

## Streetscapes in an American City

*Louis Sauer  
Daniel Arbour and Associates  
1610, St. Catherine Street, Suite 501  
Montreal, Quebec  
Canada H3B 4P3*

### Summary

This paper recounts the author's reading of an unfamiliar city's streetscape to articulate the social meaning of its urban images. This reading is based on the assumption that places are social texts as much as physical environments. It indeed amounts to an interpretation of the various dimensions of the city's public identity. In the case of Boulder, Colorado, the street layout, the buildings' relation to the street, the treatment of facades, the location of entrances, the uses of front and back yards, and the character of the landscape, lead to the identification of seven distinct urban images and social values. Here, these are called "Towns": Commercial Old, Residential Old, University, Nature, New, Strip, and Hidden. The author offers a mapping of Boulder based on the physical clues of each "Town image" and suggests that most of the findings of the paper can be found in other small American cities.

### Résumé

Dans cet article l'auteur, nouvellement arrivé à Boulder, Colorado, fait le récit de sa première lecture de cette ville. Partant de l'idée que les villes sont aussi des "textes" à signification sociale, que nous lisons et interprétons spontanément, il prend en compte la configuration des quartiers et des rues, le traitement des façades, la distribution des entrées, des pelouses et jardins, et le caractère des paysages des différentes parties de la ville, pour identifier sept "images urbaines" distinctes, qui véhiculent des valeurs sociales différenciées, et qui sont désignées par le terme de "villes". On trouve ainsi la Vieille Ville - qui prend deux aspects sous la forme de la Vieille Ville Résidentielle et de la Vieille Ville Commerciale -, la Ville Universitaire, la Ville de la Nature, la Ville Nouvelle, la Ville Cachée et la Ville-Rue (ou *the Strip*). L'auteur propose une carte de ces "images de villes" à Boulder et conclut en disant que les images identifiées ici peuvent se retrouver fréquemment dans d'autres petites villes des Etats-Unis.

### 1. Introduction

The built environment is constantly read by its users as it provides cues for social status, roles, and the personal and ethnic identities of its inhabitants (Lowenthal, 1979; Rapoport, 1982). This reading orients our identification of (and with) places, our actions, and desires (or non-desires) to appropriate them. Implicit in such desires are judgements about the values the place conveys and about the life styles of its probable

users or inhabitants. Thus, every reader is also an interpreter and places are social texts as much as physical environments.

Interpretation, with all the risks it implies, is what we all accomplish every day when we use places. Becoming familiar with a place not only means walking through its streets, memorizing itineraries, but also going beyond the barrier of the streetscape into buildings and engaging with its people.

In the meantime, however, newcomers and visitors have to give meaning to physical places as many statements about a vision of city life. They must explore the dimensions of this public image while assuming that it hides the most private aspect of the town as much as it expresses it. Any unfamiliar city is first a collage of images before the visitor constructs a more integrated mental vision to structure the physical and social characteristics of the entire place. This necessity to infer social characteristics and values from physical appearances in an active and dynamic process which sustains and makes possible a future attachment to the place.

## 2. Background

The author lived and worked in Boulder, Colorado, which has the built form attributes of most small mid-west American cities. The City of Boulder has a population of 45'000 and, although it is technically within Denver's metropolitan district, it is a 40 minute south-east drive through the rolling grass lands to Denver. Boulder is geographically distinctive in its location on the foothills at the very base of the Rocky Mountains and at the end of America's middle west prairie.

Upon his arrival in Boulder, the author had difficulties understanding its particular urban images. This paper's beginning was his sorting out of the various images and values of city living presented to him during the course of his everyday life.

This paper is, therefore, an account of the reading and interpretation of Boulder's streetscape for an unfamiliar newcomer who was trying to become an insider. It is a deliberate search for appearances - for the social images that Boulder gives to itself. Such a reading and interpretation of what it offers to the public eye is obviously prejudiced. The bias of the newcomer derives from his being an architect and a planner as well as his belonging to the American culture. But this bias is precisely what he at once used as a tool for the following mapping of the city and what he tries to go beyond as a venture into the interpretation he gives to it here in social and symbolic terms.

Boulder was chosen for this paper as a city small enough to grasp its overall structure and parts while being large enough to have diversity and growth. Seven distinctive image patterns were found and each is given the name of a "Town" in order to focus our thoughts upon their more discrete characteristics: Commercial Old, Residential Old, University, New, Nature, Strip, and Hidden Towns.

