

'Thinking Beyond Today'

Countryside Properties and the Shape of Time

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Introduction

"That's the modern thing: to copy old styles..."

Mr Wood, Great Notley resident

'Nostalgia appears to hold a powerful grip on our national culture' concludes Nicholas Barker, reflecting on his survey of domestic taste (Parr and Barker 1992: 7). 'Our preference for and preservation of old property runs deep in the national psyche' agrees the Independent (Independent 1996). Indeed, since the 1970s, as Raphael Samuel charts, major factors in a home's desirability for much of the population include age, history, tradition, or connotations of these, and the movement shows little sign of weakening, despite the rise of 'loft-style' living among urban dwellers (see Samuel 1994). A recent MORI poll showed a clear preference for older-style semi-rural properties over more contemporary options (CABE 2002). While the Daily Mail Ideal Home Show, barometer of 'Middle England's' tastes, named its 2002 'showhome-village' 'A Celebration of Village Life'. This featured four converted 'old' properties, and one new look-alike, following survey results detecting keen interest in modernised older property (Daily Mail 2002).

Although 'conservationism' has been a 'a leading idiom in new development' (Samuel 1994: 63) since the 1970s it is only in the last decade, possibly due to the high cost of (both to buy and maintain), and high demand for, genuinely old property, that desire for an imitation 'period' exterior with 'modern' interior has replaced, or truly accompanied, that for an older home (see Independent 1996; Jackson 1996). Neo-vernacular developments offering 'instant oldness' (Samuel 1994: 77 – crediting the term to Adrian Forty) with 'mod cons' have mushroomed nationwide. In the 1980s the style gained a high-profile champion in Prince Charles, who with the Urban Villages Group (see Aldous 1992), and his Poundbury experiment, spoke up on behalf of the populace against Modernist arrogance, ushering in, perhaps unwittingly, a tidal wave of settlements 'based on all the traditional components' (Cannell 1997) where theoretically one can not only live in a 'traditional' house, but belong to a 'traditional' community.

It is this phenomenon that I wish to consider: the popularity of the home that looks old, or evokes the old, but is not. What does this trend reveal about manifestations of the 'homely', in particular the 'feel' of the homely, in early twenty-first century England? By the homely I mean that which encourages or permits what, on an existential scale, Heidegger calls 'dwelling', a feeling of being 'at home' in one's environment (Heidegger 1971).

While acknowledging Heidegger's fundamental contribution, alongside that of Bachelard (e.g. Bachelard 1969) to the 'homely' debate, I wish nevertheless to be wary of assuming any 'essential' qualities, and to focus on understanding the phenomenon in its geographical and historical context: England in the 1990s. Perhaps, after all, people no longer need to 'dwell' in the way they once did. While the current revivalist trend in England, is exactly that, a trend, following a period post-war when older homes were considered 'moribund' – associated with bad quality and unjust social conditions (Samuel 1994: 58; 153-4). Therefore, I have limited myself, while bearing wider questions in mind, to a specific study: the work of one medium-sized developer – Countryside Properties – on two sites in Essex.

Countryside, based in Essex but operating nationwide, appear to have found 'the perfect formula' for 'what aspirational middle England wants from its suburbia' (Dyckhoff 2001: 9). With the slogan 'Thinking Beyond Today', they specialise in the masterplanning of new traditional 'villages' on the outskirts of existing towns, developing certain aspects of the site themselves, including all landscaping, while selling some plots to others.

Great Notley Garden Village (*figs 1&2*) and Beaulieu Park (*figs 3&4*) are two such 'planned urban extensions', to the towns of Chelmsford and Braintree respectively. The former, much publicised, even through its own docu-soap, as an experiment in creating a 'sustainable community' from scratch, consists of just under 2,000 homes grouped into three 'hamlets', as well as a primary school (architectural award-winning, and one of very few buildings on site – none of which are residential – not styled in the 'traditional vernacular'), church, community centre, doctor's surgery, Tesco superstore, village green, and fish and chip shop. Initiated in 1993, it is near completion. The latter, begun in 1999, will contain just 550 houses when finished and no community facilities, and is more of a commuter satellite, although there are hopes that the scheme will eventually increase to 3,000 houses, with education and employment spaces, and its own station.

Drawn initially to Countryside by Residential MD Chris Crook's enigmatic talk of 'built-in nooks and crannies' and 'instant maturity' in a Guardian interview (Dyckhoff 1991), my interest was strengthened when, visiting Great Notley, I was struck by how much more interesting, both visually and spatially, their patches seemed than those of other developers, combining styles from early Tudor to Garden Suburb in a 'reckless charging around architectural history' (Dyckhoff 2001: 11). Conforming to Essex Design Guide guidelines for appropriate design is encouraged locally by the planning authorities, but these settlements, mirroring the layout of 'genuine' villages, with winding streets and paths, ponds (*fig 5*), spinneys, even a manor at Great Notley (*fig 6*), seemed to take the village aesthetic to new levels. The current What House magazine Housebuilder of the Year, Countryside are at peak popularity, and their apparent reputation with homebuyers – one resident mentioned a 'snob-factor' – confirmed them as my case-study.

In the following pages, I will investigate Countryside's 'formula', considering how and why aspects of history and memory are employed in design to create homes that people want to live in. How does Countryside perceive, provide for, perhaps even encourage, needs and desires for memory and/or history? And how do residents or potential customers experience any 'historical' interventions that are made? In exploring those questions, I will also bear in mind how Countryside's activities connect with practices of remembering, in the broadest sense of that term, on a wider scale, social and individual. Focusing on a specific example, I hope my findings will also feed into my initial research question, and perhaps offer insight into the issue of being 'at home' at all in the early twenty-first century.



fig 1: Great Notley streetscape, including the Elizabethan influenced 'The Hall'



fig 2: Great Notley streetscape



fig 3: Beaulieu Park streetscape



fig 4: Beaulieu Park landscape



fig 5: pond at Great Notley



fig 6: manor house at Great Notley

1. Surfaces

*"You can't really make something what it isn't.
You can try your best, but you can't really do it."*

Josephine, Great Notley resident

The popularity of old-style houses accompanies a well-documented wider trend, even mania, to generate encounters with and images of our heritage. This is usually linked to the postmodern, late-capitalist, global consumer society that we now inhabit, and although considered positively by some, as democratic access to tradition (e.g. Samuel 1994), or as permitting celebratory play with traditional structures (e.g. Jencks 1996; Foster 1985) the voices of the 'doom-mongers' are often loudest (Jencks 1996: 16).

