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A CONCEPT OF HOME FOR THE MODERN URBAN STRANGER

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ABSTRACT

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The issues of domesticity in the contemporary urban realm will be examined in the following manner. I will first investigate the implications of what it means for a 'table' and 'chair' to exist in a space both physically and psychologically. Issues of value and a sense of place as well as the concept of civilization given any cultural context all begin with space defining elements associated with human habitation. As my research challenges the preconceived notions that society makes about modern domestic life, I will build a series of full-scale domestic furnishings that will critically reference my philosophical inquiry about the nature of place. The built forms will symbolize society's condition of mobility as well as function as usable pieces of furniture that inculcate the user to an adaptable sense of home.

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PREFACE

One characteristic of the modern urban condition that needs reinterpretation in light of its ever evolving parameters is the concept of domesticity. It is my contention that the concept of home is mythologized by society as that static, sedentary space in which there is "complete comfort, total acceptance, and unquestioned membership"; mythologized because the reality of how we live belies this 'myth consumption'. It is really the transitory nature of today's lifestyles, symptomatically described by the kaleidoscopic, fragmentary images of the modern city and society's consumer fetishism, by which society must define its concept of domesticity.

The search for home begins with a revised view of 'stranger' in the context of a world with increased urbanization, mobility, and global communications; where being a stranger is the norm rather than the exception and identity is tied neither wih place nor community but with self. As plac and membership within a community cease to be regarded as fixed, then home will transcend its indelible myth as detrmined and permanent and the language we use to describe it, both built and spoken, will replace the current discourse of fear, estrangement, and nostalgia from modernity.

To try and examine the nature of this phenomenon I wanted to come to a personal understanding of what constituted an idea of home. My starting point was a definition I based solely on physical requirements. At the time I began my research, a table and chair represented for me the minimum physical requirement necessary to embody a sense of home. To invoke the idea of mobility I removed a non-specific table and chair from the context of a room and photographed it around Houston. These photographs appear in Appendix I. It was an attempt to come to terms with our existing landscape in order to negotiate our way to finding home. I chose locations that were not immediately recognizable as defineable spaces and were deliberately unsettling as places in which a

domestic setting might occur. The following text is drawn from an analysis of these photographs as it pertains to the thesis of the nature of home for the contemporary urban inhabitant.

INVOKING THE STRANGE

It is hardly for want of the familiar that the chair and table photographic series was produced. On the contrary, the quality of the 'strange' is deliberately invoked to illustrate the true ambiguity that exists between our perceived *in situ* domesticity and the landscapes of our modern environments. It is predicated on the safe assumption that we live in a world of increased urbanization, mobility, and global communications. Home is no longer that static, sedentary space in which there is "complete comfort, total acceptance, and unquestioned membership (Harman, p. 95)". It is now characterized by its temporaneous existence and its provisional ability to move and inhabit the interstices of our built communities.

The search for home begins with a revised view of 'stranger' in the context of a world who's social organization is no longer tradition directed; a community defined as one where deviation from the standard is neither desired nor tolerated and where there is a specific spatial entity shared by all members with a collective identification to place. Rather, the tradition based community has been supplanted through modernization to bring about a stage of self-reliance (inner-direction) which has been succeeded by an era of other-reliance (other-direction) (Harman, p. 64). However, before I make the argument that these photographs attempt to illustrate this abstract social theory, I need to define what the table and chair represent.

Furniture has the dubious distinction of being a permanent fixture in our lives. I choose these words carefully because our perception of it is one of immutability despite the fact that it is rarely 'built -in' and humans have shown little tolerance to furniture that can't be moved. We want it flexible but we want it highly adaptable and unobtrusive, too. This is why we tell our guests to "please, become part of the furniture", that is, fit-in. It is a

curious analogy we make because it extends to the nomenclature of we use for chairs and tables as anthropomorphic creatures. They have arms and legs, backs and necks; the personification of man is unmistakable. The chairs in these photos also index a specific human user in the sense that an occupant/owner is clearly missing but referenced. Lastly, I want to stress the inherent symbolism furniture has to the general mobile conditions of contemporary society. Indeed, furniture in the seventeenth century was referred to in English as 'moveables' and the root of the French 'meubles' means 'to move.' Therefore, it is the intention of the pieces in these photographs to be read as a symbol for both the collective identity of society in a nameless place and as a specific anonymous nomad negotiating Houston's urban realm.

The important distinction, then, between tradition bound communities and the reflexive groups of like-others is that the former is unquestionably accepted as an accident of circumstance whereas the latter is deliberate and social proximity to one's 'home town' is rendered insignificant. The consequence is that one place is readily replaced by any other as an acceptable homescape in this highly mobile structure (Harman, p. 68). The furniture series begins to address this condition through the obviously deliberate placement of the pieces and the curious feeling that the spatial context for the chairs and tables is somehow less important than the immediate world that the objects themselves create.

The furniture is self-referential, symbolizing the liberating trend of individualism attendant with modernism as producing actors who are more independent, self-reliant, and critical. This is one of two human social needs identified by Eric Fromm; the other being the desire to avoid aloneness (Harman, p. 64). As these two drives compete for prominence at various stages of social organization one can see the alienating consequence of independence as producing a feeling of isolation, aloneness, and fear. The problem of the modern stranger then is reconciling the need for membership, as driven from the sustained myth of tradition-direction, with the need for autonomy. What the photographs

show is that a social mode of other-direction has the possibility of taking the best of both

worlds and its means for existence through highly sophisticated modes of communication,

which is what most emphatically characterizes the modern age. That is, if there is no more

'home' in the nostalgic sense of the word, then membership is achieved by the collective

identification as strangers who now orient to finding rather than remembering a home.

Issues of membership is referenced in the photographs by the allusion to an

unnamed program or event for which the tables and chairs represent inclusion. They serve

as a dividing line between the realms of public and private and they exist as private entities

within public spaces. Because this world is structured around temporary privacy at best

(that is all one could hope for in the photos), the assumption that there is always a place of

private dimension to return to is dubious. Harman outlines the argument as such:

> Private constitutes 'own': that which one possesses , transforms,
> controls. In the dichotomy between public and private may be
> discovered a key to the social organization of strangeness.
> 'Private selves' lead to a constant division between self and other;
> between 'anonymous functionary' and friend/neighbor/
> substantive individual. Privacy generates a place to go to, and,
> hence, a place to be public from. It is a spatial concept which also
> has implications for social and cultural proximity. The loss of
> privacy, in the form of a loss of identity, of home, of a sense of
> "where I belong", in turn results in a loss of the distinction
> between home and away. It is all away. With nowhere to return
> to, the present place is only relative to any other place; it has no
> significance in relation to private self. The social organization of
> strangeness, then, is constituted of the real lack of privacy. This
> in turn implies spatial rootlessness. (Harman, p.68)

Lance Packard in A Nation of Strangers argues that the very pursuit of privacy leads

inevitably to its inaccessibility. The further one attempts to distance oneself from others,

the more that very pursuit brings attention to oneself (Harman, p.69). The oddness of the

furniture is not simply that they are literally 'homeless' but that they have been orchestrated

to connote a sense of privacy in contexts completely devoid of those means.

What the photographs do fail to show, however, is that as privacy becomes a scarce commodity, the pursuit of material goods is actively sought as a means of isolating one's self behind a mask of things. It also serves to place oneself within the community through the membership of accepted goods. In fact, 'commodity fetishism' *is* the accepted means of achieving membership for the modern stranger whereby it is *required* to acquire private property, worship the new, and buy authentic experiences in order to 'fit in' (Harman, p.69). This goes a long way in explaining the apparent paradox of increasing rates of consumption in an age when for the first time it is possible to exist comfortably without *owning* anything.

Other direction requires a highly sophisticated language of membership, both verbal and visual. 'Fitting -in' becomes the sensitive reading of membership clues that distinguish one's self according to trivial differences while maintaining a fundamental commitment to that which makes one similar. These two modes of behavior are classified by Harman as 'communicative normalization' and 'discursive strangeness' (Harman, p.60).

Communicative normalization is the use of both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication between members as a means of achieving and maintaining membership. It requires taking cues from others and basing one's self perception on those cues. Allegiances are made through discursive means (Harman, p.61).

Discursive strangeness is the non-compliance within the language of membership and it is conspicuous. Deviance as a category is quite visible in a system of symbol communication that is not followed.

The implication is that the pretense of familiarity breeds strangeness. Other-direction as a mode of conformity yields singles bars, encounter groups, cocktail parties and 'personal' ads. It is a 'false collectivization' wherein individuals do not deeply relate to others as members with anything more in common than their membership (Harman, p.61).

This seems to me to perfectly express the familiarity found in suburban housing developments wherein membership, the earnest desire to 'fit-in', breeds only the most cursory examples of likeness through pseudo-historical facades of the collective memory of childhood homes or idealized versions of the same.