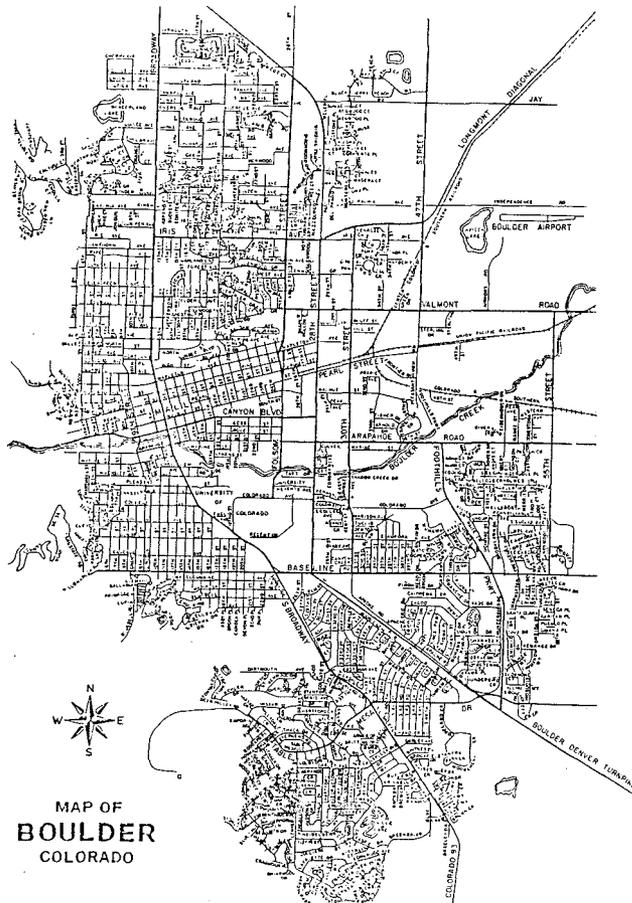


Fig. 1 Boulder's Street Map.

The changing street patterns indicate some of the various times of the city's development. Boulder began as the service centre for booming mountain mines to the West. The railroad, connecting the mines to the north-east region, was dominant and, just before deviations in ground slope increased substantially, commerce settled in along both of its sides. Working class residential development continued in the commercial (diagonal orientation) orthogonal street pattern. The merchant class located its residences on both sides of the commercial core, closer up the mountain slope, maintaining the orthogonal street pattern but aligned its streets parallel with the mountain line. The early university followed the merchants away from the core. Later expansions continued the previous street patterns up to the end of World War 2. In the early 1950's, the first major residential expansion took place at the south-east of the centre - towards Denver. Then, between 1970-80, to the north, south and west, Boulder's development area and population increasing four-fold. In general, the street patterns of this period follow the contemporary American suburban loops and curves.

Plan de la ville de Boulder.

L'évolution de l'arrangement des rues reflète différents stades du développement de la ville. Boulder fut d'abord un centre de services rattaché aux mines florissantes situées à l'ouest de la ville. Une ligne ferroviaire reliait les mines à la région nord-est et jouait un rôle important; des commerces s'installèrent des deux côtés de cette ligne, jusqu'au point où les pentes devenaient plus raides. À l'agencement orthogonal des rues caractéristique du district commercial (orientation en diagonale) s'ajoutèrent des quartiers résidentiels pour les ouvriers. Les entrepreneurs choisirent d'occuper les deux côtés du centre commercial, plus près des pentes de la montagne; ils gardèrent un agencement orthogonal mais alignèrent les rues parallèlement à la montagne. L'université s'installa à une certaine distance du centre. Jusqu'à la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, les constructions prolongèrent les rues existantes. Au début des années 50, la ville s'étendit vers le sud-est du centre, dans la direction de Denver. Puis, entre 1970 et 1980, elle se prolongea vers le nord, le sud et l'ouest, alors que la surface de la ville et sa population quadruplaient. En général, les rues construites à cette époque suivent le schéma contemporain des banlieues américaines, avec ses tournants et ses arrondis.

