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Welcome to the inaugural edition

Middlebury Geographic is designed to capture and celebrate the scholarly work, independent research, and worldwide adventures of the Middlebury College student body.

Inspired by National Geographic and J.B Jackson’s Landscape, Middlebury Geographic combines quality journalism with narrative photography and creative cartography. Each feature article, each photo essay, and each special section is uniquely infused with personality and perspective.

The inaugural issue explores the cultural geography of neighborhoods. We bring together work from fifteen different students and one professor, offering the reader a variety of perspectives, scales, and locations. From a slum in Mumbai, to suburbia outside Phoenix, to the streets of Paris, to the courtyards of Croatia, and back home, we hope you enjoy the journey ahead.

Sincerely,

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Photo by Evan Masseau on the summit of Mt. Mansfield, VT.
Cultural Geographies of the Haight-Ashbury Neighborhood

by Caitlin Sargent
Bob Marley’s face, tattooed against the storefront of the Central Haight Market, is the celebratory threshold of the San Francisco neighborhood that remains dedicated to the idea of the culture—and the period—that invented the neighborhood’s funky style, and gave it a place in the imagination of the nation.

Marley warns passers into the Haight-Ashbury not to “gain the world and lose your soul.” This sentiment is echoed defiantly in every piece of spiritual and psychedelic cultural materialism the street has to offer. It is present in the self-righteously alienated expressions of strung-out street kids whose bedrolls and rottweilers clog the foot traffic of the sidewalks. Tourists debus and clamber over each other in huddled masses to take turns posing in pictures under the signs at the famous intersection of Haight St. and Ashbury St. It was here that members of the Grateful Dead once tossed their holy cigarette butts. Now the intersection sports a Gap. The Haight is well on its way to selling its hippie counter-culture soul for the upscale market niche, catering to the vogue demand for the costume and symbols of exotic counter-culture complexity.
The Hippie culture that developed in the Haight between 1965 and 1967 is intimately linked to the landscape of the neighborhood. The cultural styles and values of that former era continue to exert influence on its aesthetic and political character. The Haight-Ashbury, located in the geographic center of San Francisco, is aesthetically unique among the districts in the city—and the country. Bright swirls of color adorn the columns of storefronts; tie-dye shirts, incense and head shops litter the landscape; and halfway down the block that runs between Masonic Ave. and Ashbury St., an unusual pair of risqué, red healed inflatable legs protrude boldly out of a second story window. The landscape is created by people’s daily lives; its structure is their reflection—the kind of people they are, were, and are becoming (Lewis, 1979, 15).

As young people flowed into the Haight in the 1960s, the neighborhood experienced a re-vitalization—windows “blossomed” with Indian print fabrics, wind chimes and other exotic cultural imports (Perry, 84). The shopping district was reinvented as twenty-six new businesses serving the Hippie community, it grew out of store fronts that had been barren and boarded up only months before (Perry, 127). A new kind of store was invented, the Psychedelic Shop. (Perry)

It was here that members of the Grateful Dead once tossed their holy cigarette butts. Now the intersection sports a Gap.

The “Summer of Love” was created by a nexus of historical and geographic circumstances. With the prosperity of the post war era, a youth culture emerged in America. The baby boom cohort that participated in the Summer had not been assimilated smoothly into the American work force of their parents (Lewis, 1976, 186), and the emphasis on conformism that came out of suburbia was disquieting if not outright offensive to them. Books like Kerouac’s On The Road romanticized the idea of living the mobile “counter-culture” lifestyle (Cresswell, 1992). The new heroes were the rebels and vagabonds of society—idealized commune farmers, druggies, and beat poets. There was a call to abandon the stifling suburbs and join the nomadic, easy going throngs, to usher in the new “Age of Aquarius.” The youth mobilized and hitchhiked to the gravitational center of it all, the street intersection of Haight and Ashbury.
Geographically, the Haight was the perfect site for a revolution. The landscape of the neighborhood and its location in the Bay Area were both integral to the formation of hippie culture and the “Summer of Love.” The artistic and social trends in the Bay Area influenced the spiritual openness that the hippies inherited. The Bay Area served as a gathering place for world influences, including eastern spiritual gurus of Buddhism and Hinduism; the International Center for Krishna Consciousness moved into the Haight in 1966 (Perry, 126). San Francisco has long been the destination of for the nation’s dreamers and seekers: the Forty-niners of the Gold Rush years, the beat poets of the fifties, gays in the seventies, and in the nineties brash young dot comers (Porter). In 1965, the beats and their coffee shops, as well as their hippie hangers-on, were pushed out of the traditionally Italian neighborhood; the Haight became their new home (Lewis, 1976, 186).

The pre-Hippie Haight was a deteriorating neighborhood. Compared to newer post-Quake homes, the old Victorian mansions were out of style and rents were cheaper (Perry, 6). The neighborhood was diverse, with no ethnic majority, and it housed many students from nearby SF-State (Perry 19). Once young people started pouring into the Haight in tidal wave fashion, Gray Hound bus tours had to add an extra stop at 710 Ashbury Street, the home of the Grateful Dead (Perry, 169). Besides the temptations of cheap rents, a tolerant community and good transportation, the Haight’s real advantage was its proximity to Golden Gate Park and to Berkeley, where Owsley’s in-home factory produced the copious tabs of LSD that kept the summer, and the psychedelic community, going and partying for a whole year (Perry, Hoskyns).

