Culture and Neighborhood Change

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And most importantly my family and the past and present people of the neighborhood.
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**Introduction to the Project**

Please consider for a moment the environment in which you grew up.

What were the people like?
Did they share a certain commonality such as race or religion?
Did you have much interaction with them?

What were the boundaries?
Were these boundaries physical or social?

Was there a center of the neighborhood? A focus? A landmark?

It was questions such as these that lead me to realize that neighborhoods are an integral part of our culture. They shape the way we feel about our environment for the rest of our lives, and it is for this reason I chose the study of a neighborhood and its changes over the years for the focus my thesis.

I believe people no longer feel a connection with the land because of a loss of heritage involving a particular place, and one result is urban decline. Landscape architects may play a prominent role in reversing urban decline through the creation of parks, plazas, and greenways; but there is a second, deeper connection between the practice of landscape architecture and urban renewal, and that is in neighborhood design. Neighborhoods can express many facets of the history of the urban landscape and how people both create and react to changing environments. This project studied a neighborhood and its decline, but the approach will had a dual focus. First a study was made of how attitudes toward neighborhoods have changed over the past forty years. This took the form of a cultural analysis of the past and present conditions of the area. After a background was presented, the study then turned its focus to a park design that would be oriented to revitalizing community space for a two block area in the center of the neighborhood.
PROBLEM STATEMENT

Many examples of poor urban design can be attributed to a lack of sensitivity among designers toward the needs of people. For this reason, I have decided to design a neighborhood park for my final project in hopes of being able to encompass the understanding of social values.

OUTLINE OF PROJECT

goals and objectives
1. To demonstrate how culture relates to neighborhood change by assessing and comparing the changes in a neighborhood.
2. To develop a background study of influences that have created modern perceptions of the neighborhood being studied by outlining terms used to describe cultures and applying them to a description of the site.
3. To demonstrate how an analysis of change in an area over time can bring about a better contemporary design.
4. To refine a landscape philosophy as it relates to living in the urban environment.

process
1. Conducted a case study of a neighborhood in Detroit, Michigan by:
   A. compiling old photos and data.
   B. questioning contacts such as past residents, current residents, architects, and landscape architects about current perceptions an activities in the neighborhood.
   C. studying demographics through census tracts.
   D. preparing drawings showing changes in the neighborhood over the years, a time-line analysis.
2. Created a site specific design that will express certain lessons I have learned from my studies.
assumptions

1. I won't have to explore in great depth the economic realities of the site. By this I mean I won't get involved with complex economic statistics, but instead I will consider economics in a contextual sense.
2. The site I have chosen will be available and economically feasible for development.
3. The response I get from residents will be representative of the whole community as I am unable to get responses from the majority of residents given my time constraints.
4. The neighborhood condition is currently improving.
   - The Grayhaven project has been successful.
   - The riverfront development projects are successful.
   - The church has been reopened for alternative uses.
The Site, Past and Present

There is a small neighborhood on the east side of Detroit in which I have a very strong interest. My parents grew up across the street from each other in this neighborhood, and consequently the lifestyle of that one small area has affected my family for two generations. This neighborhood is bordered by the Detroit River to the south; a large thoroughfare, Jefferson Avenue, to the north; and canals to the east and west. It was originally planned as luxury residential area along the river, but the Depression halted such development. Then in the late thirties and early forties, the neighborhood was created as middle class homes. The neighborhood, after experiencing a long history, change, and decline is now fragmented. Most of the decline began to take place in the late sixties and was followed by urban renewal in the form of demolition in the seventies. However, there have been recent attempts at revitalization that have not yet proven to be failures or successes. Because this site has many unique physical characteristics and history full of change as well as a personal heritage for me, this is the area I chose as the focus of this project.

After developing a strong understanding of the past changes in this neighborhood, I made assumptions about the current attempts of revitalization and chose a specific site that I believe can respond to new projects in the area and still represent the old qualities of the neighborhood. This site is comprised of two small blocks in the center of the neighborhood. One of these blocks was once the site of a Catholic church, school, nunnery, and rectory. Now, only the church and rectory remain. The school was closed due to a lack of enrollment and was eventually demolished along with the nunnery. Across the street from this block is a city park made up of a playground, two tennis courts, and a playfield. I also chose a supportive site of three blocks of vacant land to the north of the church and playground. For the site of the church and playground, I designed a park that would reestablish interest and a sense of community in the area. For the three blocks to the north, I designed a planning proposal that would support the viability of the park.
Before attempting this design, I chose to study the current condition of the entire area and the influences that created this condition.