Deprived of the 'great modern syntheses' (Kolb 1990: 4) that once defined and framed existence, disoriented by a high-speed globalised world, and 'incapable of dealing with time and history', yet consequently obsessed with it, we endure life 'in a perpetual present and in perpetual change' (Jameson 1985: 117-125), trying to locate and preserve the vanishing 'real' and 'authentic', and fighting against encroaching collective amnesia (see Nora 1984, Huyssen 1995; Forty 1999: 215). Lacking subjectivity, unable to create anything original, we purchase representations of what we would like to be, fulfilling nostalgic desires with stereotypes (see Jameson 1985; Baudrillard 1985) as we commodify the past into a 'heritage industry' (Hewison 1987). In England, as elsewhere, a reaction against globalisation and perceived homogenisation results in emphasis on local tradition (Rykwert 2000: 236) and accompanying traditional (read bourgeois) values. The rhetoric of the Essex Design Guide, Urban Villages Group and the American New Urbanism movement, with their emphasis on 'communities' and the local vernacular, shared by Countryside, is seen as one manifestation of this, responding to the postmodern condition by counteracting 'a ubiquitously placeless modern environment' (Frampton 85: 24).

Indeed, at first glance, what Countryside seem to be selling, in alluding to recognisable stages in architectural history, rather than merely employing generic 'traditional' facades, is akin to what art-historian Alois Riegl labels 'Historic Value': evidence of 'one moment in the developmental continuum of the past', placed 'before our eyes as if it belonged to the present' (Riegl 1982: 38; also Forty 2000: 212). By offering an artefact that is clearly of another time that is not this one, they satisfy nostalgia for something that still recognisably *means* something.

Like many greenfield developers, Countryside pick up on a site's history, perhaps naming it after what the houses replace or mask, thus endowing it with pre-existence and associated status (see Garreau 1992: 340). Beaulieu Park, for example, keeps the name it bore as a hunting ground for Henry VIII, a history given a double-spread in the sales brochure, while grander houses are named after his wives and associates: the Aragon (see fig 7), the Wolsey etc. The homes offer clearly readable symbols of a stable and friendly, albeit mythical, English past, apparently representing and resuscitating declining values of security, domesticity and family.



fig 7: 'The Aragon' house style

However, what they ultimately offer, as cultural critics and architects alike loudly proclaim, is pure inauthenticity, through denying both the present, and the reality of the past. As we search for perceived vanished authenticity, they sell us the chance to surround ourselves with illusions of it in 'a triumph of image over substance' (Vidler 1999: 66) where a 'compensatory façade' masks the messy reality of existence (Frampton 1985: 17). They are examples of Norman Klein's 'social imaginary': a wishful creation - 'a shared memory of an event that has never occurred yet' (Klein 1992: 9-12).

Offering an overload of pastiche without even the saving grace of irony, commodified nostalgia contributes to existential alienation, exacerbating an already 'homeless' modern condition (see Bogner 2000; Seamon 2000; Jager 2000).

Architects also deride these 'villages' for less philosophical reasons, condemning them as unimaginative 'visual pollution': such 'decorated sheds' – symbolic decoration applied to modern boxy interiors – are purely a money-making exercise, capitalising on dreams fuelled by consumer society, and pandering to the lowest common denominator (see Venturi et al 1996).

While not entirely dismissing such arguments, I am not satisfied with them as explanations of what Countryside are doing. Condemning these phenomena as mere surface, many critics fall into the same trap, reading the built environment as text, and refusing to even try and look beyond theories of surface to what might be happening beneath. I believe there is something more complex going on, and discussions with residents of Beaulieu Park and Great Notley strengthened that feeling. (I spoke to twenty-two, with written feedback from a further eight, and if these informal interviews gave me one thing, it was a reminder that most people, given the chance, do not lack self-awareness, or the ability to reflect on their desires, although it can appear so after carefully editing.)

Therefore, as I move beyond initial impressions of Countryside's activities, I have two guiding principles: a) to approach the environment as texture: exploring how places are experienced and 'felt', rather than merely read, through the filters of memory and place theory; and b) to avoid value judgments, for it is too easy to simply condemn. Such settlements are an inescapable part of our cultural landscape, and although not the only vision for the future of mass housing, they are a firm popular choice.



Fig 8: external nook at Beaulieu Park (on The Aragon house)



Fig 9: external nook at Beaulieu Park

2. Surface to depth

"It should have a sort of character, let's put it that way."

Raj, Beaulieu Park resident

Having addressed how critics might view Countryside's activities, I now look, less cynically, at what Countryside say they are doing, beginning with a near dismissal of the importance of Historic Value. For I encountered a striking absence of any wish among residents to maintain or feel the presence of the Historic Past in their domestic environment. (I use the P in order to maintain a distinction from less 'historical' forms of pastness.) Questions designed to elicit nostalgic responses brought few, revealing a kind of historical insensitivity: neither a 'sense of the Past' or of 'Olden Times' in house or estate design, nor a dream of 'olde-worlde' village life, appeared a major factor in people's choice of home. Likewise, in interview, Head of Design Trisha Gupta also failed to pick up leads to discuss nostalgia or the 'spirit of the past', and although this initially surprised and frustrated me, it subsequently sent my research off in a much more fruitful direction.

Before progressing, I should stress that the main considerations when home-buying, for most of those I interviewed, were practicalities: facilities and amenities. Economics were also key: not just in the sense of what was affordable, but in that of viewing property as an investment. For three people, this was reason enough not to acquire a contemporary-looking house, for 'contemporary style can date rapidly and thus lose value,' in the words of one. As the Independent noted in the '90s, practicality is 'overcoming the sentimental feeling attached to old homes' (Independent 1996). Or, as Andy from Beaulieu Park put it: 'The modern buyer has more practical considerations.' Even when envisioning their ideal home for me, people often began by listing facilities or nearby amenities, reflecting Patrick Keillor's concern that home is now more product than artefact (Bullivant 2000). Nevertheless, one house must be chosen over others fulfilling one's practical and economic criteria, and Countryside, priding themselves on keeping their edge over competitors, take a strong interest in the less conscious factors that draw people in.