The language of membership is the language of architecture commodified in the same way we symbolize all consumer products as denoting a particular social group or status. When that language is not spoken (discursive strangeness) it is immediately apparent and often acted upon. Witness all the community activity boards advocating conformity under the guise of neighborhood beautification acts. Says Harman, "the immediacy of self-disclosure through symbols replaces the 'getting to know the other' which prevailed when other ... was hard to get to know (Harman, p.62)." This is why we don't bother to know our neighbor -- their normalcy (membership) is accepted by way of their symbolic language: a three bedroom, two and one-half bathroom house and family car. This is also why the chairs and tables seem so strange to us. There is no readable past or readily accessible symbol with which to 'place' them.

The ambiguous nature of these photographs highlights the argument that Harman makes about one of the true causes of modern man's alienation. And that is the conflict between the myth of time and space-bound community (tradition-directed) that we refuse to give up and the reality of its relative insignificance in today's world of transience. That the furniture seems *almost* right proves to a certain degree that the viewer, too, is a stranger able to read the myths of domesticity while not consuming them. The sympathy the viewer feels is the shared identity with his own strangeness in the same way that Edward Hopper's paintings reveal a modern community through the absent presence of the viewer, also perceived to exist in solitude.

To the extent that the chair series is understood to represent the placelessness of modern man, the viewer can begin to appreciate how the nature of space becomes place.

Intimate experiences of place are based on the subtle distinctions made between movement and rest. Space is transformed into place as definition is acquired and meaning is ascribed. This is achieved by pauses in movement -- pauses that make possible a location to satisfy biological needs and to become the "center of felt value." Ultimately it is a dialectic of the geographical distinction between home and away, symbols for the two basic conditions of for animal beings, movement and rest (Tuan, p.138).

Nearly all the photos are taken near or in view of modes of transportation, lines of communication, or the implication of dynamic activity that exists in juxtaposition to the repose, the pause, of the table and chair. The result of a habitual use of a path is that the path acquires a stability and a density of meaning that are the traits of place. The paths and the pauses along it constitute a larger sense of place -- the home and then the city. Place in terms of the modern mobility of man can encompass the whole region of habitual experience sub-categorized by home, office, and vacation spot even though it may have no apparent boundaries (Tuan, p.182). What, if nothing else, do these photographs portray but the inexorable movement of the city within which can exist a spatial pause from which to reflect and observe.

What these spaces also address, and this is true of the newest built communities in general, is the preclusion of any historical context at which to look back and acquire a sense of self and identity. Modern mobility is so complex that the experience of place becomes superficial and inauthentic precisely because there is not enough time to accumulate the knowledge of a place where every day is multiplied by all the days before it. This conundrum is addressed, however, by the philosopher James K. Feibleman who has pointed out that perhaps it is not the extensity but the intensity of events that matters in qualifying their importance in our lives (Tuan, p.184). They need not actually to have happened.

The particular appeal of the movie *Blade Runner*, I believe, and indeed much of what we admire in modernity is the evocation of a future past.

> I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on
> fire off the shoulder of Orion ... I watched C-Beams glitter in the
> dark near the Tannhauser Gate. All these moments will be lost in
> time, like tears in the rain. Time to die.
>
> *Blade Runner ,1982*

Nostalgia can be created for times and places that have not yet happened nor been seen. Simply, the possibility of their occurrence in the space that exists between the myths by which we live and our present reality is enough to suspend the sense of loss an alienation modern man experiences in his mind's landscape. It is the same sense of delight and comfort one experiences with deja vu; knowing for sure that one was supposed to have lived at least this long! If the idea of a future can exist, then that notion may be more real than reality itself. Our sense of community and belonging is ultimately entwined with humanity and confirmed by the myths that we share as humans.

The photographs evoke the prospect of a future through the use of a strong horizon line which presages a point in time and space beyond the present. As the spatio-temporal structure of perspectival space has been relativised to the human viewer, the indexing of man by the tables and chairs define a place from which to view the future. The pictures with Houston's skyline in the background are very much about invoking a promise of the future, the possibility of journey and a sentiment for a shared humanity. The past is looked for in the future from the present. The verity of this reading occurs in those pictures where the relationship between the foreground subject and the background object is most successful; principally when the table and chair are not lost to the scale of the framed view.

On the subject of journey there is much to be learned about the nature of home; especially in reference to the mobility of today's culture. The two types of journey at work in these photos are of the body and mind and are actually symbolic of each other. Rarely is the journey considered significant in and of itself; only as a place related event. In truth, it is the journey that is real while home remains the ideal. With the emphasis in our society on rootedness and place, we do not adequately deal with our growing placelessness and the sense of loss it engenders. Place-loss becomes self-loss and journey is one means to retrieve it (Porteous, p.142).

Aboriginal Dreamings are ancestral songs that describe paths and regions across all of Australia that quite literally create place and identity for the Aborigines. It is precisely the structure of these songlines, the act of calling and naming every topological feature, that creates place from space. More interestingly, the concept of home is not just associated with the geography of place but is quite literally embodied in the movement and journey itself; what the Aborigines call 'walkabout'. They exist in a continual state of becoming, never having arrived or left from anywhere. Therefore, they are purely adaptable as ones for whom nowhere is home yet can be at home everywhere. Furthermore, they claim ownership to the *right of access* to their respective paths. Home is partly described by the conscious choice to be there (Chatwin, p.120).

In almost every photograph, the concept of journey is embodied by the tenuous nature with which the furniture touches the ground. There is no evidence of rootedness and in many cases the furniture seems to float (the gas station photograph in particular has this quality). Curiously, though, the furniture seems most comfortable, however temporary, in those settings proportionally more inclined to the man-made than natural. Perhaps meaning is only apprehended in nature after it has been scaled by architecture to man. "Nature is too diffuse, its stimuli too powerful and conflicting, to be directly

accessible to the human mind and sensibility," posits Tuan (Tuan, p.111). Thus, without the context of architectural form the furniture seems more alien and alienating in nature.

Most often, however, the subjects in these photos inhabit a realm of 'in-betweeness'; the space that exists between the dualities of home:away, city:nature, and the familiar:unfamiliar. Arrival defines the place and departure defines one's having been there. Journey happens 'in-between' and these are the spaces we inhabit more and more frequently; the expressways, airports, borders. "These empty spaces are gathering spaces, places for waiting, watching, arriving, taking leave (Harman, p.96)." In-between promises many windows of opportunity but it lacks the condition of familiarity, of home and the given. It assures difference; "It is a state of expectancy, of discovery, of confrontation; when in-between one is always confronting one's own difference." More than any other description, this seems to capture the essence of ambiguity in these photographs. Add to this the following quote by Harman:

> The milieu which is felt by the stranger is a subjectively perceived world which touches every sense; which makes its mark upon memory as having a particular character. It lives out its difference, its particularity, for to become a place with a name (i.e. to remain in memory, to find a spot in the ongoing *duree* of the traveler) it presents itself as incomplete -- as a world to be entered into, experienced, and taken when one leaves. It is nameless; its horizons are undefined until through 'having been there' they crystallize in the memory of the traveler. (Harman, p.96)

Being in-between necessitates an awareness unlike that of home because movement is influenced by the transformation incurred in the 'naming' and 'placing' of previous places. One is open to redirection.

Like the sculptures of Martin Puryear, the photos incorporate the idea that a wholeness of self is possible in today's 'deconstructive' realm specifically by remaining incomplete. Meaning must be ascribed and personalized; it cannot be simply appropriated. The domestic dramas are only partially complete and located in settings only marginally

represented. For this, indeed, is the reality of how we live and it should obviate the myth of home as that space in which one is completely familiar and no longer a stranger.

Another reading of the ambiguity present in the photographs stems from an understanding about the 'in-between' communities society has been building, appropriately named 'edge cities'. They are a morphology of a third wave in a trend of decentralizing downtown city centers. First came the suburbinization of America after World War II that pushed homes beyond the confines of traditional city edges. Next came the movement of the market and retail centers out nearer to where society had moved. This was marked by the proliferation of malls in the 1960's and '70's. The third and current wave in the birth of edge cities is the movement of society's means to create wealth, namely jobs, business and manufacturing centers, to the outskirts of outlying city centers (Garreau, p.4). Edge cities are becoming a familiar typological urban form based on a generation of value decisions by Americans as the best ways to live, work, and play. Consequently, they are now recognized as home to a majority of people despite the fact that they are described as 'soulless' places and that they incorporate many of the qualities of in-between spaces (Garreau, p.8).

These communities are now connected by an infrastructure of jetways, freeways, and rooftop satellite dishes -- not the railroads and subways of the nineteenth century. It is a structure for mobility that has not only increased exponentially but has emphasized that freedom as being based on individual terms. One need only regard the marked preference for single family detached houses concurrent with the entrenched belief of the privilege for the private automobile. And, herein, lies the paradox of our confusion with the familiarity with these places: edge cities are urban centers blown out to automobile scale. The chair and table problem is precisely one of scale -- of having moved from the indexing of cities on the human pedestrian scale to one of the fast moving automobile.