First, I looked at the demographics. The statistics taken from the 1980 census indicated that generally the area was still occupied by families with young children. However, the primary finding was the number of people who were unemployed was much higher in the northern portion of neighborhood. After questioning past residents, I learned that for approximately forty years the area above Essex Avenue had been a lower income area and a declining neighborhood. I believe there are two reasons for this. The first is that this portion of the neighborhood is bounded by a major commercial strip, Jefferson Avenue, to the north. As people moved to the suburbs and chose to shop away from home, the area became more depressed and there was subsequent neighborhood decline to the south. Second, this portion of the neighborhood is in closer proximity to the industrial area to the west, and many of the factory workers have lived in this area for years. Presently, this is an issue because the industrial area contains a Chrysler plant which is scheduled to close this year for two years of renovation, putting many people out of work.

In contrast, there is a wealthy suburb, Grosse Pointe, to the east of the neighborhood. I believe the southern half of the neighborhood has been able to remain in good condition due to its proximity to the suburbs and the fact that it is bordered by water on two other sides.
Within the neighborhood and close to my primary site of design exist several other influences. The most significant is Grayhaven, a new development consisting of lower/middle to middle income apartments and condominiums. This area was first developed in the late twenties, but the Depression halted the project. The intention of the current development is to bring people back into the city. This project is in its final stages now, so it is difficult to tell how successful it will be. Thus, I have made the assumption, for this project, that Grayhaven and the other projects planned for the area adjacent to the neighborhood have been successful.

The last two influences on my primary site are an elementary school and the old Fischer mansion, originally the home of the creators of Fischer Auto Body and now the owned by the Hari Krishna religious group. Both of these are next to Grayhaven and my site. I believe the elementary school is an important consideration because it is a familiar and important site to many people in the neighborhood. The same is true of the Hari Krishna home, but fewer people are likely to be involved with that area. However, the Hari Krishna home does have a distinguished architectural style and may be a neighborhood landmark given its unique character.

The above inventory and analysis describes current conditions of the neighborhood. The next step, in the research, was to go further by questioning past residents and assessing both physical and cultural changes in the neighborhood over the past forty years.
TIME-LINE

The following is a time line of the neighborhood as I perceive it from interviews of my family members.

The Twenties--It was during this time that my family first moved to the area. It was a prosperous middle class area with much open land just out of the downtown. There was a large amount of upper middle class development going on in nearby areas. One such project was the Grayhaven development.

1925-Patrick Hoban, my great-grandfather, his wife and children, moved to the neighborhood on Algonquin Avenue.
1928-The Hobans moved a few streets over to Lenox, a substantial move up for them.
1929-The Depression hit and Grayhaven development stopped.

The Thirties and Forties--This is when most of the infill of middle class homes took place, although development was periodic in relation to the Depression and World War II.

1934-First class graduated from St. Martin's, the neighborhood Catholic school. This class included my grandfather.

The Fifties--This decade was a pleasant time in the neighborhood. There was much community interaction and the neighborhood was well kept and safe.

1956-James Hoban, my grandfather, his wife and children moved to the Riverside neighborhood, buying a house one street east of his parents' house.
1958-William Pasquinelli, my mother's father, bought a house directly across the street from the Hobans.

The Sixties--Following trends that were encompassing the nation, Detroit suffered unrest. Blight and racial tensions increased.

1967-Race riots broke out on 12th Street in downtown Detroit.
1968-The Pasquinellis moved to the northern suburb of Grosse Pointe, fearing the change in their neighborhood.
1969-The decision was made to close the school, causing many families to move.
The Seventies--The seventies were a time of much change in the neighborhood. "White flight" had taken place; federal housing programs were implemented and failed. The final result was the demolition of many blocks of old dilapidated homes in the area.

1970-St. Martin's school was closed due to low enrollment.
1971-The Hobans also moved to Grosse Pointe due to neighborhood change.

The Eighties--The decline of the seventies continued for the first part of this decade, but toward the end with the initiation of new projects all along the riverfront there was new hope for improvement.

1986-St. Martin's school was demolished.
1988-Greyhaven project was restarted as lower middle class housing
1989-St. Martin's Catholic church was "mothballed", meaning it was closed but not up for demolition because there is hope in the archdiocese that new development will bring new members.