Gupta implied that it was not references to the Past itself that mattered to people, but the physical qualities that the passage of time inevitably creates: 'If you look at how villages or towns or even cities that have grown up over a length of time are arranged, they will have spatial variety and have made use of various landscape characteristics, and the space will have evolved' (Gupta 2002). The subsequent 'felt' quality, 'the richness of history' (Rossi 1982: 29), accumulated 'by accident of time and tradition' (Osbourne 1992: 12), is described by Riegl as 'Age Value' (see Riegl 1982) and helps us distinguish an old thing from a new one. As Crook

puts it: 'You go to the place...and you know it's been there for a while. You don't necessarily know how you know its been there for a while. And you don't necessarily understand why you appreciate it' (Crook 2002).

As recommended by the Essex Design Guide, Countryside, through analysing historic towns and villages for inherent patterns and qualities, endeavour to create an equivalent 'sense of place', of individual character, in new developments, something lacking in 'sausage-machine' estates of the 1970s: 'you'd go into it, and you could actually be anywhere, because the character of the houses and the use of materials was exactly the same wherever you went' (Gupta 2002). Place-theorists agree that 'sense of place' is vital to human well-being and identity, helping us feel 'at home' in the world (see Casey 1987: 195; Norberg Schulz 1980; Relph 2000; Violich 2000). Violich stresses that although there is no 'generalised quality' expressible as a formula, it is possible to 'design in' foundations on which a sense of place can develop, and this is what Countryside attempt.

Gupta identifies 'legibility' and 'memorability' as key qualities of the spatial and visual variety inherent to old places, and strives to incorporate these in developments. 'Legibility' allows one to take possession of the town, navigating it easily thanks to clear spatial boundaries (EPOA 1997: 5; Frampton 85: 25) and recognisable 'visual keys' or 'landmarks' (EPOA 1997: 13; Lynch 1996), such as a distinctive red house, or large tree, and thus feeling comfortable and in control more rapidly. While 'memorability', the presence of 'devices that make places memorable', like a beautiful water feature in the park or working fireplace in the bedroom, ensures that a site or property sticks in a potential customer's mind, then aiding them settle quickly by enhancing legibility once they move in (Gupta 2002).

I see legibility and memorability working together in additional ways at Beaulieu Park and Great Notley. For the properties are clearly 'legible', as stressed by a recent sales brochure, as 'traditional Essex village', with sites offering 'all the essential qualities' of this archetype. Their visual aspect conveys local distinctiveness and cultural heritage, qualities of 'sense of place' (Violich 2000: 132-4) while addressing a web of useful memories. The fact that the houses resemble something we know, whether from direct personal experience – previous homes, or visited places – or from collectively shared and media-disseminated images, encourages, I suggest, a sense of connection, even belonging, and of knowing how to 'be' in the space.

If we have physically been in similar 'genuine' towns before, then this spatial familiarity may well trigger a 'body memory' (Casey 1997: 189) where rather than, or in addition to, our mind consciously recognising visual similarities to other places we have been in, our body, through the evidence of all the senses, recognises the feeling of being in a similar place through the perception of familiar forms. 'Re-enacting' the past rather than merely picturing it as the mind

does (Casey 1987: 194), our body may thus reinforce the link between the 'new' site and more established ones.

Casey stresses the importance of differentiating types of remembering, leading me to stress that I see the above process as a whole as one of 'recognition' - a remembering that is oriented towards understanding the present, and related to perception - rather than 'reminiscence' - related to nostalgia and about 'revivifying' the past and thus 'revitalising the present' (Casey 1987: 106-124). While not denying that those two types may coexist, as the values of security and domesticity that we may collectively reminisce about are 'recognised' in the site's surfaces, I wish to emphasise that I don't think the popularity of these 'historical' styles and arrangements is primarily due to a hankering for the Past or its values, but to a more fundamental process of recognition essential, in turn, for a more fundamental sense of security within our environment.

Spatial and visual variety is also achieved through the considered emulation of the 'evolved' quality of old towns, responding to the design journalist's challenge that such developments 'have none of the genuinely organic spirit of real old villages' (Glancey 2002: 11). Countryside's design philosophy of 'instant maturity', employed both site-wide and within individual properties, attempts to evoke, through an 'evolutionary' principle, the feeling that older places engender, thus putting people 'at ease' (Crook 2001: 10). At its most basic level, this is achieved through the use, whenever possible, of good-quality materials that will weather like those of former eras, rather than the cheap imitations available today. While the 'conviction that this place has evolved over time, rather than being a spanking brand new development' (Crook 2002) is encouraged by the intermingling of exteriors inspired by different eras, and by constructing elements of some houses in different styles, as if they have been extended at a later date.

The incorporation of 'built-in nooks and crannies' is a subtler version of this practice. These are like the spaces that appear in old houses as doors, windows and stairs are moved around over the years - 'spaces with no obvious function, such as landings that lead nowhere.' As Crook says 'to really give character to a home, you have to add those things that old houses acquire through time' (Dyckhoff 2001: 10). These 'dead spaces', as BP resident Lee called them, also serve as storage or display spaces: Lee was using his internal ones for bookshelves, while people keep tools and pot-plants within external bricked-in arches. (*figs 8 & 9*)

Countryside also work to bring out the site's genuine past, not just by highlighting its History, but by incorporating existing features. Field boundaries, hedgerows and water features were incorporated as guides to the shape of the different 'hamlets' making up the overall 'village' of Great Notley. Every existing hedge, spinney and tree was maintained, protected under polythene

while building-work surrounded them, and used as structuring elements for design. (figs 10, 11 & 12)



Figs 10 & 11: existing hedgerow used as design-guide for pathway at Great Notley



Fig 12: existing trees and hedges used as boundaries for housing at Great Notley

Gupta explains: 'the best thing for designing is to actually have a feature that you can make the most of, so that you have a frame to design within. And when you do that you find that the design has to be a lot more interesting to make it work...And in the end, if you've got a stand of mature trees in the middle, that instantly transforms the character of the new houses' (Gupta 2002). This tactic not only gives structure and identity to the site, but a certain 'established' presence. (see *fig 13*)

Such inscription of agricultural prehistory 'into the form and realisation of the work' is advocated by Frampton. It enhances the 'idiosyncrasies of place' and contributes to a tectonic quality more vital to 'sense of place' than scenographic ones (Frampton 1985: 26-7). At Beaulieu Park there were few trees, so landscapers designed the site around the view of listed New Hall on the horizon. (*figs 14 and 15*)

Countryside do not expect potential residents to consciously register and tick off the forms designed to captivate them or put them at ease, but do expect buyers to notice, appreciate and remember them: 'There must be something about the house when you go in it as much when its empty as when its all tarted up with showhouse furniture...People don't select the individual detail and say "Oh yes, that's really nice," but they'll look at it, and they probably won't quite know why, but there'll be something about it that makes it feel right' (Gupta 2002). I had an 'instant maturity' experience that allowed me to reflect on this in a Great Notley showhome. The furthest door of those opening off the first-floor landing ahead of me was set back in a nook (*fig 16*), and something suddenly felt strangely, yet pleasantly, familiar.

