visiting a patio, demonstrate how incomplete my experience of the area as an urban place really is. Today, instead of walking out of the core, reflecting on my day, enjoying the street and the weather, I drive quickly away from the center of the city, with no opportunity for aesthetic reflection, safe contemplation, or spontaneous socialisation that typify plazas in great cities around the world, and are notably absent here.

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