The Ninties--It is at this point in time that my project goes beyond the existing conditions and proposes changes for the future. This will be discussed in more detail in the design.
COMMENTARIES

The following are two commentaries from former residents describing the lifestyle of the neighborhood. The first is from Cynthia P. McCown, the author's mother. Mrs. McCown moved into the neighborhood being studied in 1956 with her parents and left in 1965. Mrs. McCown wrote the follow essay describing her images of where she grew up in the fall of 1989 specifically for background to this study.

My first memory of the neighborhood in which my family lived from the mid fifties to the late sixties is of the public playground directly in front of the church-school complex owned by St. Martin's Parish. My mother drove into town from the new, blue-collar suburb where my parents had purchased their first home a few years earlier to look at a home in this older neighborhood where homes were first built in the 1920's. As I recall, before meeting the realtor she left me and my two younger brothers at that playground to amuse ourselves while she viewed the home at 242 Riverside Drive. Certainly this is a comment not only on the neighborhood, but on the times, when a young mother could confidently leave a third grader, a first grader, and a pre-schooler alone in a public place for an entire half hour.

The playground itself comprised an entire block. It was divided into four quadrants. Swings and slides and the usual playground equipment were in one corner; tennis courts were in another; two baseball diamonds occupied the other side of the grounds. There was some sort of brick building, perhaps an equipment shed, in the baseball area, and the perimeter was enclosed by a high chain link fence. This playground was to become a focal point for years to come. Though not officially part of the school complex, it seemed to 'belong' to the school. Kids gathered there before and after school, the boys played their Little League games there, various city summer programs took place there (primarily the kind where some post-teen with a coach's whistle taught kids to braid long plastic laces into tassels for bike handle bars), and in the early years, at least, it seemed to us a fully adequate recreation area.

Of course, we played on the block most of the time. The parish itself probably consisted of twenty blocks around the church. Our immediate neighborhood was the two blocks extending from the church and the school buildings to the lake, that is, Lake St. Claire. As I've said, homes were first built there in the twenties:
certainly the "Fischer Mansion," a white stucco affair a block to the south and east of the church, was built earlier. But it seems to me that homes had continued to be built in that area on into the forties. On our block, along with homes like my family's, red brick and in a style I can only call twenties-deco, were several brick colonials, some smaller brick bungalows, and a few newer ranches. These blocks immediately surrounding the church were probably the "best" blocks. Beyond the church, toward Jefferson Avenue to the west, were rentals, frame flats and small, old apartment buildings. I knew kids who lived there; my friend Beatrice, whose parents had immigrated from Belgium, lived there. To the north, before one crossed a canal into Grosse Pointe Park, the neighborhood got seedier, as well. That was where the public school was, and, as I remember it in those early years, only two children on our block walked, or were driven, the eight blocks to the public school. The rest of us went to the parish grade school.

We walked to school, of course, and walked home for lunch. We walked to the small block of shops on Essex Avenue, a street that ran perpendicular to the church block and a block or two toward the west. As young children, we only went up to Essex on errand for our mothers. A can of soup or some ground beef at the "Mom'n'Pop Grocery", some band-aids at the drug store, perhaps a loaf of hard-crust bread at the bakery—we would walk on past the playground and the church and over to Essex to purchase items forgotten on the last trip to the A&P. There was a "sweet shop" on the corner, the proprietor had a soda fountain, a counter of penny candy, some cheap toys. When I was young, I was allowed to stop in and buy a treat as a reward for going to the store for my mom. Later, too many big boys hung out there; I don't remember ever actually sitting at the fountain, but perhaps I did. It seems my brother went there more than I, and it was there we were first introduced to crime in the big city. My brother had borrowed my big second-hand balloon-tired bike, and it was stolen as it was parked in front of the sweet shop.

This was all before I was in sixth or seventh grade--mid to late fifties. In that time, along with the playground and the shops, another special place was the park. Lakewood Park, I think it was called, at it was a broad, barely-treed area on Lake St. Clair. A canal was its northern boundary, and the river edge was breakfronted with large broken cement blocks. There were swings and slides near the parking lot and a brick restroom building. To the south was some sort of home of
school for --what?--retarded children? It was a mysterious place, and we never ventured toward its fences. We often went to the park, which was about four of five blocks from our home. I went there especially to sit and watch the freighters and think. My mother accompanied us many times when we were quite young, and tried to keep up the practice even when we were older. I remember on Saturday morning when I was into my teens, she tried to engineer a breakfast cook out with the whole family; it was pretty unsuccessful. We did all love that park, though. And of course as we got into high school it was a great stopping off place on warm spring evenings after school dances.