Searching for the cause of this, I realised that I had been reminded of a similar landing in a big Victorian house where I used to play as a child: the nook would be perfect for hide-and-seek. Analysing this subsequently, it seemed that a spatial configuration had provoked a bodily sensation, which then sparked a mental image, leading to conscious recollection, but so rapidly that the levels of recognition were virtually simultaneous.

Similar negotiations between cognitive and bodily memory, knowing and feeling, are ongoing in the process of 'reading', and settling within, our environment, as Casey explores. Therefore, 'the lived body' as he stresses, being 'always in the thick of things' (Casey 1987: 180), we should devote as much attention to the bodily as to the cognitive or visual, working against the cult of 'mentalism' (Casey's term) in analysing the role played by memory in perceiving a homely environment. Not forgetting that fuzzy bit in the middle, where the most interesting stuff may happen, which Tschumi articulates more coherently as - 'that gap in the obscurity of the unconscious, somewhere between Body and Ego' (Tschumi 96: 110). (see also Rodaway 1994; Pallasmaa 1996; Sibley 1995: 1-4)



Fig 13: existing mature tree used as focal point for design at Beaulieu Park



Fig 14: Countryside sketch of proposed view to New Hall at Beaulieu Park



Fig 15: view through to New Hall today



Fig 16: landing of Great Notley show-home

We have looked in detail at how Countryside reproduce the spatial and visual qualities of older sites, encouraging spatial orientation and recognition but, apart from a reference to the established presence generated by old trees, we have not considered that 'felt' quality of an old village, that 'richness of history' or established presence that Crook mused upon. Can Age Value be created from scratch too, along with the built forms of the village?

I believe that it can, for this temporal quality, I suggest, is inherent to the evolved spatial configuration with its 'evidence' of evolution; not, I stress, in the sense of a *genius loci* type spirit, but as something that our recognition of those established spatial forms projects into them, responding to the 'story through time' that they offer us. What the interaction of our perception with the built forms produces is Age Value; 'a generalized sense of the passage of time' (Forty 2000: 212) The subsequently perceived evolved, and evolving, condition of the site, combined with the mature natural elements of the landscape, gives it an 'established' atmosphere, something that the residents of Beaulieu Park and Great Notley that I spoke to both noticed and appreciated. It also provides a sense of temporal continuity: an understanding of time evolving towards the present and beyond, which orients us, and in which we feel 'rooted.' This condition would seem to be as vital to our feeling 'at ease' or 'at home' in a place as spatial orientation.

I conclude that what Countryside's tactics achieve, far more importantly than evoking any sense of the Past, is an evocation of a sense of the passage of time. The nostalgic focus of postmodern society on Historic Value (jumbled as that history may be) seems to be about looking back, to something that can never 'be' in the present even if it was in the past. Whereas Age Value implies continuity; an ongoing forward movement *from* the past rather than a looking back to a separate Past. The sense of active progression or evolution, and of knowing that time has passed in a place, engendered by evidence of age helps us to position the present, and ourselves in it, not in a historical sense, but in a way that allows us to feel part of an ongoing story, like that we imagine for our own existence.

3. Depths

"Living in a place like this is a bit odd...But over time, you get your own history in a place."

Ros, Great Notley resident

In prioritising passed time over the Past, I do not mean to entirely dismiss those 'postmodern' arguments about purchasing a place in a mythical representation of the English village. To a certain degree, I see that as the case, but I believe it is not done naively, and that it is a more complex phenomenon than initial assumptions about nostalgia or social conservatism might suggest.

At Great Notley and Beaulieu Park a story can be read about a certain kind of village. It is a story in space, accessed as one walks through the village and recognises its forms, just as one reads a certain story about domestic life walking through a Countryside show-home. This story offers clear associations with a Past, albeit a 'fake' past or 'social imaginary' of cricket on village greens, summer fetes, Miss Marple, and the like. Such stories could be seen to be both playing to our desire to, while also encouraging us to, 'hang...onto a Bekonscot dream' of an ideal village in an idealised past (Glancey 2002: 10).

However, this (and the showhome story) is not necessarily a story that anyone (or many people) really believes. Just as the story told on a more abstract scale, that of the evolution of the space through time, is a 'fake' story, that no-one actually believes, for we know the village is new, but one that is nonetheless plausible, and that serves an orienting function. The story through time is a story that could have happened, but didn't, at least not in this space. And the story through space is one that we like to think might have happened, somewhere else in time, but probably didn't. But that nevertheless is still 'true', in that it exists, and we tell it to ourselves and each other. And they are both stories that we recognise, not necessarily from direct personal experience, but certainly collectively, and from indirect experience. They are two types of shared narrative, or 'memory', and as that serve an important function.

Ricoeur, in *Time and Narrative*, argues that narrativity is essential to both the human perception and understanding of time, and, through this understanding, to our ability to make sense of our own existence in time, and thus ultimately, to our ability to 'exist' at all: 'Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence' (Ricoeur 1984: 52). Although stressing that in articulating this fundamental link between human existence and story he is saying nothing new - 'That life has to do with narration has always been known and said'

(Ricoeur 1991: 445) – he then moves beyond that generalisation to deconstruct how the relationship actually works, and his insights add much to my argument.