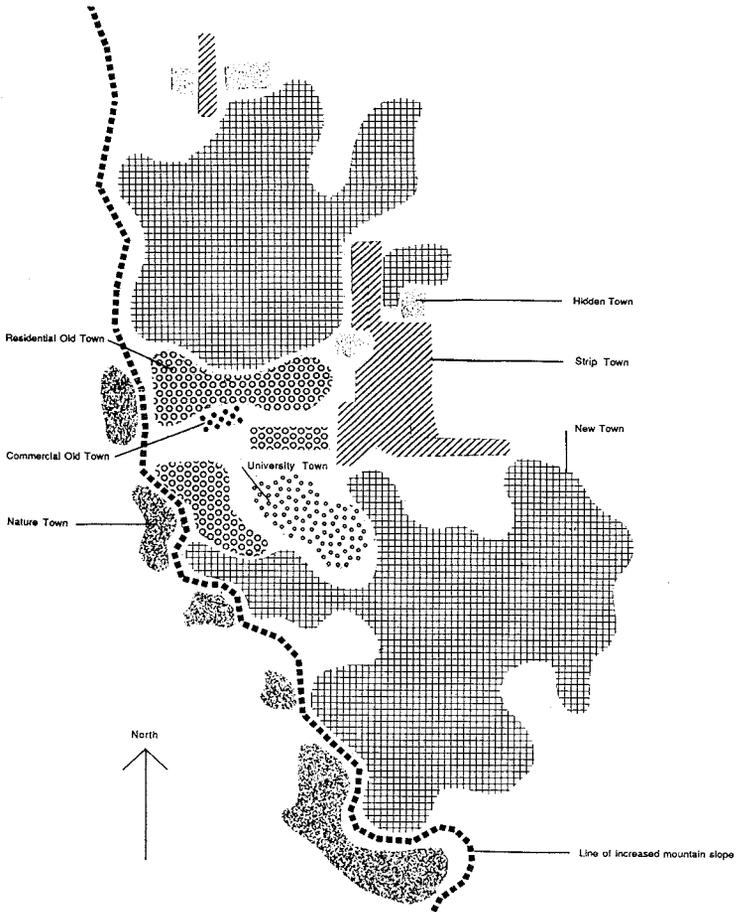


Fig. 2 Diagram locating Boulder's Town images.

The town image patterns illustrate the locations of developed areas which have structured images - ones that are easy to remember. The gaps between patterns indicate discordant (or unstructured) images - ones difficult to remember. Boulder's early development is located at the central cluster of Old Commercial and Residential Towns and University Town. New Town developed to the north, south and east. Strip Town developed directly east of the old commercial centre where land was flat and cheap and is beginning to form other cores as can be seen in the northern part of the city. Hidden Towns are tucked into very small and discreet outlying areas. Although most of the city is built on the sloping foot hills, the "line of increased mountain slope" indicates where the slope deviation increases more significantly. Urban development west of this line consists of the residential Nature Town. Recent municipal regulation created a major open space preserve - for developed parks and managed grass land - and it restricts the expansion of Nature Town.

Diagramme mettant en évidence les "images urbaines" caractérisant Boulder.

L'emplacement des espaces ayant une image structurée - une image dont il est facile de se souvenir - est indiqué. Entre ces espaces se trouvent des images en faux (ou non-structurées) - celles dont il est difficile de se souvenir. Les premières étapes du développement de Boulder se trouvent là où la Vieille Ville Commerciale et Résidentielle et la Ville Universitaire se rencontrent. La Ville Nouvelle se développa vers le nord, le sud et l'est. La Ville-Rue s'étendit juste à l'est de l'ancien centre commercial, là où le terrain était plat et bon marché; elle commence à former d'autres noyaux (voir la partie nord de la ville). Les Villes cachées se situent au sein d'espaces extrêmement limités et discrets, proches du périmètre extérieur. La plus grande partie de la ville est construite sur les pentes situées au pied des collines; une "ligne où les pentes deviennent plus raides" indique cet élément topographique. À l'ouest de cette ligne se situe la Ville de la Nature. Plus récemment, un règlement municipal imposa une réserve naturelle - destinée à des parcs et prairies -; ce règlement limite l'expansion de la Ville de la Nature.

## 2.1. *About Origins and Public Sociability: Old Town*

Old Town is one of Boulder's strongest assertions as a place with an identity anchored in the past and with a proud awareness of its origin. In Old Town, past time is made visible through the rehabilitation and protection of its old buildings, and as well, in the attempt to build new ones which do not overshadow them.

Old Town has two main image patterns which also define the functional areas for its activities - Commercial Old Town and Residential Old Town that have two congruent ways of asserting origins and nobility.

## 2.2. *Commercial Old Town*

Long time antique dealers tell us about people who purchase old portraits which they soon call their "family portraits". The question is whether a clear and undisputed knowledge of one's actual origins is fundamentally different from a deliberate choice of one's origins, or, even different from a re-interpretation of one's past?

In Boulder's Old Town, whether this past has been actually shared does not seem to matter. The old buildings are restored, given "noble" functions, and new additions are carefully considered before they are built. Commercial Old Town's identity is supported by an emphasis on the past as a shared and cherished possession. What does seem important today is the existence of a simple image of the past which all can identify with. Authenticity is not at stake here. What is at stake is continuity - the action of linking the present with the past (Jackson, 1980).

Commercial Old Town is also Boulder's place for public encounters. It invites people, be they city residents or visitors, to stroll its street. It is organized as a place where hospitality can be performed, becoming a sort of living-room. But, like any house where guests are welcome but not allowed to explore all the many nooks and crannies of the place, Boulder's front parlour is furnished with utmost care in order to prevent any indiscreet inquiry about the other aspects of life in the house (Korosec-Serfaty, 1985). The most expensive shops, the most pleasant cafes with terraces, the old restored hotel, and major public buildings are located in Boulder's Commercial Old Town, together with its older and better maintained street and buildings. The place emphasizes the pedestrian and the car's visibility is minimized.