The bohemian design of the neighborhood retains much of the flavor of hippie culture, but it has been cleaned up and reimagined in order to package it for sale.

The Haight resides at the end of Golden Gate Park, close enough to the Japanese Tea Gardens, picturesque walkways, and hidden nooks to satisfy both the nature lust and the drug happy behavior of emerging hippie culture. Parallel to Haight Street, and two blocks down, is the offshoot of Golden Gate Park that is affectionately known as the Panhandle. It was once the carriage entrance to the park, but during the summer of ‘67 its grassy lawns and green glades allowed the Haight to absorb the 75,000-plus Hippies that came through (Perry, 236). Not only did people sleep in the Panhandle, but the “Diggers” (an anarchist guerilla street theater group born in the Haight in sixties) held free meals there (at least for the first part of the year) and the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, and Janis Joplin (residents of the Haight themselves) would all throw free concerts there (Perry, Hoskyns).

The park also served as a gathering place and the residents of the Haight began to recognize themselves as a cohesive cultural group—one that had a voice that could speak to the whole nation, spreading word of the unusual happenings in the Haight. A place is not a place until it has a poet to celebrate and characterize it (Stegner, 8-9).

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The Haight had many poets all of whom used the park in some way as a venue for expressing themselves, their ideas, and their vision of the values they thought their generation should stand for. In addition to musicians there was theater, epitomized by the SF mime troupe. The troupe was active in many “Digger” activities aimed at creating a “free city,” these included setting up “crash pads” in Haight Street Victorians as a new form of cheap, crowded residential unit (Smith, 89).

The psychedelic newspaper The Oracle was another voice of the movement; it explored the philosophical and political implications of the developing scene and spiritual discoveries. In January 1967, The Oracle partook in an effort to create a “Human Be In” in the polo fields of Golden Gate Park. The date was picked by an astrologer, and 25,000 people showed up in a “gathering of the tribes” and “seeking the return of this once voluptuous country; regaining the forests and great herds” (Levine). It is questionable whether the movement would have been able to come together so effectively without this voice. It expressed both the cohesiveness and the multiplicity of feelings that characterized this generation’s struggles to create a space and culture of its own. Without its poets and their park venues, the Haight would just be a street.

The hippie movement idealized the notions of nature and simple communal living. They tried to turn the accessible urban land into their ideal country by living in the park. The Hippie movement of 1966–67 created a new cultural landscape in the Haight. The space of the street was reframed to meet the social and physical needs of the Hippie community. The community was mobile—hippies roamed the coast from one party or commune to the next and inevitably met up with each other in places ranging from Big Sur to Nepal (Perry, 169), but the Haight itself was a defined and limited space. Hippies claimed the space and reframed it as a jungle, an exploratory playground of a new age. They created a new culture by returning to older, idealized ones to which they had no genetic link. They actively excluded the mainstream and all its symbols by offering free food, free music, cheap places to crash, and the constant stimulation of love and drugs. Theater was important, and when at the end of the summer, the neighborhood finally buckled from population pressure, they staged a “death of the hippie” symbolic funeral to usher out the masses that had sought inspiration and highs in the Haight when school was released in May (Perry).

The culture of the Haight was constructed by creating a space that reflected values hippies saw in themselves that were not reflected in the landscapes they had come from. It was characterized by an unusual investment in the counter culture, which included an emphasis on color, murals, graffiti, nature and more pleasing aesthetics than suburbs, track housing and strip malls could provide. It tore down symbols of the mainstream, destroying the credibility of that culture as a viable option if one wished to live a life of “truth.” It instead offered images that were foreign to American towns: Hindu and Buddhist art, as well as drug imagery. Interestingly, though, it is the mainstream culture that is today creeping into the Haight. It is absorbing the Haight’s counter culture image and subtly claiming it for its own, through the process of gentrification. Some changes are not so subtle, corporate.

An earlier version of the Bob Marley mural

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Haight-Ashbury 7
outposts like the Gap and Ben and Jerry’s now stain the famous intersection and a McDonald’s at the gate to the park has become a regular hang out for a new generation of street kids.

The Haight contradicts many of the assumptions of critical geography because its symbols represent the counter culture; the space was claimed as a refuge for those opposed to the powers that regulate, determine and pronounce the meanings of conventional landscapes. Even today, the Haight is home to a small contingent of Anarchists, radical leftists and drug advocates drawn to the neighborhood because of the cultural myth of its tolerance and its historical legacy. They leave their mark in political graffiti and neon flyers and postings trying to convert others to their cause.

The Haight is not a neighborhood frozen in time, though to the uncritical eye, its psychedelic murals and abundance of marijuana paraphernalia might suggest so. Today the Haight is experiencing a quiet renaissance, but the neighborhood has seen hard times since the Summer of Love. In sixty-nine there was a wide spread heroine epidemic, businesses in the shopping strip were boarded up, and Page street, which separates Haight Street from the Panhandle, became a crime haven (Porter). Somehow the neighborhood resisted attempts at urban renewal. In the early nineties when old hippies had made their money, they came back to the Haight to purchase the old Victorians they had crashed in as kids (Porter). These Hippies became idealized as peaceful flower children, “spiritually connected by political ideology” (Janofsky). But it is those that never left, now homeless, that have sustained the Haight. Without them the authenticity of the neighborhood as a haven for the alienated and the counter culture, as well as the history it stands in tribute to, would be completely destroyed. They faced the Haight’s dirty reality—crowds, disease, drugs, and violence (Smith, Perry, Martin).