Quoting St Augustine and Heidegger, Ricoeur represents Time itself – ‘cosmic’ time – as something ‘chaotic, obscure and mute’ devoid of sequential form. Like Augustine, he says, we know time when no-one asks us, yet can’t explain it when they do. In order to articulate, and make use of time, we nevertheless shape it through certain strategies. Heidegger distinguishes three modes: ‘within-timeness’ (least ‘authentic’) – close to linear time, where we break time down into a series of moments; ‘historicity’ – the stretching along of time as a narrative, a ‘becoming’; and ‘temporality’ (most ‘authentic’) – the sense of being-toward-death. Ricoeur explains how we use stories (fact or fiction), first to establish ourselves ‘within’ time, to articulate that B follows A, and then to ‘shape’ lived time. But while we negotiate our relationship with time thus, we never lose sight of it being more than we can articulate, although that feeling of being-toward-death is the closest we come (Ricoeur 1991: 105-115).

Having developed our narrative capacity in coming to terms with time, we employ it to make sense of ourselves and of the world, witnessed as existing through (in both senses of the word: ‘within’ and ‘by reason of’) time. Narrative is used not only to make sense of our self in the sense of understanding something that already exists, but actually to form that thing in the first place. Ultimately, our ‘being-in-the-world’ is constituted by time and made possible, conceivable, by narrative.

‘It seems that our life, enveloped in one single glance, appears to us as the field of constructive activity, deriving from the narrative intelligence through which we hope to recover (rather than impose from without) *the narrative identity which constitutes us*. I emphasise the expression narrative identity because that which we call subjectivity is neither an incoherent succession of occurrences nor an immutable substance incapable of becoming. It is exactly the kind of identity which the narrative composition alone, by means of its dynamism, can create’ (Ricoeur 1991: 436-7).

Ricoeur concludes that we have ‘an authentic demand for a story’ with life as ‘an activity and a desire in search of a narrative.’ After all, ‘life is no more than a biological phenomenon as long as it is not interpreted’ (Ricoeur 1991: 432-4). For the purposes of that interpretative function, both history and fiction are equally useful. For, as I understand it, we continually employ, and engage with, a network of stories, in an ongoing process of telling and retelling, combining and consolidating, remembering and forgetting. Not only does this practice help us to understand our place and our progress in the ‘temporal’ lifeworld that we perceive, but to emplace ourselves in the material ‘spatial’ world that we inhabit, and to continue to negotiate our

relationship with the latter as it too evolves through time, its spatial configurations taking on the marks of time. (Ricoeur's name for these is 'traces'.)

A 'need' for narrative emerged from my resident interviews. In fact, it was as a result of these that I thought of reading Ricoeur. For, accompanying the lack of interest in feeling a sense of the Past around one, despite a general liking for the 'established', was a clear valuing of emplaced personal pasts and memories, and an enjoyment of telling these. Asked to name their favourite home, half my interviewees chose their current one, but for those who picked a former home, the primary reason was not its attractiveness, or its practicality, but what had happened there. For older people it was often the house where family had grown up, for others it was a house that they had altered in some way to suit their preferences – 'It was just that we made the house ours with the extension. It was our idea and it was totally different' – and for one woman it was the first flat where she had lived as an adult, forever linked in her mind with exploring her independence.

More than one person stressed that it was hard to disentangle the fabric of a house from what had happened in it. As Phil from Great Notley explained: 'You think of the experiences. In a grotty house you can have had a great time.' This could also work the other way. As Sibley points out, the domestic does not have good connotations for everyone (Sibley 1995). One ex-resident of Great Notley said that her house there had been her favourite, but she left it because 'there were too many memories in that place. Bad memories.'

Likewise, discussing what made home feel like 'home', the ideal that emerged often seemed to be a place where you could imagine stories unfolding and fond memories being formed in a safe and private environment – one resident from Great Notley, visualising his ideal home, stressed that it would 'feel lived in' by his family and children, while one from Beaulieu Park saw home as 'a place to be with the family, share and enjoy each others company. A place for both happiness and sadness, but togetherness.' Or, it was a place that you could get to know intimately and make your own. Graham from Great Notley, on the same topic, said: 'You know everything about it. You go in and say it's me! You know all the noises, which stair creaks and the sound of every door. It takes on a character of its own.' In the words of Adolf Loos on his family home: "it grew along with us and we grew within it." The house was the 'family's product', and it and its contents 'narrated family history' (Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow 1993: 80).

One might therefore suggest, contemplating these tendencies alongside Ricoeur, that a fundamental function of home, and the wider home environment, is to be somewhere that offers space where one's personal story can unfold (space *for* memories) but where one can also sense one's personal story extending back in time (space *of* memories), thus orienting one in time, and by extension, space. For if a place offers qualities that engender an

understanding of one's identity in time, which Ricoeur stresses as essential, it becomes a secure environment associated with that sense of identity, 'a repository and witness of one's life (Bognar 2000: 189).

This orienting space of the home, as the centre of our perceived existence, provides the 'security through which we learn to negotiate acceptable relationships with new ideas, and formulate and test our own' (Allison 1999: 1). This process involves the constructing and of processing stories to make sense both of ourselves, and of the collective stories of the wider world which frame, intersect and influence our narratives. The capacity to integrate, and to be subsequently modified by human life-stories is said to be a prime quality of 'place', for indeed, space only really becomes place as a result of human interaction (Violich 2000; NS 1980; Hayden 1995; Relph 2000; Seamon 2000).

So, how does a Countryside development encourage this storytelling? If we understand a welcoming home environment as a place that allows us to 'root' ourselves in space and time, one which offers foundations for our life-story and self-identity, from which we can understand our 'story' emerging, but in which we can also imagine settling in order to continue evolving, then I see a Countryside village, with its sense of the passage of time, as a kind of enriched grow-bag.

Rather than entering a bare and 'new' space, a clean canvas, we enter one where the reassuring evolution of time is already in evidence, in spatial forms we recognise, and with clearly demarcated points into which the new homeowner can 'plug' their own ongoing story for a 'kick-start' into the new environment. At a village-wide level, Countryside offer two 'kick-starts' to a 'community' story: the site's similarity to other experienced or imagined places, orienting us in space, and evidence of an existing temporal narrative in that space, orienting us in time (by which I mean evolving, ongoing time, *not* historical time). Likewise, at the individual property level, through the same two 'head-starts', the house is already recognisable in space and time as a potential home.