During the grade school years, the playground, but more importantly the church-school complex, the street of shops, and the park formed the boundaries of the neighborhood for us. As we got older, we ventured farther. I am sure I walked to the public library past Jefferson Avenue on the corner of Lenox and Kercheval at about the age of eleven or twelve. It was a big gothic structure and I visited it weekly. I had to pass through some rather unpleasant areas to get there--the same type of rental area as between the school and Jefferson, only probably a bit more run down. I remember one afternoon witnessing an altercation between two younger kids, both boys, both white; the epithet hurled by one at the other was "nigger." I remember feeling the ridiculous racism at work there.

In to high school, our activities expanded even more afield. Farther up on Essex was another shopping area. There was a cleaners, then in the next block another grocery, and further up a drugstore with a fountain. In high school my friends and I would walk to the drugstore for a coke after school, and now, when sent to the store, we could go for the larger selection at the larger grocery. A friend in high school worked after school at the cleaners; she was under age, so perhaps the establishment was owned or run by a relative.

One year I worked at the dime store on Jefferson Avenue and Lakewood; by now, the string of chain stores on Jefferson provided a mall-type shopping outlet for teenage tastes. There were two dime stores (the other being in the less desirable area several blocks south), a couple of shoe stores, a move theatre ( across the street), a Saunders candy shop--far more sophisticated fare offered there than at the local drugstore--and at least two junior clothing shops. There was also a pizza place, where we went after games.
I believe occasionally we'd walk beyond Jefferson to the next major business street--I'm calling it Kercheval, but I may be wrong--to check out the stores there, but quite soon we'd all discovered the pleasures of "The Village," a prestigious shopping area in Grosse Pointe. These were the days when Jake's had good sales and the Kay Baum on the corner was a teen dream. I guess a parent drove us, or after we got licenses we drove ourselves.

Finally, there was downtown: get the bus at Korte and Lakewood, transfer on Jefferson and get off in front of Crowly's. Shop Hudson's, the tallest-in-the-world department store (I worked there, too, my first year of college), or any one of the blocks and blocks of bustling Wood ward. When I think back on how lively and crowded downtown was, especially at Christmas, I realize the only other experience I've had that resembled it was walking, or rushing, the streets of the city centre, Glasgow.

That, then was the neighborhood: a little triangle of parish life that expanded as the neighborhood kids grew older. A pleasant world in small, serving every need until needs got bigger, the "growing," offering more. I've left out, for the most part, the close connection with Grosse Pointe: we swam at the park in summer, thanks to my great aunt's rare enough allowance of passes. We skated freely in the winter there. We collected for Unicef on Halloween and carolled at Christmas beyond the bridge. My best friend in the later high school years lived in the Pointe: the east side was the poor-but-dignified relation.

I wish there was some distinguishing name for our neighborhood: calling it the east side puts it in too general and too large a context; once, as a kid, I called it East Detroit. My mother immediately corrected me: East Detroit is not a nice place to live; our neighborhood, south of windmill Pointe, St. Martin's On-the-Lake Parish, was.
The second commentary was written by Cynthia McCown's mother, Lenore Pasquinelli. The following portions provide the attitudes of adults in the neighborhood in the 1950's and 60's. It was also written in the fall of 1989 for background for this study.

In 1956 we walked into a beautiful three and a half bedroom home, a colonial which had painted dining room wall paper and crystal chandelier made us fall in love with it immediately...The house was built in 1937 and won an architectural award.

Since the school of our choice was only two blocks away and went through twelfth grade, we expected to be there for at least twice as long as we were.

We soon discovered that the neighborhood, which was bordered by the river and boasted many tree lined streets with large beautiful homes, was populated by many young people like ourselves with growing families. The church and school couples was the unifying factor. The young fathers had a dynamic and vibrant Dad's Club that put on social affairs and the mothers had a society that conducted many exciting events. The men and women who came together through these groups became good friends and our personal social life stemmed from meeting these people.

There was a little independent grocer store, drug store, and cleaners which was a nice walk with the baby buggy. It was especially well located because it was close enough for one of the children to run up for a need item.

There was also a large park on the water which we frequently enjoyed.