The clean representation of the Haight’s Summer of Love is important to the image the neighborhood seeks to present today. While retaining much of the same counter culture rhetoric, the mainstream is no longer effectively excluded, though it is brilliantly camouflaged in flamboyant colors. The neighborhood hasn’t been commoditized in the way that Colonial Williamsburg has, and it isn’t kitschy and contrived like Disneyland, but it is a controlled environment (Porter). Its eccentricity is threatening only enough to be challengingly refreshing. It has the appeal of a radical place, with exotic people, but the bohemianism exists on the surface of a well-regulated neighborhood. Stores on the street sell hippie counter-cultural paraphernalia. Storeowners include those who originally fancied themselves Hippies, but now find themselves competing with invading vendors trying to capitalize on the tourist market. Old hippies find themselves “hooked into the system they had originally fled” (Lewis, 1976, 190). There is hypocrisy present in the way that hippie non-consumerist style has been co-opted into the capitalist system it defined itself against.

The Haight continues to benefit from its status as something of a pilgrimage site, or as least a tourist destination.

Tensions remain in the Haight. Although the neighborhood continues to be subtly drafted into the mainstream, idealists that still inhabit the neighborhood fight back against the encroachment. Rocks routinely have smash the front windows of the Haight Street Gap. Friction exists between those who want to hold the Haight to what it was, and those who now live in it (mostly young urban professionals) who want to see themselves and their own modern community needs reflected in the landscape. The landscape of the park retains its potential for youth revolution, but the youth of today’s
Haight are characterized by resistance to involvement, and discomfort with groups. While crime rates are now low and the neighborhood is safe for day tourists, homeless teenagers are still a significant presence, and they have a different experience (Porter, Martin). The Panhandle continues to be used by the street youth of the Haight, but instead of smoking joints on the grass, they shoot heroine into their veins behind bushes. With attitude, piercings, tattoos and brandings, the Haight’s modern youth showcase twenty-first century anarchy (Janofsky, Tellez, Adams).

On a national scale, the neighborhood seems to be losing its prestige as an iconic landscape. Fewer people of the newer generation recognize it. As its cultural significance wanes, the Haight might get pulled further into the mainstream. Cultural Geographer Tim Cresswell has written that places are never finished and are constantly being performed (Cresswell 37). The Haight continues to be enacted daily, it is inseparable from the people and the cultures that inhabit and frequent it—street kids, homeless, old grey-haired hippies, white middle class, high school students, tourists, yuppies. Their art and their bodies, and sometimes their body art, make the landscape of the neighborhood.

Sources
insane suburbia on the outskirts of phoenix

by Max Kanter
It is an hour before sunset and I am on top of Camelback Mountain. Below me, Phoenix spreads endlessly into the distant hills to the west, and further still, to the Superstition Mountains to the east. As the light fades, the city below me begins to glitter, with a vertebra of traffic lines snaking through desert.

The heat’s intensity breaks and a cool breeze rides up the mountainside. Twenty years ago, hikers on the same outlook observed a different scene. That is why I am here. I have been studying the explosive growth of the southwest—the rise and fall of towns that seem to change every week.
My parents moved to Phoenix in the early 1970s. My father arrived to play tennis at the Arizona State University in Tempe. My mother followed her family, settling close to them. As young adults from Kansas City, the endless sunshine, upscale resort lifestyle, and steady job growth had quite the appeal. During the 1970s and 1980s, my parents saw Phoenix’s growth. The city proved resilient to hard times for several reasons. Retirees sought affordable housing in desirable neighborhoods, with sunny weather, resort amenities, and easy accessibility. Developers seized the opportunity to develop infill projects on open tracks of land throughout the valley floor. By the onset of the 1990s, the Phoenix area resembled a sea of red roofs, spreading in every cardinal direction. Phoenix was stereotyped as an endless sprawl of tract stucco homes, with few trees.

My entire childhood occurred from within the context of the rapid urban growth. I was one of the first ten babies born at the Scottsdale North Medical Center, one week after the facility opened its doors. When I was three years old I moved to the house I would live in for eighteen years. It was the first one built in the subdivision. A half a dozen empty lots separated my family from our closest neighbor. The house, a miniature white Spanish villa surrounded by jacaranda trees and covered with vines of fuchsia bougainvillea, sat alone in an expanse of churned desert topsoil empty of life. The area had long stretches of newly paved roads, lined with partially constructed subdivisions, containing cookie cutter houses of varying earth tones. But as I grew up it transformed to a slightly outdated neighborhood that lost its desirable appeal before it was even completed. My house was considered “old” by the time I entered the sixth grade.

Families moved in from all parts of the country. In elementary school I remember resenting the fact I was one of the few kids actually born in Arizona. Most people came from California, Illinois, the Northeast, or Canada. The lifestyle was fast paced and mobile, with driving a way of life. Residents drove to shop, eat, play, learn, exercise, and even walk.