One telling consequence of this individual mobility is that it is now cultural proximity rather than spatial or social nearness that has become the new context of belonging within the universal language of membership. McLuhan's 'global village', brought on through the universalizing of embedded meanings produced via mass communications, production, and multinational corporations suggest such a world. Fast food chains insist on a uniformity of products and facilities as do hotel chains wishing to present a consistent vision of place. Additionally, houses, shops, entertainment venues, and highways become interchangeable. Ultimate familiarity and membership breeds anonymity and solitude.

It seems that we need to come to terms with our existing landscape in order to negotiate our way to finding home. We must find a language for our need of community which transcends the current discourse of expressed fear, estrangement, and nostalgia from modernity. Our language for belonging is wholly inadequate to modern life and cities. Our belonging is not one of permanence, to something fixed, known, and familiar though we keep insisting it should be. It is a constant fight between desiring the security of home and wanting to flee the boredom and constraints that home eventually comes to represent. Perhaps man is not naturally satisfied and we are happiest always seeking and never finding; retaining the ideal while journeying in the present; coming and going rather than starting and finishing. For it is the space between the myth of domesticity and its loss where possibility exists.

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[Benezra, Niel]. Martin Puryear.
        The Art Institue of Chicago:
        Thames and Hudson, 1991.

The sculptures of Martin Puryear are reflective of the idea that a wholeness of self is

possible in today's 'deconstructive' and post-modern realm specifically by embracing

cultural heterogeneity. As referential to my argument of a seemingly rootless society,

Puryear addresses the issue through his sculptures of constructed structures and/or markers

from which the marginalized dweller might find temporary recognition and reflection. Far

from merely manipulating our inherent sympathies with primitivism, the sculptures engage

us in a much more thoroughly modern way by remaining incomplete. Meaning must be

ascribed and personalized; it cannot be simply appropriated. There also exists a potential

energy within them all that is only kinetically realized in the mind of the viewer. The

importance of the material properties of the sculptures are directly proportional to the extent

that it embodies the *idea* of materiality as it is linked to craft; not craft as anti-industrial but

craft as it reintroduces human identity.

Chatwin, Bruce. The Songlines.
        New York: Penguin Books, 1987.

Chatwin weaves a personal description of his journey to Australia with his

investigation of Aboriginal Dreamings; ancestral songs that describe paths and regions

across all of Australia that quite literally create place and identity for the aborigines. It is precisely the structure of these songlines, the act of calling and naming every topological feature, that creates space. This is, in itself, interesting stuff but its inherent consequence is what proves most fascinating for my work. And this is that the concept of home is not just associated with the geography of place but is literally embodied in the movement and journey itself; what the Aborigines call 'walkabout'. They exist in a continual state of becoming, never having 'arrived' or 'left' from anywhere. Therefore, they are purely adaptable as ones for whom nowhere is home yet can be at home everywhere; at least everywhere that their songlines describe. Furthermore, they claim ownership to the *right of access* to their respective paths. Home is partly described by the conscious choice to be there.

Chatwin goes on to argue through historical and literary example that man's urge to be mobile is far from an anomalous condition despite indelible myth to the contrary. Its biblical origins in the story of Cain and Abel exist as metaphor for the State's (settled, sedentary) historic preoccupation with keeping the Nomad (shepherd, mobile) under control.

I will argue that the smooth space of the nomad is ascendant in today's world as characterized by the increased mobilization of modern world culture. Abel's death by Cain's hand will no longer be lamented for its mere moral irresponsibility.

Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. A Thousand Plateaus: Capatalism
         and Schizophrenia. Translation by Brian Massumi.
         London: Athlone, 1988.

Garreau, Joel. Edge City: Life on the New Frontier.
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Harman, Lesley D. The Modern Stranger
    On Language and Membership. Berlin,
    Nw York, Amsterdam: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988.

The accepted view of 'stranger' as an actor whose origin is complete and separate from that of the group to which he is strange is reexamined in light of the fact that increased urbanization, mobility, and global communications have altered the definition of community and its conditions for membership.

Harman argues that far from accepting the modern dilemma of alienated man in a rootless society, a contemporary view of community based on 'strangeness' (as that word befits the way we exist in the world today) is one way to establish a sense of home based on what we know rather than what we remember. As place and membership cease to be regarded as fixed, then home will transcend its indelible myth as determined and permanent and take on a more sophisticated meaning not tied to tradition.

'Strangeness' is now the condition of searching for like-others in a world where the participant is prone to move and whose identity is neither with place and community but with self. It requires skills of adaptability and assimilation and it is now the condition of rule rather than exception.

Harman summarizes the work of Reisman in that traditional forms of social organization have been supplanted through modernization to bring about a stage of self-reliance (inner-direction) which is succeeded by a stage of other-reliance (other-direction). From Fromm Harman identifies two human social needs: avoiding aloneness; and the awareness of self as an individual entity. These two drives compete for prominence at various stages of social organization. Modernity resolves the at first liberating trend of this individualism but comes to a third stage of alienated actor who "becomes more independent, self-reliant, and critical and he becomes more isolated, alone, and afraid." Other-directedness in the modern age has the possibility of taking the best of tradition-direction (membership) and inner-direction (autonomy) for its means of existence through

highly sophisticated modes of communication which is what most emphatically characterizes the modern age. If there is no more 'home' in the nostalgic sense of the word then members must orient to finding rather than remembering a home.

Harman finds it necessary to make a distinction between public and private. Private constitutes 'own': that which one possesses, transforms, controls. Because the world is structured around temporary privacy, the assumption that there is always a place of private dimension to return to is dubious. Spatial rootlessness is a consequence of any lack of real privacy. With one place relative to any other there is no significance given to a private self. Packard, in A Nation of Strangers argues that the very pursuit of privacy leads inevitably to its inaccessibility. The further one attempts to distance oneself from others, the more that very pursuit brings attention to oneself. Privacy is a scarce commodity so 'commodity fetishism' is pursued in its place. The American obsession with the pursuit of material goods serve to isolate oneself from others behind a mask of things. It also serves to place oneself within the community through the membership of accepted goods, however, the experience is inauthentic.

Harman outlines two trends in the mode of other direction: Communicative normalization is the use of both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication between members as a means of achieving and maintaining membership. It requires taking cues from others and basing one's self perception on those cues. Allegiances are made through discursive means; Discursive strangeness is the non-compliance within the language of membership and is conspicuous. Deviance as a category is quite visible in a system of symbol communication that is not followed.

The implication is that the pretense of familiarity breeds strangeness. Other-direction as a mode of conformity yields singles bars, encounter groups, cocktail parties and 'personal' ads. It is a "false collectivization" wherein individuals do not deeply relate to others as members with anything more in common than their membership. This seems

to me to perfectly express the familiarity found in suburban housing developments wherein the membership, the earnest desire to 'fit in', breeds only the most cursory examples of likeness through pseudo-historical facades of the collective memory of childhood homes.

Cultural proximity, rather than spatial or social nearness, within the universal language of membership has become the new context of belonging. McLuhan's 'global village', brought on through the universalizing of embedded meanings produced via mass communications, production, and multinational corporations suggest such a world. Fast food chains insist on a uniformity of products and facilities as do hotel chains wishing to present a consistent vision of place. Additionally, houses, shops, entertainment venues, and highways become interchangeable. Ultimate familiarity and membership breeds anonymity and solitude.

Porteous, Douglas J. Landscapes of the Mind
        Worlds of Sense and Metaphor. Toronto,
        Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press,
        1990.

Porteous' basic premise is that modern man is, at root, alienated and, thus, estranged from authentic experiences. Furthermore we confront our world in a primarily visual way that neglects the richness of experience possible through the other senses and fosters an objective, detached view of the world that ultimately reduces us to experiencing it from a distance and second hand.

The fundamental dialectic for man in life is between 'home' and 'away'. Journey is the movement that links the two and 'away' is a condition that may be temporary or permanent. 'Homescape' is the landscape of home that metaphorically reflects one's character. Porteous uses the novels of Graham Greene to illustrate the argument that as creatures of our environment, we are subordinate to it and illustrative of it. These influential environments are only manifestations of the twentieth century wasteland. We then perpetuate the model of degradation by recreating in our homes those environments by

that which we were conditioned. Greene points out repeatedly that existence away from home is inauthentic while paradoxically telling us that home is stifling to the spirit and must be escaped. Thus, "the thoughtful existential being in the twentieth century is essentially a homeless exile."

One of the consequences of Greene's work is an understanding that the two types of journeying at work, namely of body and mind, are actually symbolic of each other. Rarely is the journey, decries Porteous, considered significant in and of itself; only as a place related event. Actually it is the journey that is real while home remains the ideal. With an emphasis in our society on rootedness and place we do not adequately deal with our growing placelessness and the sense of loss it engenders. Place-loss becomes self-loss and journey is the only means to achieve our childhood roots, our ideal concept of home. It is an inward journey on which we embark to recapture the primitive -- a childhood which is forever irretrievable.