Fig. 3

The Mall in Commercial Old Town  
Le Centre d'achats de la Vieille Ville  
Commerciale

Hospitality in the home, however, is not limited to opening one's living room to friends and acquaintances, but it is a more general disposition to welcome unknown people inside one's house on the basis of mutual trust and on the assumption that self-imposed limitations will make temporary encounters possible and enjoyable. During sociable encounters, people engage in conversations and actions which do not threaten their actual life outside the sociable time and place.

Similarly, Boulder's Commercial Old Town is a genuine living-room as it is a place for meetings outside of day-to-day hassles (Korosec-Serfaty, 1982). The exclusion of cars on its mall gives it a general slow pace, and a subdued atmosphere, which is generally to be found in meetings taking place in a parlour. The passers-by on the mall share the pleasure of being together, on lawns, benches, and cafe terraces, in the movie theatre and at cookie stands. They are Boulder's inhabitants and visitors, rich and poor, some dressed-up and some not, some engaged in religious proselytism and some playing music for their own pleasure, or to make money. The place, therefore, takes on a particular quality of delayed concerns. Its lure resides in its message that time should be taken for relaxed enjoyment.

However, the very emphasis put on staging these forms of encounter reminds us that there is a back stage, where people are not idyllically coexisting, and where work, hardship, and conflict take place. This is the domain of nearby streets with busy cars and trucks, of parking lots, of alleys encumbered by various services, and of the remains of daily commercial life.

### 2.3. Residential Old Town

Residential Old Town radiates this same apparent desire for a non-conflictual coexistence. Its old houses are aligned and are equally visible from streets lined with trees. The public domain has visual unity and it is also formed of well identified elements. The buildings have a dignified relationship to the street and porches allude to the ceremony of entrance as well as to the possibility of its use for friendly sociability. Lawns have pedestrian paths which protect the passer-by from the street. Trees provide shade and changes in light which complete the almost pastoral view.

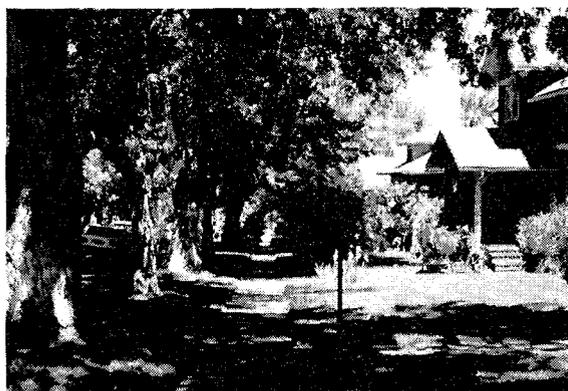


Fig. 4

Front lawns and houses in Residential Old Town

Les pelouses et villas de la Vieille Ville Résidentielle

Residential Old Town alludes to old nobility, to an aristocratic society which controlled large portions of the social world, giving it order, ceremony and hierarchy (Korosec-Serfaty, 1987). It denies the authoritative dimension contained in a strict physical order by creating a harmonious streetscape where all of the various elements contribute to the overall unity of place. The facades of the Residential Old Town houses clearly reinforce the sense of order by their formal fenestration patterns, by hiding all sense of utility and of any trivial activity going on inside. They set forth the prominence of the front door and its porch. These invite us to imagine the houses' insides as being hierarchically organized from the formal front and its public areas to the informal back and its private rooms.

This formality of the front contrasts with the informality of the back of the houses where all servicing takes place (Goffman, 1959). This physical hierarchy of fronts and backs replicates a larger social order where individuals accomplishing utilitarian tasks are less visible on the social scene. Work in general is excluded from the more dignified front domestic scene.

### **3. Change and Stability: University Town**

University Town is not surrounded by actual walls. And yet streets, sidewalks and bikeways, parking lots, and landscaping are as symbolic and efficient as physical walls. The inside is a world of its own. It establishes the sacred character of knowledge separate from the profanity of the outside world. Temporal discontinuities are over-compensated for by a spatial unity with the ultimate purpose to convey order and stability beyond change - a social legitimacy beyond questioning.

For University Town is confronted with the two contradictory aspects of academe. The majority of the campus population is young, transient, and continually changing. The creation and application of knowledge are also, by nature, future oriented. Change is a structural trait of the academic world. But change contains germs of disorder. It threatens the very structure of an institution which, by definition, seeks to endure. To continue respectability and increase status, the academic world must emphasize that it endeavours to maintain and keep alive higher, and therefore more lasting, values. It must also make clear that these values derive from shared beliefs. Stability and social agreement must be made spatially visible to legitimize its existence and to ensure its nobility.