During the 2000s housing development and home values peaked, leaving thousands of families unable to afford a home. Developers seized the opportunity to build further from population centers for affordable prices.

By 2002 homebuilders set their eyes on an area 25 miles south of downtown Phoenix; a town called Maricopa, Arizona. In the past three years Maricopa has grown nearly 4,000%. More than thirty thousand people moved in because of the affordable new housing options within an hour drive of Phoenix.

In 2003, housing companies such as Pulte Homes, Richmond American Homes, and Shea Homes quickly began construction on the first housing projects. Original prices were affordable and homes were framed, insulated, and dry-walled in only a few short months.
During the 2000s the saying was, “Drive until you can afford it.”

Thousands saw Maricopa as an opportunity to own a home. A local official stated that one family moved into Maricopa every half hour. Homes were bought, sold, and built so quickly that state officials recommended the creation of a city government to help regulate the growth. A temporary civic center was erected, consisting of a cluster of modular structures and a dirt parking lot. The new mayor’s office was overwhelmed with building permits. Home prices were appreciating upwards of 30% a quarter. Many lucky families bought homes in Maricopa, quickly resold them, and collected a profit affording them a home closer to Phoenix.

In the past three years Maricopa’s population has grown nearly 4,000%.

In the spring of 2006 housing prices began falling with the same rapid momentum in which they peaked. As prices fell, interest rates increased. This combination put pressure on homeowners trying to refinance. Eventually many residents were forced to foreclose on their properties when they were unable to make the mortgage payments. One expert economist on the housing industry recently referred to Maricopa, saying, “They really weren’t building homes. They were building mortgages that they could put into mortgage-backed securities in order to sell them to investors in China and France.”

While thousands of people still reside in the town, there are fears that population levels will dwindle; reducing it to the quiet agricultural community it was five years ago.

Now, real estate agents are feeling the pressure. Some have up to 60 listings at once. Most construction has stopped, leaving many neighborhoods with dozens of unfinished homes.

The reality in Maricopa is sad. Student enrollment is down at every school, many residents have lost their jobs, and gas prices, although lower than in recent months, are unpredictable.

After learning about Maricopa, I needed to see it for myself and decided to take a day trip last March. I left my house at 8am, hoping to arrive within the hour. After driving for nearly an hour and a half in stop and go traffic, I finally approached the outskirts of the town.

I arrived exhausted from driving the lengthy straight highway surrounded by the low lying desert shrubbery, the distant Estrella Mountain range, and the bleak blue sky hazy with a layer of brown smog lining the horizon.

Maricopa appeared like an island of desert suburbia among the scorched valley floor.

The first subdivision I passed had cobblestone walls lining the road with a thin greenbelt of non-endemic elm tree saplings and summer-time Bermuda grass.

I came to the first intersection and on both sides were two identical strip malls. The one on the left had a super market with a Starbucks inside. I felt like having a cup of coffee, so I pulled into the parking lot and walked into the enormous store. At over 80,000 sq. ft, it was equipped with a bank, an optometrist, a pharmacy, and a coffee shop. It is the only grocery store in town. I sipped my bitter dark roast coffee, observing the shoppers.

They really weren’t building homes...they were building mortgages that they could put into mortgage-backed securities in order to sell them to investors in China and France.
Everyone in the store seemed to take there time walking through the aisles. One family decided to stuff an inflatable pool and a portable barbecue into their cart, in preparation for a warm weekend. People rushed in and out of the store, stopping for groceries, coffee, and most importantly something to do. I quickly felt overwhelmed by the experience in the mammoth supermarket, so I decided to explore the neighborhoods, pass by the civic buildings, and take photos of the town’s older section and surrounding farmland.

The first subdivision I drove through appeared as I expected. There were several for sale signs on each cul-de-sac, and among them, the bank had foreclosed half, with red lettering reading, “Short Sale.”

I noticed that the developers made the conscience choice to lay a sidewalk on only one side of the street. They planned minimal space for public parks and schools, plotting only a few green spaces, covered with dried grass and desert landscaping.

I was intrigued to discover that because of the rapid growth and resistance to sustainable planning, no hospitals, fire stations, police stations, nor civic buildings were ever built. The town hall offices were housed in temporary trailers next to a Dairy Queen, the original landmark in town. The sign outside the city offices read, “Interim City Hall.”

The grey modular structure, surrounded by a partially paved parking lot was the only municipal building in town, and according to the town’s Website there are no future plans to build a permanent city hall. I continued to drive through what is considered the old section, which consisted of dilapidated rusty mobile homes from the 1970s and adobe bungalows. A tangled mess of Palo Verde trees, non-native palms, eucalyptus, and brittle long

The only playground I saw was empty. My car’s temperature gage read 108 degrees. The sun beat down on the surface of the playgrounds tangled purple and green metal labyrinth. A misting system, strung around the edges of the playground, pumped gallon upon gallon of lukewarm water into the air to provide relief from the heat. Unsurprisingly, the play area was empty of children and parents. From early May until mid-October, most families remained inside their temperature controlled environments, sheltered from the daily sun’s intensity.
needle pines were growing along a dry wash running along the road.