Perhaps we were shortsighted when we bought the house, but as things changed-the surrounding area deteriorating-it got to the point that we could not let the children walk to the store alone for fear of attack or robbery, and there were many incidents of adults being robbed and accosted as they went to the bank or the hardware store on the main street.

I really hate to talk about the race riots in 1967. It was so heartbreaking-and although the problem was a few miles away-we could hear the gunfire as we sat on the front porch in terror.

We were lucky to sell the house to a very nice childless couple who has kept the property in excellent condition until this day.

We left in November of 1968.
Culture and Neighborhoods

To this point, I have spoken only briefly of culture in relation to neighborhoods. As part of my process, I did the following study of culture and how it can be assessed.

"Culture" is a very broad and often misused term. "Culture", as defined by Funk and Wagnalls Encyclopedia, is the "sum total of all contributions of a group of people, in a designated area, within a given time. It represents more specifically, the aesthetic or intellectual achievement or appreciation of an individual or a society, and also the life-style of a society as passed on from generation to generation". I believe this definition is extremely applicable to neighborhoods because it describes how a group of people live and interact in a certain place and time. To examine the culture of the area in which I have been studying neighborhood change of the past forty years, I used a list of elements culture compiled by Steven Ott, a cultural anthropologist specializing in the culture of organizations. I used Ott's list to focus my study. The following is an abbreviated list of terms he feeling are important to relate to culture.

- anecdotes
- art
- assumptions
- attitudes
- behavioral regularities
- beliefs
- celebration
- ceremonies
- cognitive process
- communication patterns
- consensus, level of
- customs
- doing things, way of
- enactment
- ethics
- ethos
- expectations
- feelings
- habits
- heres
- historical vestiges
- identity
- ideologies
- interaction, patterns of
- jargon
- justification for behavioral patterns
- knowledge
- language
- management practices
- manner
- material objects
- meanings
- mind-set
- myths
- norms
- philosophy
- physical arrangements
- purpose
- rites
- ritualized practices
- roots
- rules
- sentiments
- source of culture
- spirit
- stories
- style
- symbols
- thinking, way of
- tradition
- translation of myths
- understandings
- values
- vision
- world views
Since my topic is different from that of Ott's, only a few of these terms were needed as guides. Thus, I edited and arranged Ott's list in the following manner to make it applicable to this study.

- Culture
  - Values
  - *terms oriented to the people in the area of this study:*
    - behavioral regularities/ways of doing things
    - justification of behavioral patterns
    - beliefs/mind-set/ways of thinking
    - assumptions
    - attitudes
    - expectations
  - *terms oriented to the physical characteristics of the site:*
    - identity
    - symbols
    - myths
  - *terms encompassing the above, concluding terms:*
    - norms
    - worldviews

My next step was to define each of these terms at they relate to my site:

**Behavioral regularities/ways of doing things:** These terms simply mean the way people live in a neighborhood. Do they talk to their neighbors? Do they drive places often? Do they walk places (to stores, parks, etc.)? Do they work in their yards? How do they live?

**Justification of behavioral patterns:** This is obviously the reason for behaviors mentioned above. Do people fear their neighbors? Do they like to drive? Do they dislike walking? Do they feel comfortable going places in their neighborhood? How do they feel about the place they live?

**Beliefs/mind-set/ways of thinking:** These are a breakdown of how people view their world around them and their condition. Do they feel trapped in their neighborhood? Do they feel limited in their jobs?

**Assumptions:** This means assumptions made about the neighborhood condition and change. Do the people feel the neighborhood is declining or improving? Do they make assumptions about other people in the neighborhood because of a difference in background?

**Attitudes:** This includes how people view such things as social status, politics, current issues. Do they feel concerned about neighborhood issues? Do they get involved in groups to make a difference?
**Expectations**—This includes both expectations of neighborhood change and personal change for the people of the neighborhood. Do they expect to stay in the area? Do they expect the area to change?

**Identity**—This personifies the neighborhood. City history, neighborhood history, racial and religious groups, family structure, and physical character are a variety of things that create identity.

**Symbols**—This is the most directly related to the site design. It includes the implications of things on the site such as the playground, the church, the altered mansions, and the presence of the river. It should be noted that symbols change meaning as conditions change. For example, the church is no longer a symbol of religion and community to the people of the neighborhood because the people who supported that church have left the area. Yet, the church may still be considered a symbol of the area simply because of its large size and central location in the neighborhood.