University Town strongly makes such assertions through choices which unify the place with a particular character. Some of these choices are design choices, while others are of a management and maintenance nature (Lynch, 1972).

Stability as a virtue is expressed in the careful conservation of old Victorian and neo-classic buildings, as well as in the progressive construction of new ones along two inspirations. Roof shapes, colour, and material along with fenestration patterns come from a self imposed Tuscan style, whereas the facade material of native stone relates the place to its specific mountain location.

Order is made legible through elaborate landscaping which evokes leisurely activities in a park, rather than more day-to-day living, and through the compulsive pedestrian character of the place. Open space cannot be acted upon by any user, not even by the students who live on campus. Entrances to the fronts of buildings are formal and their opposition with the buildings' backs is again quite clear.



Fig. 5

A University Town building and landscape

Un bâtiment et son environnement, dans la Ville Universitaire

University Town is served by a large backstage which goes much beyond the University's parking lots and service compounds. The serendipity of University Town cannot exist without a large number of functions provided by the city at large, and more specifically, without whole areas surrounding it. The frontier between the University and this backstage is the street where vehicular traffic is heavy. Beyond the street are those backstage private market places dominated by the hustle and bustle of the students' daily life. There are a wide variety of shops and eating places, fraternities, sororities, and private housing rented to students and faculty. Open spaces show a vitality of individual and group living. Students, shop keepers, visitors to motels, customers of gas stations make them their own.

#### 4. Ambiguity of a Love Affair: Nature Town

Located at the western edge of Boulder as the land begins its mountain ascent, in Nature Town the landscape inspires respect and admiration - a sort of love which leads its inhabitants to hide their houses, to tuck them away on the slopes and behind a profusion of natural elements. From the greatness of the landscape comes its sacredness which the house mostly enables the inhabitant to contemplate. Houses are turned inward and have views free from human presence. Looking around and seeing only mountains is a sort of private enjoyment of nature's tranquillity.

The sentiment that one is facing beauty is also a sentiment of privilege. Such a privilege should be protected and maintained by the very protection of the landscape: hence houses minimize their presence and the prevalent use of materials and colours blend into the place. Seemingly "spontaneous" or "natural" landscaping attests to sophisticated efforts to make the houses' surroundings look untouched by man's hand.

Still, the hidden houses try to avoid any allusion to what they actually are: a luxurious suburb where privacy is overemphasized and the relation to the social outside world is so minimized as to be completely replicated by only the view of the landscape. Hidden driveways and front doors minimize chances of social encounters. Indeed, they give a message to the passer-by to keep out.



Fig. 6

A Nature Town street with houses blending into the landscape

Une rue de la Ville de la Nature, avec des maisons se fondant dans le paysage

All signs of utilitarian functions and spaces are invisible from the street. The backstage functions for house and land maintenance are located adjacent to the garages and are hidden by planting between them and street public views.

The suburban character of the place, however, is betrayed by the street layout made of the familiar American curvilinear patterns. Only beyond the street do houses attempt to hide in the folds of the terrain. Some are perched above the land much like natural rock promontories. But the general intention is to dominate the street and to limit risks of losing individual identity while providing encompassing vistas all around.

Such insistence on individuality, privacy, freedom of view, and direct visual access to the beauty of nature, reveals that the dwellers think of their houses also in terms of market assets. The place tells of financial wealth through the location of the houses right on the mountain, the size of the property, the custom design of the houses, their landscaped surroundings, and the assumed cost of their maintenance.

Love of nature is here at once a privilege and a pretext. The building of such houses allows the actual enjoyment of privacy and also the display of wealth. It helps assert one's social status while enhancing one's sense of well-being and increasing the value of one's investment.

Nature Town is a socially segregated place which tells once more of an orderly world, where everyone enjoys a beautiful shelter, and it belies the disorder of the world around it. It also attempts to display wealth as a natural phenomenon and to deny the struggles its acquisition implies.

Fundamentally the place represents an elaborate form of nature's use as a means to achieve social status and high privilege. Yet, nature is loved. And this tension between plain materialism and belief in the sacredness of the landscape sums up the ambiguity of this love affair.

## 5. Formality and Informality: New Town

Boulder's early 1950's New Town was at one time its first suburb. Now integrated in Boulder (per se) by increased development, it has kept its appearance, which states that everyone is on his own and should at least seem happy to be so - being on one's own means individual freedom. Spatial and visual discontinuities in the streetscape tell of such idiosyncratic ways of doing things. They let us guess the residents' sense of accomplishment through their separation from others.