The older area was the original town before the explosive growth. Prior to 2002, people living in Maricopa worked for the agricultural industry in the area. Local cotton farms, citrus farms, and the Shamrock Dairy Farm employed most of what were the approximately 1,500 residents (pre-2002).

Touring the town proved intriguing, frustrating, and yet enjoyable. While driving home after my visit in the late afternoon rush-hour traffic, I was saddened by what I had discovered in Maricopa. With limited jobs, rising fuel costs, a decrepit housing market, and few public services, how could Maricopa hope to progress into the future? Unfortunately after visiting the place, the answer to the above question seems discouraging. While it can be argued that housing crisis was hard to predict, it is not surprising that the golden period for Maricopa was short lived.

Maricopa is an unsustainable community. While housing affordability is a problem, building thousands of poorly constructed and fully landscaped houses centered in one of the driest regions in North America, is not the answer to sustainable planning. Considering the economic strains, thousands of people will be forced to move away. Maricopa has the potential to dwindle back into the ag-town it once was.

Driving home after my short visit, I looked in my rear view mirror and saw the fiery Arizona sunset silhouetting Maricopa’s palm trees and rooflines. Watching the sun fall below the horizon invoked a feeling of comfort. Through all of my frustrations with life in the Arizona desert, Phoenix is undeniably my home; scorched, sprawling, and so intriguing from a geographer’s perspective.
Growth, Decline, Regrowth & Regression

By Jonathan Schroeder
Assistant Professor of Geography
Middlebury College

To visualize patterns in long-term population trends effectively, it is not enough to compare population maps from different times or to examine a map of change rates over a single period. Such strategies may reveal general trends, but subtler variations are easily missed. The maps here instead illustrate two principal components of trend variation simultaneously, revealing not only general growth and decline, but also regrowth and regression.

In the early post-war decades, urban populations consistently declined in city centers while inner-ring suburbs grew. In recent decades, however, the story has grown more complex. New patterns have emerged both within and among urban areas.

The "major urban cores" here are the parts of the 40 largest U.S. urban areas in 2000 that had urban densities in 1950, according to estimates from 1950 census tract data. Areas that were not covered by 1950 tract data are omitted, including 6 of the 40 largest urban areas. The maps are arranged geographically to highlight regional patterns.

This work represents part of Prof. Schroeder's doctoral thesis project completed in January 2009 at the University of Minnesota.
Within urban areas, most city centers are green, indicating that downtown revitalization and residential development became widespread in the 1980s and 90s.

Conversely, the outer edges of most cores are purple, indicating recent stagnation or decline in the populations of inner-ring suburbs. Beyond these two patterns, however, there are few consistencies in how recent trends have varied within urban areas, and the more remarkable patterns vary from region to region or by individual urban area.

While most urban cores through the country's center have lately been declining, a few cores in the Northeast and Upper Midwest have had large sectors of regrowth, and in cores in the West, particularly in Southern California, most tracts have been growing. Recent trends in the South have been more varied. For example, Atlanta's dominant pattern is a north-south contrast between growing and declining tracts, with most declines occurring in traditionally black neighborhoods (as in several other cores).

Population trends within U.S. urban areas therefore cannot be easily summarized. Traditional "monocentric" models relating population density and growth trends to distance from the city center are inadequate, but so too are the more recently developed "polycentric" models, which still do not account for the many clear regional variations. Nevertheless, this work demonstrates that it is possible to map and visualize patterns in emerging trends throughout U.S. urban areas, and this should be useful for confronting many of the challenges of urban policy and planning today.
(un) COMMON PEOPLE of PARIS

Photography by Nicolas Sohl
Four Muslim women pause among the crowds at the Louvre.
Two young girls dance in front of the Centre Pompidou.

A local candidate for the extreme right wing political party Front National calls for the removal of Muslims from France.

A woman looks on as people stroll through Les Halles, once the city's central market.
Tour de France. Crowds cheer on cyclists as they speed down Rivoli St.
Spectators usually only get a quick glimpse of the five final loops around central Paris.
Dharavi is the epitome of a slum—squalid, unhygienic, and overcrowded. With approximately one million residents crammed into the space of a square mile, Mumbai’s central slum dates back generations to the late nineteenth century.

As India continues its economic climb, 21st-century urban planners and entrepreneurs do not see space for Dharavi in the future of Mumbai. Over the past decade, private developers have created the Dharavi Redevelopment Project (DRP), a plan to rid the city of the slum.

By Uma Tantri
Photographs by Cloe Shasha
Strong opposition from prominent Indian citizens, academics, and most importantly Dharavi residents, however, has delayed the projected 2007 start date. While the first two groups point out the logistical and functional flaws of the plan, opposition from the residents is rooted in their connection to place – in their deep ties to the land and way of life. Indeed, the slum dwellers are true sedenterists: Dharavi is their home, a place they couldn’t imagine leaving for slum rehabilitation housing. It follows then that the DRP planners must reassess their development scheme to accommodate Dharavi residents’ traditions and values.