**Myth**—This also is incorporated into the design by playing on things like the city history. For instance, the automobile industry and the changes in the neighborhood such as the absence of the old shops, school, and nunnery can all be incorporated into the design to tell people of the history of the neighborhood.

**Norms**—This encompasses all the conditions and situations that the people of the neighborhood consider standard. It could be standard social behaviors or standard physical conditions. For example, the overgrown state of the playground and surrounding area could be considered not unusual or bad by the people of the neighborhood if that is what they are accustomed to.

**Worldviews**—This summarizes some of the other terms by indicating how the people of the neighborhood perceive themselves and their neighborhood relating to the rest of the city, state, or even country.

I used the above terms and the brief descriptions that I created for them primarily as a source of inspiration or "brainstorming" for my design. I realize that I cannot accurately assess the present culture of this neighborhood because I am not involved with the community there. I also realize that feelings of the people in this area may vary greatly and be influenced by many conditions that I, given the scope of this project, was not able to explore. However, I hope the above outline has helped me communicate the direction I pursued with my design.
The Design

After closely examining the neighborhood's past and present conditions in relation to culture, I began my design for the small two block site. My main goal was to create a design that would evoke enough enthusiasm to reestablish neighborhood pride. I felt I could accomplish this by using historical reference, to describe culture in general, and by responding to current needs, to address the current neighborhood culture.

Once again, this site is comprised of two small blocks in the center of the neighborhood. One of these blocks was once the site of a Catholic church, school, nunnery, and rectory. Now, only the church and rectory remain. The school was closed due to a lack of enrollment and was eventually demolished along with the nunnery. Across the street from this block is a city park made up of a playground, two tennis courts, and a playfield.

Currently The site is barren and overgrown. To the north are three blocks of vacant land where houses and shops once stood.
I first looked at the impact that a design for these two block might create in the area. After meeting with Detroit architects: Schervish, Vogel, Merz, I was more aware of the details of the riverfront development happening next to the neighborhood. I created a study of how the newly proposed circulation pattern and landuses for adjacent areas could carry over into the area I was studying and positively influence the development of my site. Since the area I studied is located at the border of the city and the suburbs, I felt changes in this area could make a significant difference. For example, Jefferson avenue is a major transportation corridor from the city to the suburbs. I feel this left the neighborhood I've studied as forgotten land between this major road and the river. Thus, I hoped to link my site into a larger planning scheme creating more interest in the area. First, I planned to reroute traffic and bring more people into the area as well as making circulation easier for the people within the neighborhood. This circulation plan incorporates walking and biking trails which are important because they allow people to bike or walk through the neighborhood to the park I designed and on to the existing city parks along the riverfront.
I then returned to my initial site analysis and contrasted it with an analysis of what future conditions might be. As I mentioned, the neighborhood is currently fragmented. I saw opportunities such as the linkage of all the riverfront parks and the revitalization of Jefferson Avenue all the way from the city center to Grosse Pointe. By creating a design in the center of the neighborhood, I hoped this would also pull the area together. This laid the framework for a timeline concept for my project. I hoped to create a design that I would be able to be forecasted into the future to measure its success.
I began my conceptual design by doing a time line analysis of the physical changes of the neighborhood. After doing this I could see the changing amount of open space primarily due to demolition. It was this exercise that influenced me to incorporate the northern three blocks of vacant land to strengthen the viability of my design. Thus, I proposed to first reopen the street that ran through these three blocks and then clean up the lots and reline the streets with trees making this area into temporary park space to link the site to the existing riverfront parks. After the creation of a park on the two block site of the church and playground and after the neighborhood became more vital through existing projects such as the Grayhaven housing development, the three adjacent blocks of vacant land could be redeveloped into housing.
My main vehicle for studying culture as it exists and also adding cultural commentary was the playground. I chose to focus on the playground because the way we structure life for our children is a prime example of assimilation of someone into a certain culture. For instance, the simple fact that we have playgrounds indicates a cultural concern for positive environment in which children can develop. Even things such as our schooling system, recesses, and summer vacations reinforce a cultural concern for play. The first playgrounds in America were created by philanthropic organizations in the 1880s and 1890s in order to get children out of the streets (Eriksen 1985). Thus, I proposed for my design that Detroit's large automotive companies support the development of this community park. This carried through in my detail design, but first I'd like to step back and look at some of the other potentials the site held.