The neighbourhood hardly betrays any aspect of its particular past and hardly relates to its particular locus. The reference is a more general model of a residential neighbourhood in America. In this sense, it belongs somewhere and nowhere. Somewhere is the traditions of the American isolated farm as well as the European estate. Still, it is nowhere because New Town is as much a dimension of Boulder's identity as it could be part of any other American town (Clark, 1986).

Wide streets in New Town reveal that the streets are not places for direct social engagements, except for car traffic. There is no pretence of respect for a common public image to be conveyed by the street. There are no trees lining it, sidewalks are directly next to the paved street or absent, planting is highly individualistic.

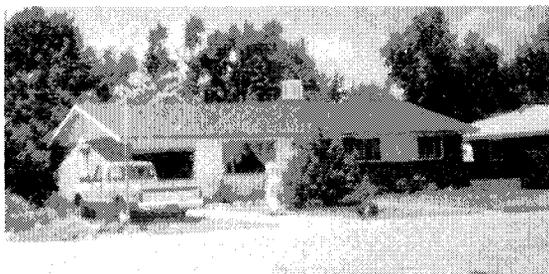


Fig. 7

A New Town street and house

Un bâtiment situé sur une rue de la Ville Nouvelle

Cars and driveways dominate the streetscape and the front of the houses. New Town does not hide its cars, nor does it line them neatly at a good distance from the home. On the contrary, it shows them, keeps them close to the house, and within sight of the residents and passers-by. It displays them as utilitarian objects and status symbols, in other words, as visible signs of a certain set of values. New Town does this deliberately, for cars connect with the world outside, a world which is recognized as necessary for everyone to function normally.

This attitude contrasts with the denial of the importance of cars observed in Old and Nature Towns. In New Town, the recognition of cars is made even more important as the garage doors face directly upon the street and are often open, displaying all the signs of house and car maintenance. These activities provide informal exchanges with neighbours on driveways and front lawns.

Offered to the public eye are adornments of various kinds. Miniature statuary and planters whose display reminds us that each resident is his own landscape gardener. While residential Old Town is a kind of celebration of the dwelling's "function" in its pristine form, New Town is both formal and informal. It achieves this mixture by displaying at once all the symbols and signs of its values rather than by hiding some of them.

As the New Town's house *façade* and front yard reveal these values to the street, they also act as a wall to shelter from public view the back yard, where informal outdoor activities take place. Unlike Residential Old Town's backstage car storage and maintenance, in New Town these are accepted for public display. But both are similar in the need for inner family private living which is kept guarded at the back of the house.

This mixture of informal and formal public sociability, expressed in uses made of places, as well as in symbols, can be explained as the concession New Town makes to its own sense of neighbourliness, where one should appear available to one's neighbour and not attempt to look superior to the other members of the community. However, this is contradicted by the emphasis New Town puts on individuality, family identity, and privacy revealed by the frequent withdrawal of the front door from public view, and the increasing use of fences and planting at the street's property line to privatize the front yard.

## 6. Discontinuities and Place-Making: Strip Town

Strip Town freely takes advantage of the great spatial resources in America. The lavish use of space is most strictly experienced on its wide streets. The car is the key to its use, enjoyment, and success. On both of its sides the streetscapes seem heterogeneous, made of bits and parts of composite images with apparently no connections between them. While the streets are well defined, decidedly mono-functional and unambiguous, the street sides make hesitant statements expressing isolated fragments of diverse ideas. A sense of incompleteness is pervasive.

Strip Town at first sight gives a sense of America moving ahead, not settled down, unfinished, and privileged with new places to make. It shows a kind of exuberance, or perhaps even a carelessness about whether place-making endures or not. It is transposable and almost every part of it can be replaced by any other part. Its vitality also resides in the fact that it deals with the basic needs of daily and ordinary life without any attempt to make them more dignified.

Like New Town, Strip Town seems not to tell one anything of its past or of its particular locus. It presents itself as a standardized part of any newer American urban landscape, again, belonging at once to somewhere and nowhere. In Boulder, however, Strip Town is looking ahead and changing its disheveled appearance to a more dignified one. An example of this transformation are the signs which announce individual shopping centres by calling them "plaza", "village", "place", or "mall". These apparently mere interruptions in the continuity of the road scene, suddenly become locations. They furthermore acquire the minimal quality of a place when a locally derived name reinforces the designation of the shopping centre as a "place" or "village". Strip Town in Boulder has, as an example, an "Arapahoe Village" referring to past and local Indian traditions.