Porteous' portrayal of cityscapes are unmistakably negatively biased as seen by the euphemism he uses of 'deathscape' after Malcolm Lowry's diatribe. Cities prevent man from an opportunity to live a natural life through its placelessness, rootlessness, and emphasis on greed and alienating technology. It is an antithesis to the childscape realm to which we all identify and seek. Home is to that which we knew as children -- a fantastical, imaginative, and secure world that was inexorably rooted in nature and the rural.

It is increasingly evident to me, however, that this image of childhood is over idealized and that for many, the world in which they were young is not at all a place to which they would seek to return. An idealized version of childhood for those of Porteous' and Greene's generation neglects to acknowledge the reality of how we grew up: in suburbs that were themselves romantic versions of a rural ideal or in exo-urban centers unabashedly devoid of any secure, simple, and easily apprehended view of the world. The city is a deathscape precisely because we refuse to understand it on its own terms. We will

never control that which we don't understand. Twentieth century thinkers, of which
Porteous is only the latest, have outlined the problem in wonderful detail and, yet, very few
have addressed any realistic solutions.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. <u>Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience</u>.
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.

Through a social scientific approach the book examines the way people attach
meaning to and organize space through the nature of experience and experiential
perspective. It focuses on "general questions of human disposition, capacities and needs"
within the context of the following discussions: the biological facts of human perceptions
of space; the relations of space and place; and the range of experience or knowledge.

For the purposes of my interests in home, Tuan's extrapolation from direct and
intimate experiences to the symbolic and conceptual apprehensions of space prove most
enlightening. Intimate experiences of place are based on the subtle distinctions made
between movement and rest. Space is transformed into place as definition is acquired and
meaning is ascribed. This is achieved by pauses in movement -- pauses that make possible
a location to satisfy biological needs and to and to become the "center of felt value."
Ultimately it is a dialectic of the geographical distinction between home and away, symbols
for the two basic conditions for animal beings, movement and rest.

The image of home is comprised of the multitude of its components and
furnishings. In the small and the intimate is the evocation of place born and nurtured.
Time enters the equation in that movement in space defines the concept of place. The result
of an habitual use of a path (the routine within the house, for instance) is that the path
acquires a density of meaning and stability that are the traits of place. The paths and the
pauses along it constitute a larger sense of place -- the home and then the city. Place, in
terms of the modern mobility of man, can encompass the whole region of habitual
experience sub-categorized by home, office, and vacation spot even though it may have no

apparent boundaries. Modern mobility is so complex that the experience of place becomes superficial and inauthentic precisely because there is not enough time to accumulate the knowledge of a place where every day is multiplied by all the days before it. This is the accepted belief whereas the philosopher James K. Feibleman has pointed out that perhaps it is not the extensity but the intensity that matters in qualifying the importance of events in our lives. Nostalgia can be created for places and things where one has never been nor seen.

The past is often looked back at to acquire a sense of self and identity. This can be achieved through experiences shared with those associated with a particular past or it can be invoked by objects that have specific relationships in one's past. I would like to extrapolate this argument and posit that perhaps it is also the acquisition itself that confirms a past and this is part of the reason for the prevalence of consumerism -- the establishment of a past, any past that one would choose and can afford to buy. We are more than what the present defines but in the absence of something to show for it we attempt to authenticate experience through consumerism.

One of the most important arguments that Tuan makes is that the identity with place need not be physical. Home can even be another person since it is the focus of value and source of meaning in other people that is ultimately important. It is only because relationships are impermanent that we cling to the objects that produce intimate experiences.

Vidler, Anthony. The Architectural Uncanny:
        Essays in the Modern Unhomely. Cambridge:
        The MIT Press, 1992.

John Hejduk as foil for Vidler's preoccupation with the uncanny;
   the uncanny of the stranger and vagabond.
Literally unsettled architecture that represents the vagrants and
        strangers that so disturb the static and social order.
An architecture that inhabits the interstices of settled communities
        to tweak the collective unconscious in a critique of
        conventional monumentality.
Deleuze and Guattari's guerrilla warfare state made visually manifest

in the form of mobile structures that constitute the smooth, flowing, and unbounded space of the nomad in defiance of the striated, closed, and sedentary space of the state apparatus.

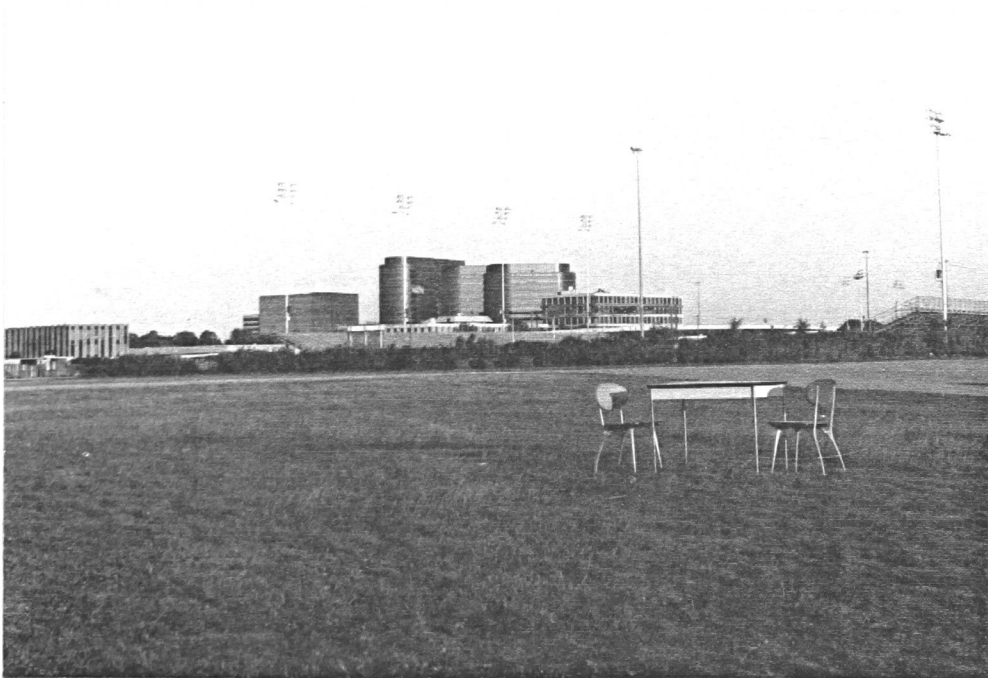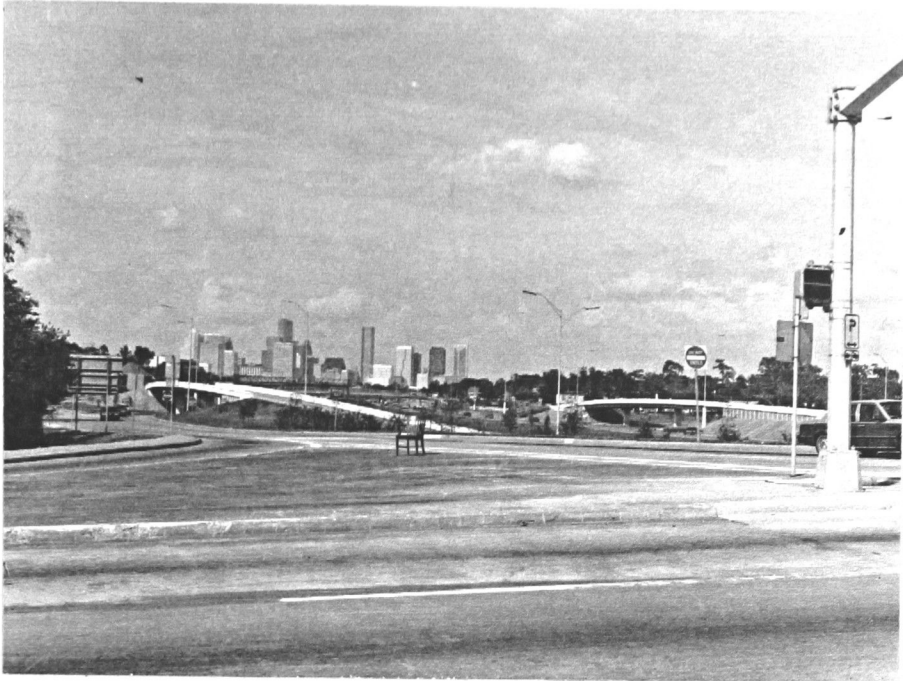So exists one response to the unspoken and ill-defined needs of modern strangers.