Until the late nineteenth century, Dharavi was a swampland inhabited by the Koli fishermen. When the swamp filled with coconut leaves, dead fish, and human waste, the land became a viable space for an array of activity. The Kumbhars came from Gujarat to found the Potters’ colony while the Tamils arrived from Tamil Nadu to open the tanneries. People from Uttar Pradesh came to jumpstart the textile industry. Andras, Biharis, Assamese, Bengalis, Maharatis flocked to Dharavi in hopes of economic success to create the most diverse neighborhood in the most diverse city in India (Jacobson and Bendiksen, 2008).

The beginning of the slum where children play in the open space and dogs search for food.
Generally, “slum households are deprived of good housing, they do not have access to clean water, they do not have access to hygienic systems of waste disposal (including the sanitary disposal of feces) and, in general, they live in polluted and degraded environments not suited to human habitation” (Swaminatham, 1995). A scarcity of running water and toilets results in an unhygienic environment where human excrement flows freely through the alleys. Dharavi is made up of low-rise wood, concrete, and rusted iron hutments (technical name for slum-dwellings) that are packed extremely close together, each hutment sharing walls with its neighbors and frequently capped with asbestos ceilings. These flimsy dwellings “do not protect against extremes of cold or heat; they are open to dust, rain, insects, and rodents” (Swaminatham, 1995).

At the geographic center of the city, the slum sits between two railway lines. Next to Dharavi is India’s newest corporate zone. Concerns about quality aside, Dharavi’s largest problem is overcrowding. In Shashikant Kawale’s home, a family of twelve lives in a ninety square foot room (about half the size of an American parking space) (The Economist, 2008). Until recently, only a few people had a water connection; most residents had to walk up to a mile in the morning to wait in line to buy water from “local goons” for their daily cooking and cleaning (Jacobson and Bendiksen, 2008). Goons have a monopoly of control over most resources in the slums. But lacking property rights, Dharavi residents must accept this system of corruption.

There are plenty of slums like this all over Mumbai and India, but the location of Dharavi brings it to center stage. At the geographic center of the city, the slum sits between two railway lines. Next to Dharavi is India’s newest global corporate zone, the Bandra Kurla Complex—at the same distance as Wall Street is to Brooklyn Heights (Jacobson and Bendiksen, 2008). Initially Dharavi was on the outskirts of Mumbai, but as the city’s population burgeoned, the development sprawled around the slum. Dharavi now occupies about $10 billion in dead real estate capital (The Economist, 2008).

As India’s economic boom continues, businessmen, economists, and urban planners see no space for Dharavi in a rising international city like Mumbai. Entrepreneurs want to redevelop Dharavi because it is “choking the life out of the city, robbing it of its rightful place in the 21st century” (Jacobson and Bendiksen, 2008). Amidst gleeful predictions of India’s growing GNP, there are deep anxieties about the central presence of non-taxpaying slum-dwellers. According to India’s business elite, Mumbai must eliminate sprawling slums and create a true middle class through rehabilitation housing in order for it to rival China’s soaring Shanghai. The DRP aims to do just this.

The current rehabilitation project divides Dharavi into five sectors, each to be developed by international investors that are generally non-resident Indians. This plan would move approximately 57,000 Dharavi families into high-rise housing where they would be guaranteed 225 square feet of free housing with indoor plumbing in exchange for their land in Dharavi (Patel and Arputham, 2008). Additionally, developers are going to be granted bonus Floor Space Index (FSI) in the redevelopment of Dharavi (Patel and Arputham, 2008). Generally, urban planners are granted 1.33 in Mumbai, but DRP plans call for up to 4.0 FSI, which would disproportionately inflate

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the profits of the developers. Usually for a redevelopment plan like this to pass, 70% of Dharavi residents would have to consent but the government claims they do not need approval because the DRP is already part of an approved redevelopment plan.

Moreover, Dharavi is the site and source of livelihood for its inhabitants. Bulldozing the hutments threatens their already unstable economic means. The Kumbhar Potters, who are the heart and soul of Dharavi, have been making pots in the same neighborhood for over a century (Jacobson and Bendiksen, 2008). Their objections, recognizing the threat posed by the DRP, are two-fold. First, they object to the claim that Kumbharwada (the Potters neighborhood) is ‘a slum’ in need of rehabilitation—to them, it is a home and a community. Second, their work is a source of income as well as of identity. The hutments have been key working space under the Potters’ control since the 1930’s. Their forced removal, accordingly, threatens the Kumbhar Potters’s unique way of life—something which has been cultivated and preserved over the decades. Moving from Dharavi is out of the question.

The Kumbhar Potters, who are the heart and soul of Dharavi, have been making pots in the same neighborhood for over a century.

The Kumbhar Potters, who are the heart and soul of Dharavi, have been making pots in the same neighborhood for over a century. The Kumbhar Potters current location in the slum is rationally better than any slum rehabilitation housing: with the destruction of Dharavi comes the destruction of important traditions.
The DRP planners are unable to see this intense connection to place. Physically and emotionally distant from Dharavi, they tend to be non-resident Indians who assume that no one would consider a squalid and unhealthy place like Dharavi to be suitable for extended living. The lead planner, Mukesh Mehta, lives on the affluent Napean Sea Road and is a member of the prestigious Bombay Gymkhana and Royal Bombay Yacht Club. He received a top education in India and then studied architecture at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, NY. In addition to the DRP, he develops real estate on Long Island’s posh North Shore. For the westernized affluent of India, mobility is prized. Being able to pick up and move to a new exotic location on a whim is considered a privilege. But what Mehta and others like him don’t realize is that those ideals of mobility do not translate for the residents of Dharavi. T.S. Elliot recognized that “culture…depends on a lack of movement, on stability, rootedness, and continuity. People who insist on moving present problems” (Cresswell, 2006).