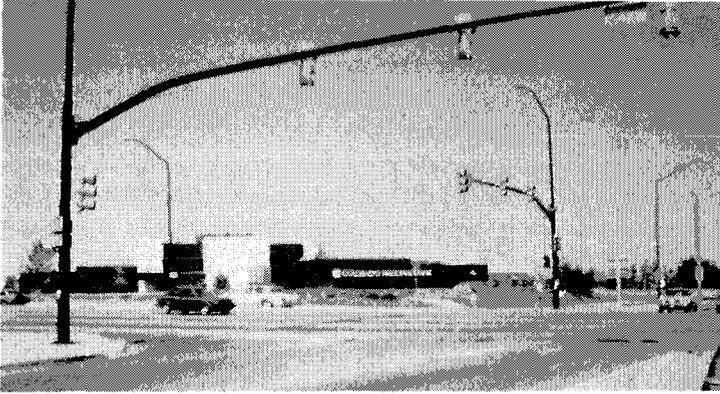


Fig. 8 A Strip Town street  
Une partie de la Ville-Rue

In all cases this name selection shows a desire to create places by dismissing part of the connotation traditionally associated with such terms like "plaza" or "village" in other cultural contexts, or even in the American one. Although this may appear to some (and may actually be) a perversion of language, it is nonetheless the beginning of place-making in an otherwise very resilient and supple environment.

Giving names to the strip's side "islands" make them more legible and distinguishable from each other to customers. Big corporations together with small businesses on the strip must find a distinctive image for themselves. The variety of signage, building form, colours, and use of flags are based on economic goals. This explains in great part the interpretation which is made, in each different shopping centre, of the name of the location. Often the imagery is used to establish the architectural massing, facades, material, colour, and landscaping. A certain degree of unity is created where the theme-image supersedes the specific character of each store.

Place-making in Strip Town is made of name-giving as much as of the use of a specific aesthetic repertoire - also observed in University Town. This similarity is not recognized in the latter case because it is not socially legitimated. Like Strip Town, University Town gives names to its buildings and uses a common inspiration for the design of its new buildings. It does so in a more varied and sophisticated manner than Strip Town, and in doing so, it acquires nobility in our eyes. Strip Town on the other hand, makes uniform statements in each of its commercial enterprises and thus loses nobility.

Strip Town in Boulder is also slowly acquiring a more polished look from the road through local mandatory requirements and design guidelines which demand attention to setbacks and the landscaping of the new commercial developments. Parts of Strip Town have well maintained edges with mature trees, lawns, and, ironically enough for a place where car traffic prevails, pedestrian pathways. New visual continuity is partially achieved, which still does not significantly alter the overall appearance of the Strip, but which again reminds us of its resiliency.

Among elite residents, Strip Town is generally regarded as a necessary evil. It is the city's backstage in itself. "It's ugly, but it's useful" is the accepted assumption. Its

apparent disorder contrasts sharply with Old Town's orderliness. Contrary to what one may expect, the values embodied in Old Town are not opposed to those of New Town, but to those embodied in Strip Town. This can be understood as Old Town promotes an aristocratic society and way of life while Strip Town is the very expression of popular culture.

Finally, the accidental beauty of Boulder's Strip Town offers itself from time to time. From its vast and apparently barren parking lots, one obtains unique broad views of the mountains beyond the urban settlement. This is a kind of celebration of nature which was not intended but is there nonetheless.

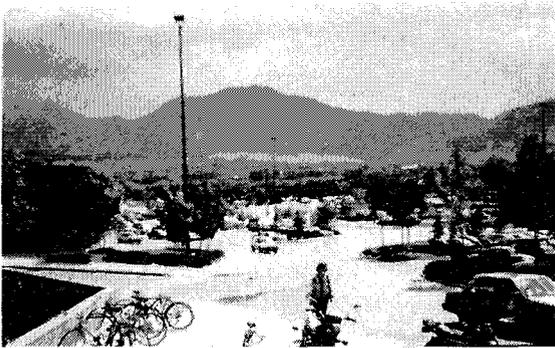


Fig. 9

A Strip Town parking lot view of the mountains

La vue sur les montagnes, à partir d'un parking situé dans la Ville-Rue

## 7. Illegitimacy and Secrecy: Hidden Town

The fast pace of driving along Strip Town again and again, as well as driving in other Boulder neighbourhoods, does not lead one to discover Hidden Town. Becoming a pedestrian, however, with one's relaxed pace provides a wealth of additional detail. Almost accidentally you suddenly stop at the sight of a neighbourhood made of mobile homes. Mobile Home Parks are Boulder's Hidden Town.

Hidden Town is surrounded by fences, trees, and hedges - an enclosed territory with houses which cannot be confused with conventional ones. Hidden Town departs from other residential neighbourhoods because of these boundaries and because its houses question the accepted appearance of ordinary houses. This feeling is enhanced by the fact that, once inside, it seems more densely populated than a conventional suburb, having a higher number of houses, smaller outdoor private spaces, and apparently more people using the streets, yards, stairs and porches.