The 'built-in nooks and crannies' are *most* interesting in that they, while generating the domestic kick-start through evoking the passage of time, also, by contributing to spatial variety and giving some established sense of identity to the house, provide an additional stimulus to the accumulation of future stories and memories. They offer "'landmarks" by which we gauge our progress through a given part of the landscape and on which we hang lasting memories' (Casey 1987: 198), assisting one in taking possession of the house and orienting oneself within it. By giving a 'framework' similar to that of Gupta's field boundaries, they offer an 'aid' to interior design, or the arrangement of personal artefacts, helping the homeowner incorporate their own character, while also offering spatial detail that will play a part in future memories of the property and our time there, for 'we observe the continuance of *time in place*'

and our memory of experience is 'place-specific' (Casey 1987: 182-198). Bachelard too views the nooks of our home as offering 'clearly delineated...refuges' for our memories (Bachelard 1969: 8).

Nooks and crannies make the house something more complex than a 'decorated shed' (Venturi et al 1996), despite Countryside sales brochures promoting the product as 'interior layouts to suit a modern lifestyle but within an elevation that has all the charm and character of a much sought-after period property.' For the presence of 'nooks' bridges the potential crevasse between exterior and interior by uniting them in a plausible and desirable story. This story weakens claims that these interiors are just Modernist principles in disguise (Samuel 1994: 75), for rather than 'systematically gutting' the interiors of every trace of the past (Samuel 1994: 54), here traces are purposefully introduced. As noted, the converted period house is in vogue, and what Countryside produces is almost a pre-conversion: ready-converted spaces, saving time normally invested over centuries by a series of residents making structural changes to suit their lifestyles! (The pre-converted manor house at Great Notley is the most surreal example of this, built ready transformed into three 'townhouses' behind the grand façade!)

The nooks are not only 'scars' left by conversion processes, but in some cases intended results of it. For example, Crook explained how house-building convention inserted walls at a certain point in the attic space (often already 'converted' into a spacious bedroom in a Countryside home), leaving triangular 'wasted' spaces between walls and eaves. Space-conscious homeowners remove these today, turning that space into storage, perhaps for shoes. But in some properties, Countryside do that 'in advance.' Indeed, many nooks serve a double purpose – storage *and* trace - so that economically valuable space is not sacrificed to a mere conceit.

But such conceits may be increasingly important at a time when nationally, we are increasingly mobile, moving house more frequently, often over long distances. Most are no longer born in the same house that they live in once adult, or even the same community, whereas once we may have done so, in the process maintaining a sense of personal history that was also inextricably connected to a social one. Heidegger's ideal of the Black Forest farmhouse, designing 'for the different generations under one roof the character of their journey through time' (Heidegger 1971: 160) seems an anachronism. But this does not have to result in the existential separation of self from the idea of home, as Bachelard fears, if we can find ways to understand our 'homely' needs and desires, spatial and temporal, and to incorporate our personal narratives into spaces purposefully created to nurture them.

We must be wary however, of over-defining such spaces, and thus over-prescribing future stories with the very techniques that could stimulate them, resulting in frozen narratives, and

a fixed vision of village life. Architect Wendy Shillam sees the practice of 'nookism' as one that limits the way people inhabit their houses, restricting their use of space (see Glancey 1999). Countryside homebuyers are required to sign a ten year Good Neighbour Covenant. This requires them to vet any proposed alterations to their property with the company, ensuring that the site has a period of time to establish itself in its original form.

Countryside do not ban alterations, but insist that they are 'sympathetic to what we've created' (Gupta 2002). Gupta explains that a lot of care is put into creating that initial form in order to give people the feeling of '*inheriting* something', stimulating their sense of ownership. She explains: 'When you go back after a few years to a completed scheme it's quite interesting to see what people have done. You find that if you've landscaped open spaces and front gardens, people will put more into them and it will all look really beautiful. But you go along to a scheme where the house-builder has just put in grass in the front gardens and the odd tree, and it doesn't seem to get a lot further than that. But if you show people what you can do...'

Nevertheless, I sympathised with the resident who complained that she was not allowed to change the colour of her front door. There is a tension here to be resolved: we may no longer have the time in the day, or in one place, to create really established homes for ourselves. But, having been given a 'kick-start', one's home must be allowed to move on, and we to fully engage with it to make it ours while we are there.

4. (giving) Depth to surface

"It's not authentic...But then I don't care that much about its authenticity."

Lee, Great Notley resident

Despite referring to processes of 'fakery' involved in Countryside's work, and briefly discussing the myth of the English past that some see this as perpetuating, I have not addressed the issue of authenticity head-on. And on the 'community' front particularly, this issue must be addressed. After all, these stories, both those through time, and those through space that so offended Glancey, *are fake!* One might even stress the perils of the fake story through space more emphatically than Glancey's fears about nostalgic conservatism did, seeing the 'silent-white-majority' architecture of the story (Venturi et al 1996: 154), as dangerously limiting to our identities in a culturally diverse society (e.g. Smit 1998).

While acknowledging the validity of these concerns, I believe that the 'inauthenticity' of that olde-worlde English village story is vital. For not only is it 'fake', but it is, as far as I saw, 'fake' in the eyes of many residents too. However, this fictional story of rural life and village folk is well known, not just nationally, but internationally, often through media exports. (The 'Midsomer Murders' series for example, set in a sweet little village, is primarily filmed for export). Sri Lankan residents that I interviewed had come to England with clear ideas about, and interest in, English villages and the English countryside. And, not only do we know the story collectively, we know that others know it. Thus, we are able to share a story about the Past, and to recognise references to it in our shared environment, without sharing a past ourselves.

Most importantly, the story that we share is one that we know to be false (we may not *all* believe it to be false on the wider scale of England's history, but we certainly know it to be false in the context of that particular village), thus emptying it of much of its historical baggage, and making it 'owned', *in reality*, by nobody, and thus open to be claimed, and played with, by anybody and everyone. In that way it offers an interesting variation on the 'shared background or social meaning', 'embedded' in the landscape, that Hayden sees as the basis for civic or community identity. (Hayden 95: 9-13).

I don't believe that this shared fiction, and the other 'kick-starts' described above, are enough in themselves to make an 'instant-home' or 'instant-community.' But I did not get the impression that many of those moving into the 'villages' were expecting these. They nevertheless appreciated the effort made to help generate a 'homely' environment. Regarding individual houses, Lee said: 'They're building things that people can add to,' and regarding the

community Phil observed: 'Countryside seemed to really push the community thing, but perhaps we needed a push. But people now do it for themselves. A random bunch of people from the Home Counties...Over a short time, a strong network has formed.' Wife Emma added that all being new together had made people open to meeting each other: 'In an existing community, it can be more difficult for the incomer.'