Aspirations of progress held by India’s upper classes have created anxieties amongst the residents of Dharavi. The desire to catapult Mumbai into the 21st century is valid. And “mobility is central to the morphology of the city. It is the central factor in the growth of the individual and the city” (Cresswell, 2006). But this push may have dire consequences on the rich, rooted culture of Dharavi’s population. Their profound investment of labor and feeling into the land has made it invaluable. Slum-dweller Shaikh Mobin told National Geographic, “Mukesh Mehta says I am his hero, but what does he know of my life? …Does it occur to him that we do not wish to be part of his dream?” (Jacobson and Bendiksen, 2008).

The controversy has clouded the potential of slum rehabilitation projects to effect positive change. With the proper adjustments, the DRP could be a success: it could improve the livelihoods of the slum dwellers while benefiting developers and regional governments. But many times, governments and private developers make decisions without collaborating with the affected communities. In these cases, newly developed facilities such as schools and medical clinics are established without consideration as to who will manage them. The disconnect between developers and slum dwellers spells disaster: redevelopment high-rises turn into vertical slums, as there is no group to turn to for maintenance when most inhabitants can not necessarily afford the upkeep on their own.

But if more Dharavi dwellers of diverse interests from all of the major neighborhoods are organized to collaborate with the redevelopment planners, there would be some foundation for community-based organizations that could undertake maintenance of the new infrastructure and programs. Indeed, the success of the Kampung Improvement Program (KIP) in Surabaya, Indonesia, is attributed to a process of community involvement and compromise. Collaboration would help ensure the sustainability of the DRP. Moreover, it would give considerable control to the slum-dwellers over their homes, communities, and livelihoods.

The local and state governments of Mumbai and Maharashtra must also play an important role in sustaining redevelopment.
Providing environmental health and small-scale business training to the inhabitants is essential to the rehabilitation project. Such measures teach community members how to manage their homes and businesses. Beyond the immediate benefits, they encourage them to take pride in their homes and to mobilize as a community. Moreover, the government could establish home loan programs that provide a soft small credit to the community to help with house improvements (i.e. toilet, kitchen, floor, etc.), not unlike the successful Surabaya scheme. It could also follow Muhammad Yunus’s micro-finance model and provide loans to young women. By building the foundation for active community foundation and for government support, the DRP could sow the seeds for sustained success.

Sources

These photographs serve to show certain places in their entirety. The composite images of many individual frames, combine to give a greater sense of place.
The city wall surrounding Dubrovnik has held off intruders since the 7th century and provides a complete view of the buildings within.
The stillness of this photographer’s tripod captures the early morning calm of the church. By mid-afternoon, this square will be swarmed with tourists and their language guides.
The courtyard behind the city gate funnels tourists and their dogs into the streets.
There's no place like home.

by David Dolginow
When I was eight, I drew this picture of my home. What would Bachelard say about my state of being? Stifled? Content? Distressed? I liked rulers.
The struggle of creating a home is one we face continuously, whether it is arriving to Middlebury College for freshman year or to China for a year abroad or to a new city for a summer job. Many of us have had supportive families growing up, who, whatever their imperfections, have helped build the sense of comfort and security that makes a home, so that even the most mundane of appliances, photographs, and furniture are inexplicably infused with meaning. With each step away from our childhood homes, we are confronted with the task, the process, of creating a home in diverse environments and among diverse peoples.

Having a space that feels like home has been critical to my happiness in college. I need a quiet, safe place where I can return after a late night at the Mill or a long day in the library. This home has come in many forms, from a well-lit double in Stewart to a corner apartment overlooking Otter Creek. During the fall of my sophomore year, I had the opportunity to study critically the idea of “home” in one of those perspective-shifting courses, Cultural Geography with Professor Anne Knowles.
Yi-Fu Tuan, a professor who taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison as a cultural geographer with a brilliant mind, quiet voice, and slight frame, describes the traditional way of thinking about home for humanistic geographers in his seminal work *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Home exists at the center of our cosmos. Amid a chaotic and threatening material world, home is a place of security that engenders a feeling of contentment and rootedness: “The city or land is viewed as mother, and it nourishes; place is an archive of fond memories and splendid achievements that inspire the present; place is permanent and hence reassuring to man, who sees frailty in himself and chance and flux everywhere” (154). We solidify our home through specific landmarks or clusters of buildings that have a personal, religious, or spiritual connection and through the people with whom we interact regularly. It is in these places that we construct some of our fondest memories through shared experiences with family and friends. Indeed, the familiarity of daily existence provides the very foundation of home.