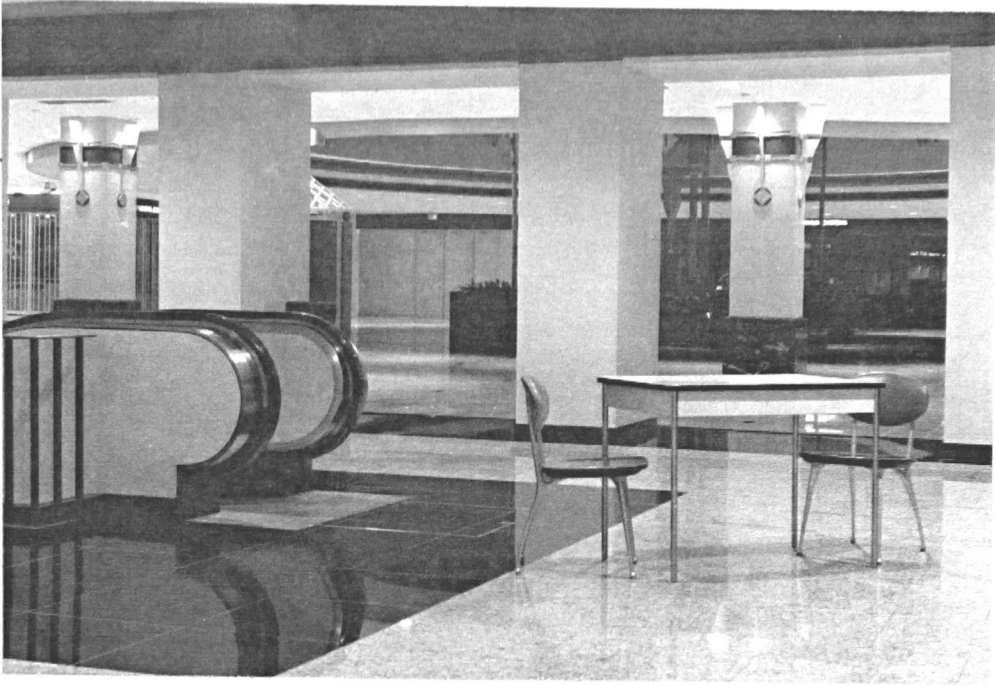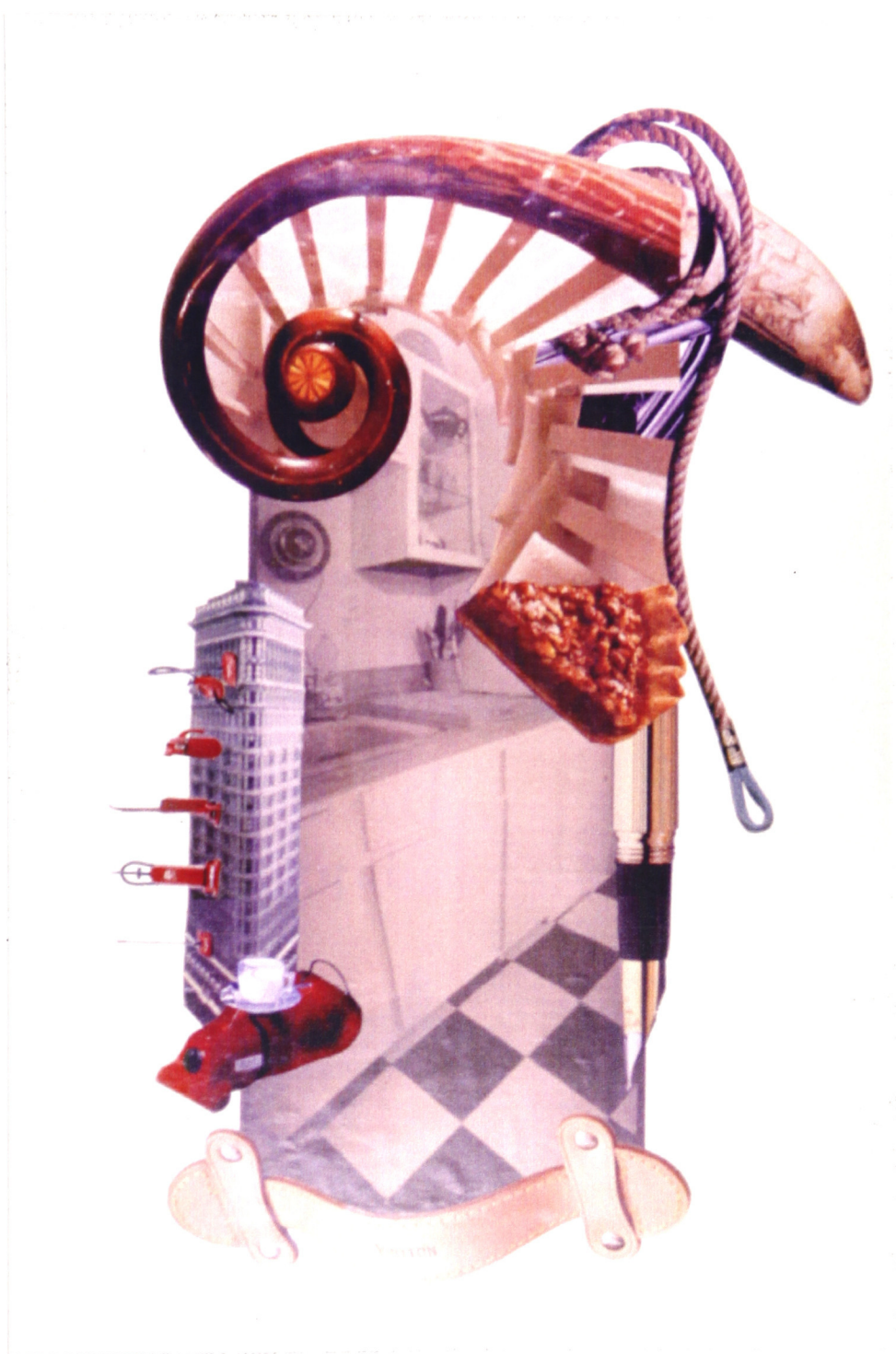# APPENDIX I