Most people seemed pragmatic about the 'new community' rhetoric of Great Notley: some thought it worked, some not, some like Phil, a sceptic, were pleasantly surprised, but few were disappointed, for they had not bought into the myth. As Garreau explains, the way we 'do' community has changed, with geographical association increasingly replaced by networks of friends and family spread country-, or even world-, wide (Garreau 1992: 265-301). At Beaulieu Park, the current absence of amenities made people feel that there was little community, but again this did not necessarily bother them, as their lifestyles, often commuter lifestyles, perhaps didn't have time for lengthy neighbourhood interaction. Those who were disappointed, in both 'villages', tended to be the over 55s, all but one of whom had moved from a 'genuine' rural environment. Some found their new home lacking in contrast, while others were pragmatic. Without dismissing the validity of the former's sentiments, one should bear in mind that the rose-tinted glasses of age may enhance memories, and that many did not move from choice, but because they could no longer 'cope' in the old environment.

I understand this general pragmatism as an essential element of what I label the making of 'pacts' with space and time. These pacts are negotiated relationships that, through accepting the presence of a bit of 'fakery' in our lives, allow us to access something else that is vital to our well-being. By which I don't mean material goods, or even practical shelter, but a sense of being 'at home' in our environment, spatially and temporally. Manufactured emplaced narratives and traces in new-built sites are compromises that allow us a sufficient degree of rootedness and narrative connection back through time to 'exist' and thus to evolve onwards: a manufactured 'prehistory'. As Ricoeur says 'The pre-history of the story is what connects the latter to a larger whole and provides it with a backdrop...the stories must emerge from this background. In this emergence, the story guarantees man' (Ricoeur 1991: 435). Such pacts, like the 'fictions' they generate, are not necessarily articulated, or even consciously made, but they are consented to at some level of our being, and in return they offer the shape to our temporal existence that Ricoeur stresses as fundamental.

It should be remembered that not all the temporal orientation occurring on these sites in the production of a homely environment depends on compromise. As we observed, there are 'real' traces of passed time too: those established trees with their 'genuine' Age Value offer a more general, more abstract sense of time than that conveyed by the constructed narratives of the village's evolution, akin maybe to that sense of being toward death that Heidegger distinguished, and perhaps even to that flux of cosmic time that Augustine could feel but not

explain; a sense of time that perhaps is not cognitively registered, but that reinforces the orientation that the more articulateable narratives generate. The trees confirm that time *has* passed in that place, even if not in the form that the 'village' presents, and confirm the progression of time into which each moment will pass.

In highlighting these 'genuine' presences, I do not however wish to imply that these 'real' traces of the site's history are more *authentic* than the 'fake' traces, the 'fictions' of the site's temporal existence around them. They both have a role: the former reminding us of and binding us to cosmic time, and the latter giving vital narrative shape to existence. In that context, a 'true' history is not necessary, for it is the form, not the content, which we employ. As Ricoeur stresses, history and fiction are not so different: our reasons for recounting them are 'rooted in the same temporal structure' (Ricoeur 1991: 116) to which they are 'complementary responses' (Ricoeur 1991: 351). He stresses the need to break from the dichotomy of history and story – as Casey reminds us, the past is *always* 'transfigured by memory' (Casey 1987: xii) - and move toward a broader concept of 'truth' than 'true' and 'fictional' (Ricoeur 1991: 116).

The existence, and success, of these pacts, helps us to do exactly that. For in creating and accepting this built-in prehistory, we acknowledge our need for a fundamental sense of narrative, and allow ourselves to become complicit in its construction. There is an 'authentic' contract between us and our built environment of the kind proposed by Kimberley Dovey, who argues that authenticity is not a condition of things and places but of connectedness and process. Dovey, in fact, criticises neo-vernacular housing estates similar to Great Notley and Beaulieu Park precisely for that reason, seeing them as an attempt to find authenticity and replicate 'environmental meaning' through manipulation of appearances, resulting in unsatisfactory 'fakery', 'petrified and purified meaning' and ultimately, 'inauthenticity.' Such replications mask the reality of what they are, and the 'deceit', when discovered, results in general doubt about the reality of the environment, and existential disorientation (Dovey 2000: 33-41).

But his theory also works in favour of Countryside's villages, if we accept the hypothesis developed by this paper. These settlements offer the buying public (who are, mostly, not naïve reactionary purchasers of a 'lost' village past), not a nostalgia-placebo of 'synthetic surface effect', but fundamental orientation in space and time in a world of flux where orientation is increasingly tricky: '*spatio-temporal rootedness* which enriches our world with experiential depth' (Dovey 2000: 47). (*my italics*) For Dovey suggests that 'inauthentic' forms *can* be authentic in their 'evocation of shared meaning' and that 'we can genuinely appropriate the technically inauthentic' and learn to love fakery so long as we are not deceived. It may be pedantic to insist upon real stone he says, but it is not pedantic to insist upon knowing the difference. (Dovey 2000: 36-41)

I hypothesize that such 'authentic inauthenticity' is being practised at Countryside, and that 'pacts' with space and time are a fundamental element of that. Perception of these sites is, on the whole, knowing: not only do Countryside avoid claims to authenticity in publicity materials, preferring to use terms like 'emulates' or 'evokes', but, I believe, incoming residents are not looking for it, in the superficial sense of the word, in their environment. Accompanying the pragmatism about community is one about their surroundings, epitomised in this section's opening quote from Lee, or by Graham: 'The village idea generally works well. It's not a genuine olde worlde village. It's a very modern version of an old village.' Both said that their current home was their favourite one.

As Dovey stresses, authenticity is not an inherent quality of things, but grows out of our relationships with them. What the pact-mediated relationships between people and these villages ultimately offer, I maintain, is not the chance to perceive and remember something from the Past, through an inauthentic yet evocative form, but the chance to perceive and remember something about themselves and their place in the world. In this they differ from the state of complicity that Klein suggests we enter into with a hyper-real 'social imaginary', when 'the audience already senses, very consciously, that it is false, but buys it anyway; simply as the thrill of starring in the magic trick' (Klein 1992: 12). Such superficial enjoyment may without be the case in a theme park, but something more profound must be sustained in a domestic environment.