When I think of sophomore year, living in the tiny double next to the cigarette disposal on the first floor of Hepburn, I am reminded of Tuan’s recipe for home. The morning light raked in through our two windows. My roommate Will and I wedged our desks alongside two couches below lofted beds, creating a room of many corners—corners for wining and winding down on T-days, corners for writing essays and studying late into the evening, corners for reflecting on last weekend’s adventures and planning for the next. We were able to create a secure, nourishing place, almost perfectly composed with its flow of friends, mosaic of posters, and rhythm of daily activity. The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard also explores the idea of home in relation to human experience but from a different perspective than Tuan’s. In *Poetics of Space*, Bachelard explains how a house, or home, provides a framework for understanding human experience: “On whatever theoretical horizon we examine it, the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being” (xxxii). In other words, analyzing our house through thoughts and dreams provides us with a means to understand who we are as people and where we would like to take our lives. Through examining our inner soul, we are able to discover our destiny in the outer, material world. Our house provides us with stability by protecting us against storms and hurricanes, and this process transposes itself into parallel human values.

Bachelard also explores how different areas of the house capture the essence of different values, as houses and rooms function as psychological diagrams for human intimacy. While the roof is the center of rational thought because it provides shelter from the tempestuous environment, the cellar is the source of irrational thought, the “dark entity of the house” (18) so near to subterranean forces. He writes, “The point of departure of my reflections is the following: every corner in the house, every angle in a room, every inch of secluded space in which we like to hide, or withdraw into ourselves, is a symbol of solitude for the imagination; that is to say, it is the germ of a room, or of a house” (136). Bachelard contends that the house reflects our inner being, who we are beneath the surface, and provides a framework for understanding how we interact with the material world, even suggesting that a child’s happiness is measurable from his or her drawing of home. He quotes Anne Balife, “If he [the child] is happy, he will succeed in drawing a snug, protected house which is well built on deeply-rooted foundations’...If the child is unhappy, however, the house bears traces of his distress” (72). Bachelard’s approach provides us with a
new perspective on how home affects human intimacy and experience.

Although I think that Bachelard overstates how home represents our inner being, I agree that our home does reflect certain values that we have. As a social person, each of my rooms at Middlebury has been suited for socializing, with speakers for listening to those indie-electronica beats, couches for sitting, and glasses for drinking soda pop. It was also not by misfortune that I lived in a double for freshman, sophomore, and junior year. I like having good people in my vicinity, even if it means dealing with my roommate’s dresser, which is our floor, and trying my best not to snooze my alarm. Creating a home that reflects who we are is one of the great challenges of being a college student.

Many feminist geographers responded critically to the humanistic geographers’ description of home as an ideal place of warmth, security, and rootedness. In Feminism & Geography, Gillian Rose provides an insightful critique of largely “masculinist” geographic perspectives on home. She presents the views of several social feminists during the 1970s to demonstrate that family, home, and community were the strongest symbols of oppression for women. The capitalist system coerced women into birthing future workers and clothing, feeding, and servicing the current labor force, while restricting them from having jobs outside of domestic world. “So, to white feminists who argued that the home was the ‘central site of the oppression of women’, there seemed little reason to celebrate a sense of belonging to the home, and even less, I would add, to support humanistic geographers’ claim that the home provides the ultimate sense of place” (55).

Not all feminists agree with Rose’s critique, however; the African American feminist bell hooks’ description of home reaffirms the perspectives of humanistic geographers, extending them in important ways through political analysis. In Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics, hooks describes the intense segregation she experienced as a child, especially when walking to her grandmother’s house: “It was a movement from the segregated blackness of our community into a poor white neighborhood. I remember the fear, being scared to walk to Baba’s (our grandmother’s house) because we would have to pass that terrifying whiteness—those white faces on the porches staring down with hate” (41). Arriving at her grandmother’s home overwhelmed her with a sensation of security and homecoming. Interestingly, she refers to the house as her grandmother’s and not her grandfather’s, though he lived there as well, because these African American communities believed that the home belonged to the women. What mattered in life occurred in the home—“the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls” (41). It was a place of refuge and resistance for black people during a time when they often worked in white homes as servants or in the fields or streets.

Moreover, the home at times, especially during apartheid in South Africa, was the center for political resistance. Women were responsible for creating this home and consequently held an instrumental position in creating the African-American identity.

These two feminist readings on home underscore how we must acknowledge that, though this protective and nourishing place may be universally desired, there are many different types of homes. They may come in the form of a 1950s style suburban house with a 5-person family, white picket fence, and golden retriever, but it may look differently for a homeless person, an oppressed spouse, or a military officer, who moves once a year.
In high school, I was on top of the world, or so I felt. I had a fantastic group of friends; I was our soccer team’s super star; I loved school and did well; and best of all, I went to see the Royals on opening day each year. Even when problems arose, my family and home were right there for support. Arriving in college changed that dramatically and suddenly. I had to find my niche, academically and socially: I had to create my sense of home. Slowly, I etched out my space. One seminal moment occurred during J-term of my freshman year. I inherited a futon from my older brother, which, in combination with the blue blow-up love couch purchased by my roommate, allowed me to host intimate gatherings with other Stew-bies. Six or seven of the people who hung out there regularly became intimately woven into my Middlebury home and are still some of my closest friends today.

I now look forward to the prospect of the once daunting task of building a new home, as I graduate from Middlebury and move on to who-knows-where with who-knows-what people. It’ll be great.

Sources


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