INVOKING THE STRANGE
(PHOTOGRAPHS)
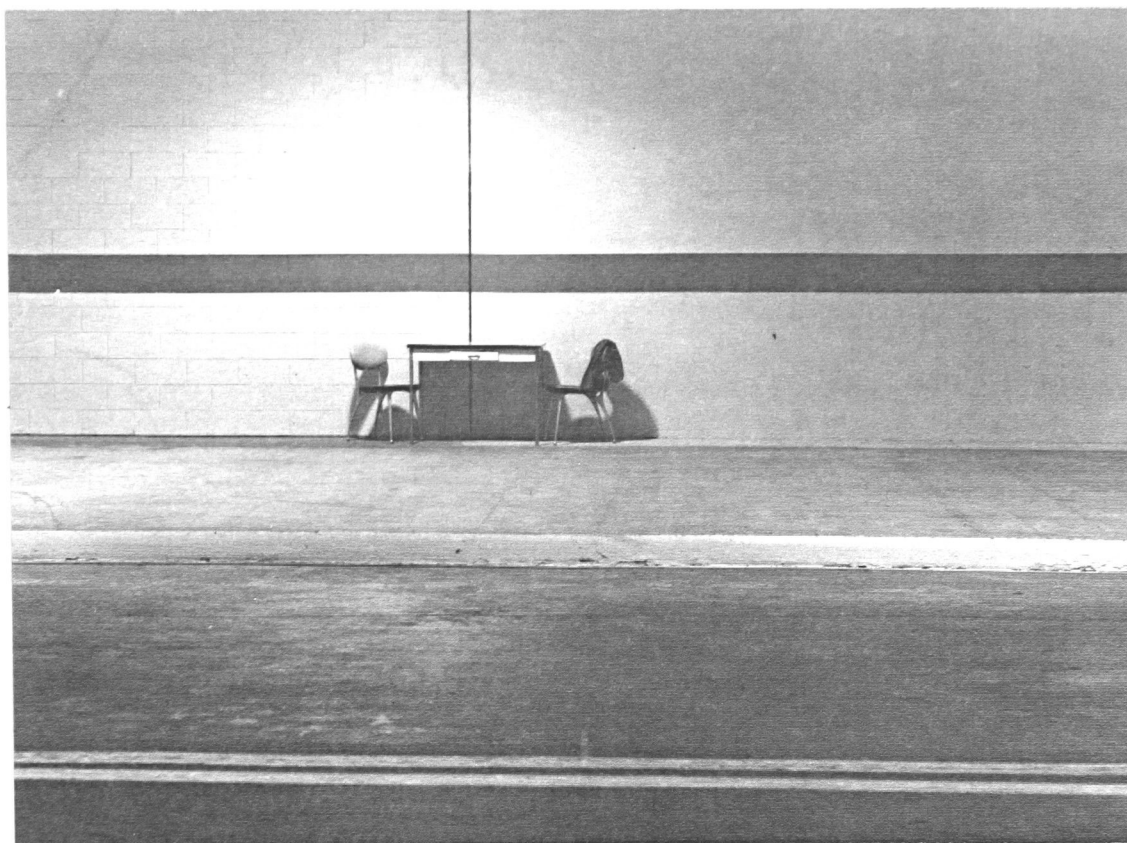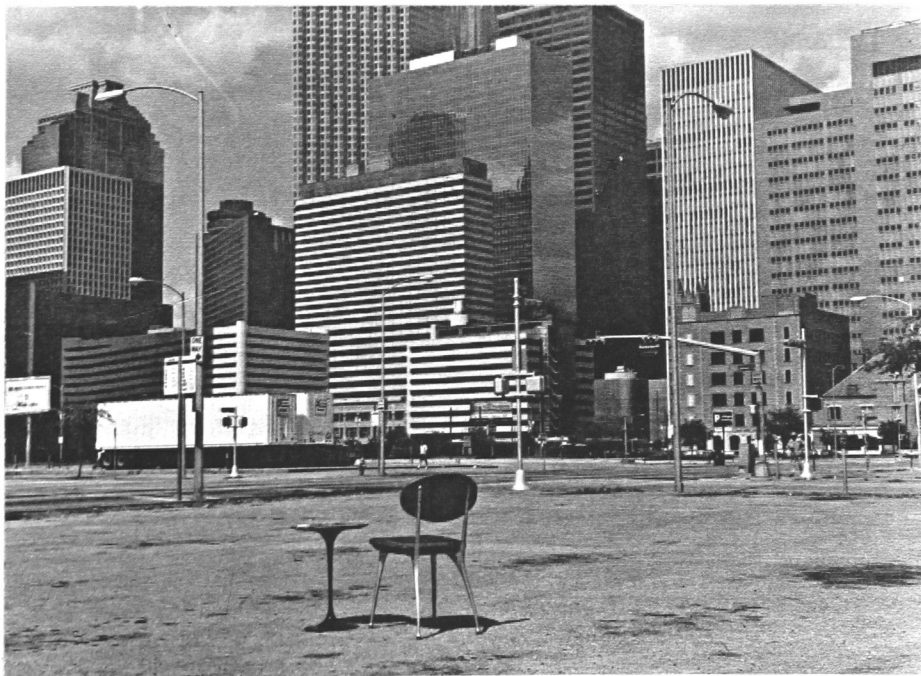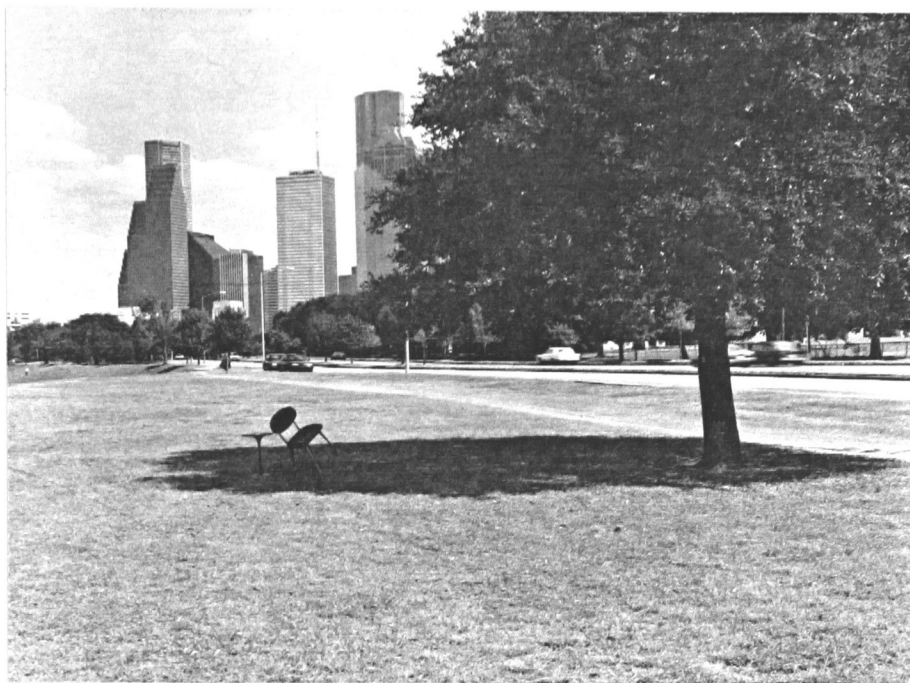
APPENDIX II

COLLAGE: A PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY OF PLACE

In a world where home can be anywhere but where one feels at home nowhere, the idea of site takes on a significance only as far as it is relevant to a particular protagonist. Therefore, the client for this project is me ,or rather, I am the stranger for whom a concept of home must be identified for me to authenticate my experience in the community. It became clear that home is no longer any one particlar place but a collection of images and memories that embody a psychogeography of place. My mapping of site became the collaged images as a way to capture the essence of domesticity. It intuitively seemed appropriate to use variations on the techniques of collage that have proved so effective in helping to interpret the 20th century. To quote from Colin Rowe in Collage City, "The bricoleur is far more of a real life specification of what the architect-urbanist is and does than any fantasy deriving from methodology and semantics".

What I felt was successful about these collages was the identification of the frame as both the a means through which to view a concept of home and as a structure to interpret that view. I am interested in the quality of form evoked by a fully framed but unsheathed house. It exists on the cusp of alluding to a freely fluid and dynamic sense of home before it is fixed as a symbolic interpretation of *any* home. The shell has been rendered meaningless as a signifier that provides any meaningful identity. All spaces are becoming neutralized and commodified and when stripped of their accoutrements and appliques we are left with anonymous white boxes.

APPENDIX III

BRICOLLAGE: THE FOXES' COINTERPOINT TO THE AUTOCRATIC HEDGEHOG

At this point I should make it clear that while collage, bricollage and assemblage had become my methodology, the construction of furniture became my means. The decision to build furniture was made for the following reasons.

1. Furniture is more evocative of the landscapes of the mind through their totemic qualities as heirloom pieces and through their anthropomorphic qualities that elicit certain sympathies.

2. It embodies more meaning since my argument hinges on the assertion that the shells of houses have been rendered meaningless through their disassociative symbols and their commodification..

3. A more meaningful authentic experience can occur with pieces we own and take with us and are not necessarily purchasable.

4. Furniture more immediately references the idea of Houston as being a city of interiority.

5. It coonotes a certain comfort -- a method and function to momentarily reflect and exist in that 'in-between' state.

6. Lastly, it reads as an analog to architecture on a scale with which I could work more tangibly and authentically. Nothing was removed from the experience since there was nothing that 'stood-in' for my design; no representational models. Ultimately, architecture is about building and construction and meaning that is incorporated into that, and I felt I could tap more directly into what it means to be an architect by designing and building full-scale furniture.

The Ladder-Back Chair (fig.1) was a literal interpretation of the frame as a construction technique to evoke the elusive quality of 'in-betweeness'. It was meant to be site specific to the Jury Room of Anderson Hall as a means to reach the balcony and look out the window as a reference to the importance of perceiving a horizon line in helping to distinguish between that which is home and that which is away. The back is conditioned by the angle at which the ladder back must be placed.

My initial interpretation of these pieces was that they be rendered somewhat incomplete until they were enabled by the spaces in which they were placed. This is how the Luna Stool (fig. 2) is meant to achieve its complete meaning. It adjusts and becomes conditioned by the ground of the spaces in which it inhabits. Its use is not fixed as a mere sitting tool but suggests a use more alusive as a seat meant to be temporarily rested on in readiness of movement. It straddles the line between movement and rest.

A sense of place can become a sense of home through extensity of use. Meaning is ascribed through habitual use. To build a routine is to invoke the familiar within the unfamiliar. It can be a method for survival. The SAD Chair (fig. 3) is meant to invoke a feeling of security of place, a perceived privacy, through the routine of opening the contraption. The framework of the step-ladder expands to accommodate the functions of sitting and reading. The space is one of comfort with a massage back and a territory created by the space of illumination, however, from the observers point of view it is highly public. Like a stage from the audience, one can see the lone actor or speaker.

The method of bricollage becomes more seamless with the Home Shopping Chair (fig. 4). It is more about a transformation -- that of a shopping cart into an English wing chair. Both typologies are clearly readable without any defineable seam. Its transformation into a domestic object occurs through its proscribed use as one that we associate with domesticity and the commodification of the home. It is a subtractive sculptural piece in that

nothing was added to create its form; only its inherent frame was reworked for its transformation.

Objects such as an ironing board, which is universally symbolic of the domestic realm, begin to illuminate our relationship to the way we think about home with the way in which we actually live. In one position, the ironing board folds out of the partition of the Wrinkle-Free Screen (fig.5) to indeed function as the tool for which it is designed. In its opposite position, however, a light flips out of the bourd as it opens to render its expected function useless. Its function is then recognizable as a table, making ambiguous any one reading of the screen as either a domestic tool or as an architectural spacemaker.

The idea of home is embodied in its psychogeography - its collection of memories and imaginations. Thus a dream house is literally *any* house that permits us to dream and that shelters daydreaming; specifically that of memories of former dwelling places and imaginations and also nostalgia for places never lived. The last piece in the series is called Dream House (fig. 6). It is a cabinet that functions first as a repository of the momentos for every place to which it is moved. This is achieved since the ladder on front only opens the drawers in spaces which are keyed to the height in which the ladder can be raised. So one may never reach the top drawer unless the cabinet is in a two-storey height space. As the ladder is raised, its use as a means to climb is reenabled by the drawers with sliding covers that act as stairs.