Hidden Town cannot be mistaken for New Town, but still it attempts, in a certain degree, to reproduce New Town's conventions to attain respectability and recognition. It does so through the additions of side and front porches, and of stairs to the houses which then acquire a more socially acceptable frontality. Windows placed facing the street are enlarged and decorated in the same effort to achieve a more dignified *façade* (Korosec-Serfaty & Sauer, 1989).



Fig. 10

A Hidden Town street, house, and side yard

Une rue de la Ville Cachée, avec un bâtiment et sa cour latérale

Hidden Town's side yards are unique by combining formal and informal functions partly like New Town's front yards and partly like New Town's back yards. Neatness and careful landscape ornamentation refer to active attachment to one's place. The presence of toys, tools, stored materials, and more importantly, outdoor furniture, refer to more frequent and informal uses of the side yard within the public view than can be seen in New Town's front yards. Thus, Hidden Town's front and backstages are viewed publicly from the street.

Hidden Town requires more effort from the visitor to become familiar with it than the other parts of the city. It is encumbered by the social stigma conveyed by its boundaries, its status as a place apart from other residential neighbourhoods, and its unconventional houses. The first challenge is to overcome the bias derived by the simple existence of the stigma. The second is that its messages are ambiguous. On the other hand, Hidden Town does not attempt to be like New Town. It is actually different, for it makes do with its own circumstances and conditions: scarce space, odd house form, and the close proximity of neighbours. It ends up being itself, a mixture of ordinary, normal elements, and of special and particular ones.

## 8. A Withdrawal?

Is there a unifying dimension in our reading and interpretation of Boulder which might help us get beyond the collage of images? For the newcomer, this dimension seems to be the prominence of one major value embodied in all places around the city: withdrawal from the street as expressed by the insistence on privacy and territoriality.

We have seen that Old Town values a civil form of sociability, harmony, and attachment to images of past order. University Town attempts and apparently succeeds in denying change and in representing stability. Nature Town is locked in its ambiguous love of nature as a source of serenity in life, but also for status and profit. New Town pretends to be amicable with the outside world but overprotects its fragile identity by stressing its individuality. Only Strip Town is simply itself, but economic forces are

leading it to become more dignified and acceptable. Hidden Town is hardly visible from the outside, yet it lives an active life of its own.

Beyond this strong attachment to these values, all Towns are apparently engaged in a similar evolution. Streetscapes are again what reveals it. Old Town streets are recently becoming more and more punctuated with high fences right on the limits of the pastoral street. New Town also multiplies its fences, or adds higher street planting to isolate it from its neighbours and the street. Nature Town strives to hide its houses more and more in the landscape. Strip Town acquires neat edges and trees which frame its robust commercial places. And Hidden Town struggles to imitate New Town in this regard. In all cases the street - and therefore engaging others outside of the home place - is at stake.

Is this withdrawal from the public realm becoming the dominant value, giving houses an even stronger role as refuges centred on oneself and one's family? The question will remain unanswered here, but it deserves to be asked as street life and public sociability seem to become more and more questioned in American cities.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- CLARK, J. (1986), "The American Family Home" (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill).
- GOFFMAN, E. (1959), "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" (Doubleday, Garden City, New York).
- JACKSON, J.B. (1980), "The Necessity for Ruins" (University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst).
- KOROSEC-SERFATY, P. (1982), "The Main Square. Functions and Daily Uses of Stortorget in Malmö" (Editions Aris, Nova Series I, University of Lund Press, Lund).
- KOROSEC-SERFATY, P. (1985), Experience and Use of the Dwelling, *Human Behavior and Environment, Vol. 8: Home Environments* (Altman, I. & Werner, C., Eds.) (Plenum Press, New York).
- KOROSEC-SERFATY, P. (1987), Urban Open Spaces, *Ethnoscapés: Transcultural Studies in Action and Place* (Canter, D., Stea, D. & Krampen, M., Eds.) (Gower Press, London and New York).
- KOROSEC-SERFATY, P. & SAUER, L. (1989), House Form and Place Identity in Mobile Home Developments: A Study in Vernacular Housing and Cultural Landscape, *Traditional Housing / Modern Housing, IASTE/LEDR, 14* (1989), 2-47 (University of California Press, Berkeley).
- LYNCH, K. (1972), "What Time is this Place?" (MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts).
- LOWENTHAL, D. (1979), Age and Artifact: Dilemmas of Appreciation, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (Meining, D.W., Ed.) (Oxford University Press, New York & Oxford).
- RAPOPORT, A. (1982), "The Meaning of the Built Environment: A Nonverbal Communication Approach" (Sage, London).