Conclusions

"As soon as I walked in it felt like home"

Luisa, GN resident

'Do today's homes hold any guarantee that *dwelling* occurs in them?' asked Heidegger in the aftermath of WW2 (Heidegger 1971: 146). The question is equally appropriate in England today. As many as four million new homes are required by 2027 (CABE 2002), the majority in the Southeast, and we need to take care that what is produced does not repeat the perceived mistakes of our last housebuilding wave. From the results of my small case-study, of predominantly middle-class, predominantly white, English, in the South East, I would reply that the homes of today that I looked at certainly did offer, if not a guarantee, at least a distinct possibility of dwelling, despite what 'surface' appearance might suggest. I would also add, that, although some may claim that dwelling as a concept is now redundant (Lyotard 1997), and it may certainly be impossible on a practical, let alone philosophical, scale for millions across the globe, it is still not only believed in, but apparently achieved, in Essex.

Countryside see their 'instant maturity' philosophy as key to creating successful home environments. In deconstructing their practices, and possible outcomes of these, I reached the same conclusion, but my investigation also led me, as I had hoped, to pose some ideas about what the homely is now in England, and possibly further afield.

A vital component of the homely that I identified was a sense of temporal and spatial orientation - of 'recognising' oneself in space, and understanding oneself in passing time - in which narrativity, particularly the 'emplaced' narratives of the environment and the relationships of our own stories and memories with these, plays a major role, and where the presence of an identifiable sense or aura of the Past seemed of far less importance than I had initially assumed. This sense of orientation appeared to be necessary, and manifested itself, both at the practical level of the individual home, and at the wider, more abstract scale of 'at homeness' in the world. In reaching this conclusion, I found myself coming close to what I was trying to avoid: the reduction of the homely to an 'essence'.

Having reflected on these conclusions, I firmly believe that although there may well be some essential psychological and bodily human needs, what must not be reduced to an essence is the manner in which we respond to these. Just as our historical context has its specificity, possibly strengthening or weakening the level of our home-need, so the manner in which we satisfy it must remain flexible. Our conditions of existence are in a shifting state: 'Globalisation has involved an incredible reorganisation of all the spaces and places through which we live

our lives' (Massey 1999: 23). We should endeavour to see those shifts away from what we know not as about increasing alienation, but about an ongoing process of negotiation between us and our environment. For example, at this point in time, when great guiding Western narratives such as 'nationhood' seem increasingly defunct, and boundaries are blurred (see Urry 1999: 312), it is possible that an *inner* sense of narrativity becomes more important. And in the absence of great collective stories, maybe personal, domestic ones matter more.

I do not see a Countryside 'village' as a prototype for the kind of homes we should be building. I can sympathise with both the aesthetic (my first value judgment: their 'look' is not to my personal taste) and social (predominantly private housing for those with big wallets and conservative leanings) concerns that people raise. (I should mention that Countryside not only experiment with more contemporary design, but also partner much estate regeneration and urban renewal. Greenwich Millennium Village is an example of both of these.) However, I *do* believe that the space and time 'pacts' that identified within the workings of 'instant maturity' offer a useful prototype or formula. It is not what the village is that intrigues me, but what the village does.

I therefore think it is a shame that Countryside appear reluctant, just like Leon Krier at Poundbury, to play around with the significance of a presence of passed time (rather than the nostalgic Past) a little more. Although some residents told me that not only would they be interested in living in a contemporary looking home, but would not see one as out of place in Great Notley, maybe on the village green, Chris Crook said that 'for various reasons' Countryside would not consider introducing some residential properties of more recent, even modernist, design to the mix. It would be interesting to see, in the context of a 'planned urban extension', how the spatial tactics of instant maturity might be employed without the traditional surface forms. Could homes of modern conception still be endowed with that feeling of passed time? What would a pre-conversion of a more contemporary looking property look or feel like, for example? It will also be interesting to see how the current urban extensions develop over time. Will Countryside's stress on quality materials mean that in twenty or thirty years, Great Notley and Beaulieu Park might somehow catch up (or down?) with themselves, with the result that to, the untrained eye, they become barely distinguishable from that which they set out to evoke?

Having started off as an essay about our relationship to the Past, exploring tensions of history, memory and fantasy, it seems almost inevitable that this paper ended up debating authenticity. Reading the practices of 'instant maturity' through Ricoeur and Dovey, I have come to the conclusion that authenticity is as evolving and shifting as our identities. As Dovey says, labelling one form, particularly surface form, as more 'authentic' than another seems pointless, if there is no consideration about the relationships, bodily and mental, that we actually establish with the artefacts we are judging, and the 'authenticity' that emerges from,

or is quashed by this. Authenticity is like a 'sense of place': it is not immanent in things, but is read or felt into them by us. In a highly visual society, perhaps emphasis on appearance is inevitable. But while one should not entirely dismiss the visual, it is a mistake to rely on it as a judge of authenticity.

'Our decrying of the inauthenticity of places and things is all too often a pedantic effort to lend our lives a surface of authenticity while a deeper disconnectedness from the places which we inhabit remains unchallenged' says Dovey (Dovey 2000: 48). In a world where we, our identities, and our homes are more mobile, it seems likely that we will need to acquire a more flexible approach to the authentic – both what it is and how we locate it. John Urry theorises a 'citizenship of flow', which will require a balance of 'determining the local' and yet being open to 'new ways of conceiving self and identity' (Urry 1999: 319).

Perhaps we will increasingly need to develop some kind of transferable nesting or home-making skills, even a transferable rootedness, that will help us, along with a more fluid concept of authenticity, incorporate ourselves, when necessary, into manufactured temporal narratives, like those offered by built-in nooks and crannies. We may be increasingly un-rooted in space, but we don't have to be in time (not in the sense of the time-zones we impose upon the world, but in terms of a sense of temporality). By understanding the contribution of time and narrative to the practice of making a home, we can compromise when appropriate, as 'genuine' emplaced narratives may also be harder to come by in an increasingly rapidly changing world.

What I am proposing is a concept of authenticity understood through the shape of time, rather than through the look of surface space. And a practice of considering the temporal qualities of a potential domestic space, alongside what can be seen.

Daisy Froud

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