If it could be said that the front of the piece enables the conscious filing of memories, then the back, locked trunk functions as the means to access the subconscious memories of home through its function as a bed and, ultimately, the facilitator of dreams. The Dream House attempts to embody a portable sense of home through the recording of the psychophenomena ofeach dwelling place that is transported anew. The dream house is renewed in every space.

These pieces of furniture are meant to interact with the spaces in which they are called upon to make a home and in some cases to record the physical qualities of those spaces. It is called furniture only in the sense that the pieces in some way define a function that is commensurate with the uses we usually proscribe to our domestic furnishings. Ideally they would not be limited to one reading.
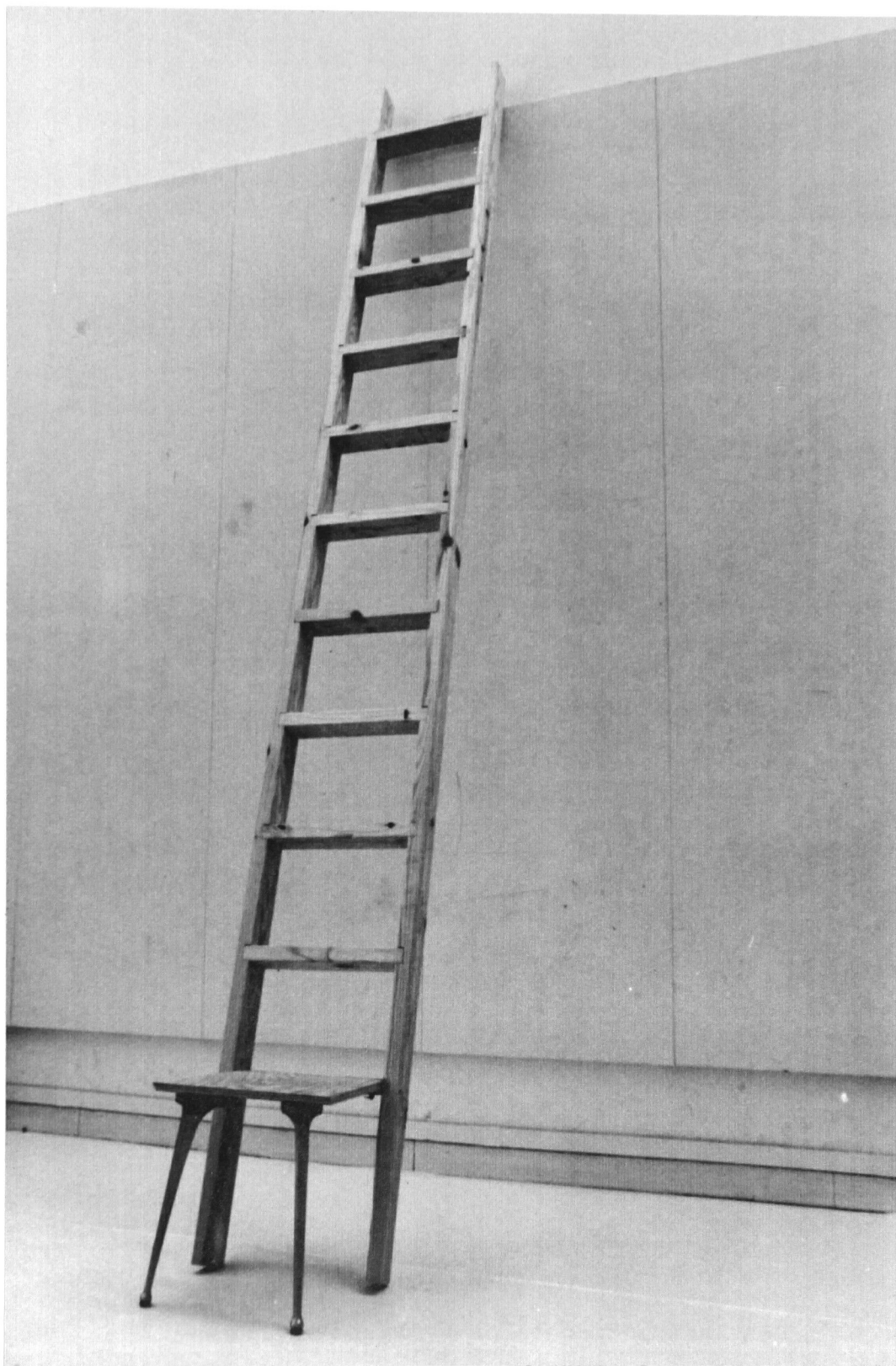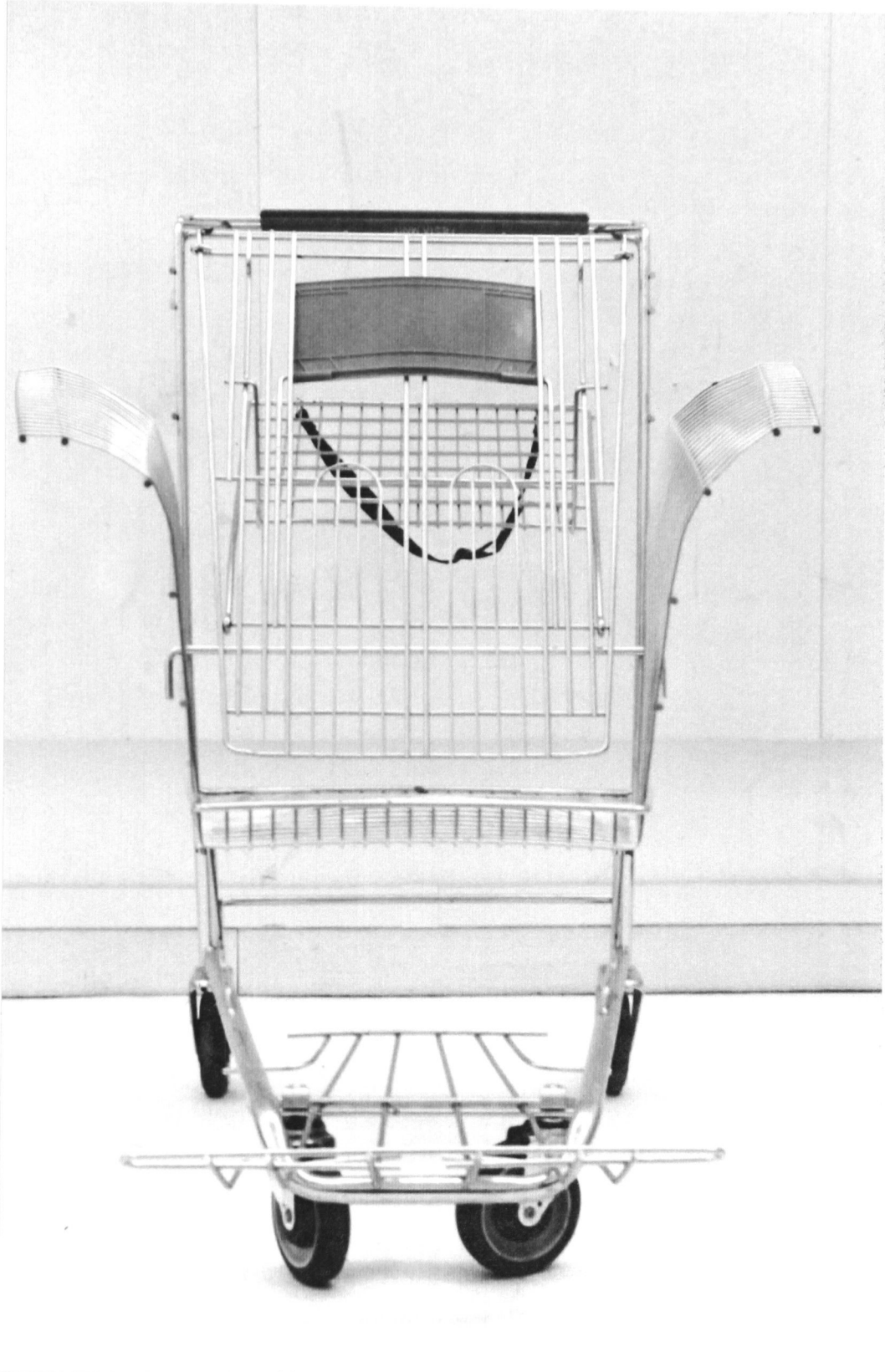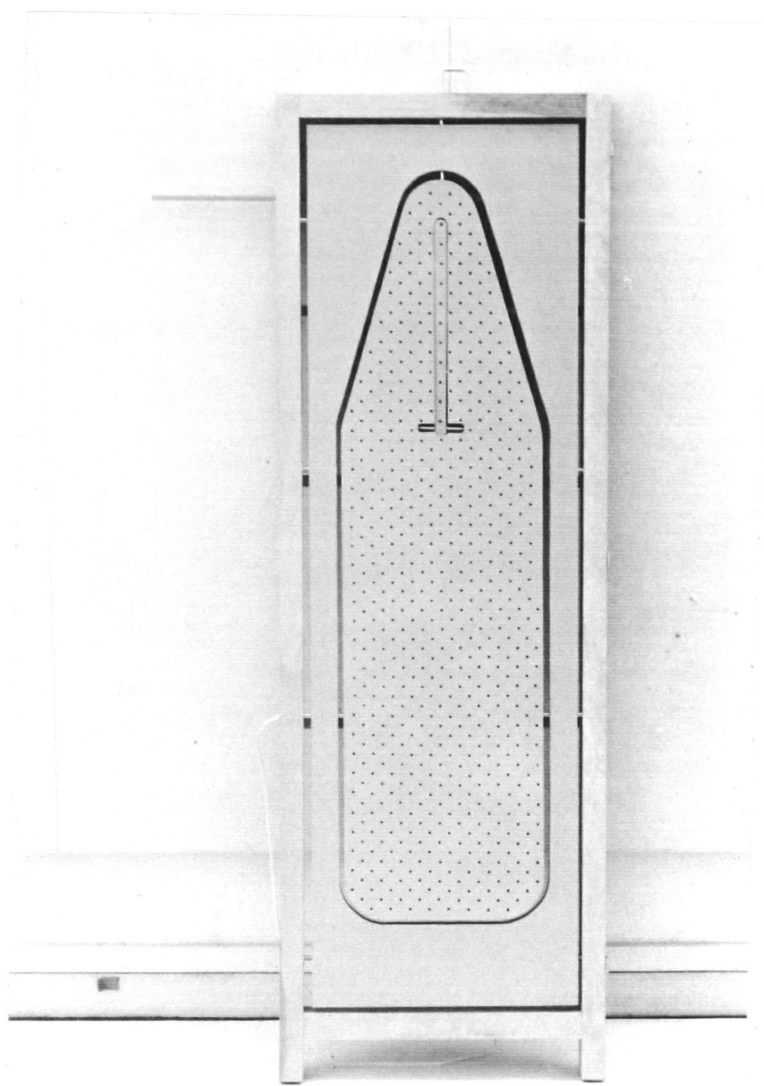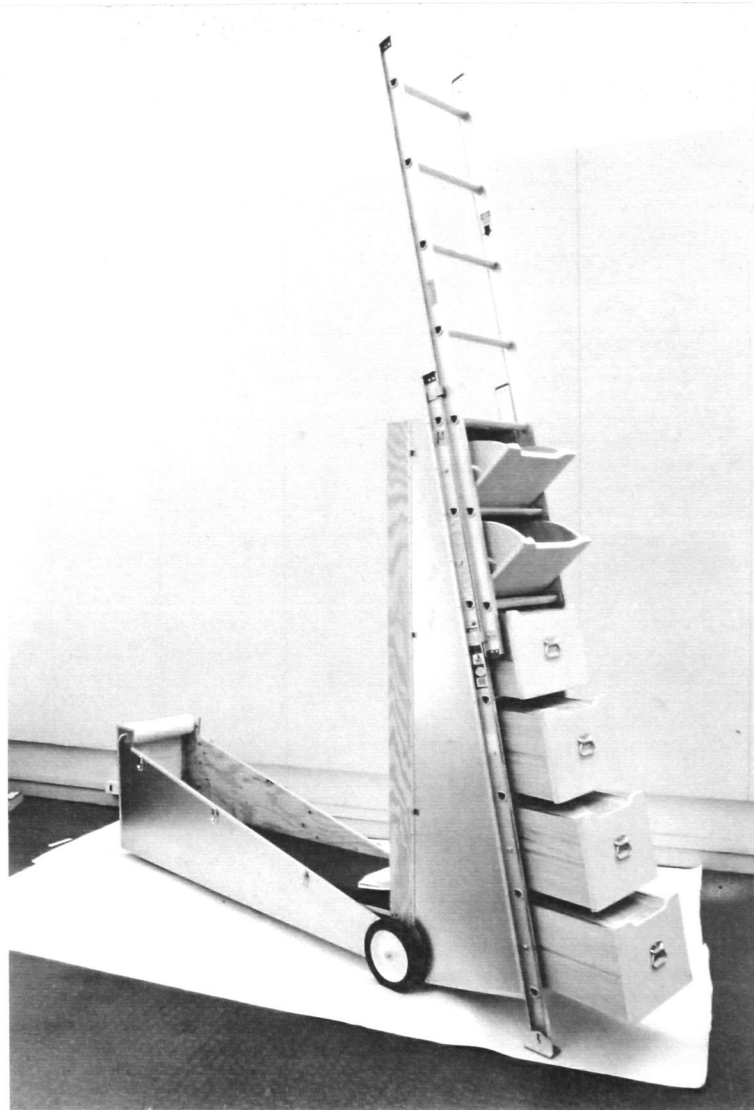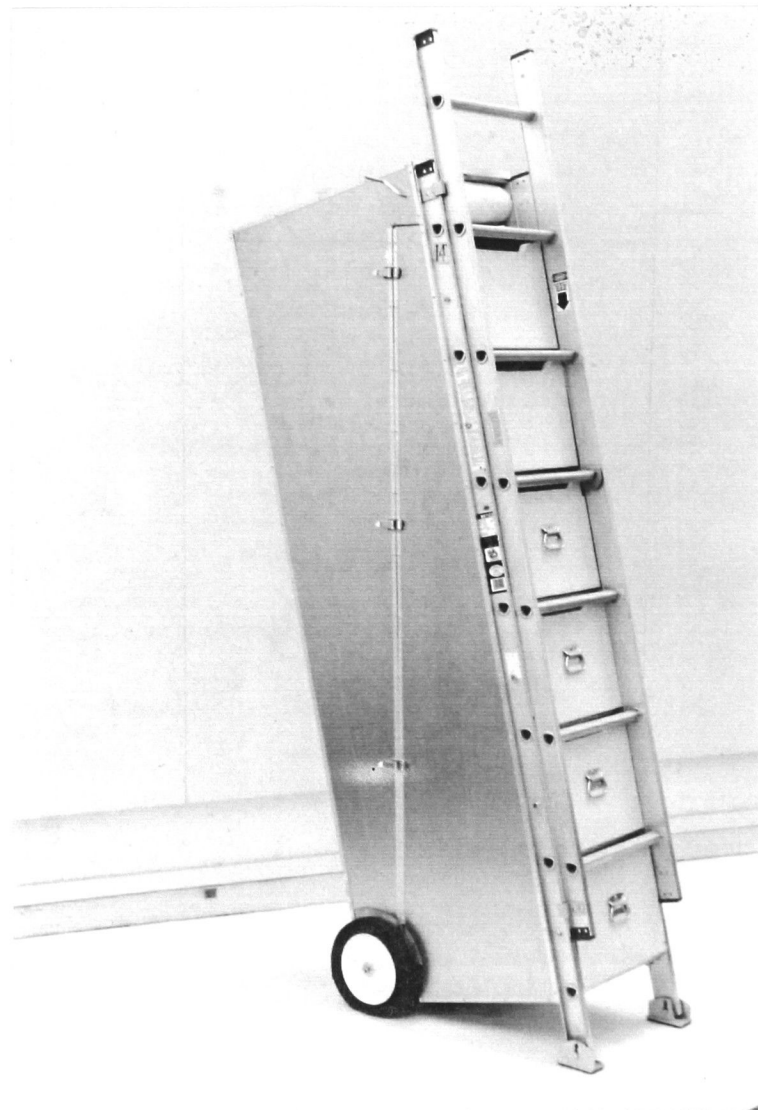
APPENDIX IV

JURY COMMENTS

Antonio Lao -- Mr. Lao felt that the project represented an attempt to reveal the arbitrariness of symbols in our society. A chair, for instance, is normally undersood only in its mechanical definitionas a support for the human body.

Overall, the project was "very effective".

Mary Ann Ray -- Ms. Ray posited whether interventions could build us out of the cul-de-sac house.

The project exhibited a high degree of craft.

Yung-ho Chang -- Mr. Chang commented that it would be interesting to see an image drawing of a plan of a typical suburban house with these pieces of furniture inserted instead of the traditional dining room table, etc.

Lars Lerup -- Mr. Lerup stated that architecture is not equipment and that these objects are 'closed' objects; they don't collapse into the world.

Perhaps these pieces could lead to another level of architecture.

Gerald Maffei -- Mr. Maffei concluded that three things made this an exemplary thesis:

    1. In the beginning the issues were clearly exposed through the identification of the relevent objects.

    2. This was followed by embedding them uncomfortably in a dramatic landscape.

    3. It lastly suggested the possibility of further exploration by the positive quality of exposing our values. It left open the question of identifying whether these pieces represented what we've become or where we are heading.

Christopher Macdonald -- Mr. Macdonald believed that the arguments would have been more persuasive if European intellectualism had been left out of the discussion and the pieces were left to stand on their own merits. Their interpretation could then have been more broad.