I proposed that the closed Catholic church on the site be transformed into a library. The placement library on this site could also meet some other interesting needs. For example, it could be affiliated with the existing elementary school, feature a special focus on neighborhood and city history, and provide space for community meetings.

In the area adjacent to the library I create a quite park for reading. I used the former foundation outlines of the church and nunnery that once stood on the site as retaining walls and seating, and placed a focal point in the area between these two past structures. This whole area next to the church would also provided paths for circulation from Grayhaven and the Hare Krishna Mansion, which houses a restaurant, to the playground and library.

On the block which is comprised mainly of the playground, I placed a convenience store. I felt would meet the needs of the people and also add more life to the park. Presently the nearest shops are on Jefferson Avenue. At one time, there were several shops on Essex Avenue, as noted in the commentaries, but these were abandoned and demolished. Now with the new influx of people with the Grayhaven project, I believe a convenience store could do quite well. Also, it would encourage people to walk rather than drive to the store, possibly creating more positive interaction.
I was then left with the challenge of creating a playground that expressed the history of the city. Since, I had proposed that this playground would be funded in part by donations from the automotive industry, I made cars the focal points. I suggested that each company donate an older model car that could be modified to become safe play equipment. I also suggested that in light of the nearby Chrysler plant's plan to renovation that more interesting pieces of that factory's equipment could be made into unusual play equipment. Then, I designed a children's scaled main-street which would be lined with small, wooden facades of various representations of architecture of this century. Along the sidewalks of this main-street would be ingraved a timeline of city events, and all the child sized street furniture would have historical reference.

The new playground makes up most of the design, but I also planned to keep the existing playground equipment so not to erase any element of neighborhood history. I also planned to keep the existing tennis courts for a more adult form of recreation to the playground area.

The new playground, the library, the convenience store, and the existing tennis courts and the old play equipment all came together to formulate my design for these two blocks. The finished product comprises the following pages.
Conclusions

I have now presented the process and products of my thesis project. Often people creating such projects find a topic of interest and then a site, but because of my interest in this particular area I did the opposite. I feel very fortunate that I found a site created so much interest for me since it was part of my family heritage. However, my main regret is that given my time frame and resources I was not able to become more involved with the people who presently live in this neighborhood. Still, I feel through this design process I have touched on many interesting aspects of both cultural anthropology and neighborhood planning and how they can be applied to landscape architecture. I hope these interests can lead me to other projects where I will be able to become more involved with community participation in design.

I am not proposing that the design I created can meet all the needs of the people and instantly revitalize this area. Instead, I have presented another way to view the design process which is to look at the cultural implications a design may have. Cultural and neighborhood changes are on going natural processes, but I believe a design with a focus on cultural needs such as mine could bridge some of the gaps left by our fast moving culture in our neighborhood structure.
APPENDIX

As part of my research process I prepared the following letter and questionnaire for the people who presently live in my parents' old houses in the neighborhood that I was studying. I received a response from one home.

Amanda T. Hoban
1900 N. Rosewood Avenue
Muncie, Indiana 47304

243 Riverside Dr.
Detroit, Michigan 48215

Dear Residents,

Please allow me to introduce myself and explain the purpose of my letter. I am studying landscape architecture at Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, where I am currently engaged in a research project which focuses on city neighborhoods. It so happens that my family used to live in your home from 1956 to 1971. Thus, there was a natural interest to study how my family's former neighborhood has changed over the past fifty years. I wish to survey a few families to gain greater insight on these changes. Naturally, the fact that you are living in a home connected to my family prompted me to seek your comments.

I will be very grateful if you could take a few moments to complete the enclosed questionnaire. Please return it in the self-addresses, stamped envelope at your earliest convenience. Your answers will help me in my research. I will keep you abreast of any proposals which I may make regarding the Riverside area. Thank you for taking the time to assist me with my research.

Sincerely,

Amanda T. Hoban

2. How long do you plan to remain in this neighborhood? I do not have any intentions of moving at this time.

3. If you plan to move, why are you moving? "I am a senior citizen and disabled."

4. Please draw on this map what you consider to be the boundaries, or edges, of your neighborhood.

East to Alter
West to St. Jean - 15th
South to Del River
North?

5. Do you feel secure (safe) in your neighborhood? yes (X)

6. Do you walk to places in your neighborhood? yes (X) due to arthritis I cannot walk too far. Children are grown.

7. If you marked "yes", a) how often?
   b) approximately what average distance do you walk?
   c) what places do you go? to park in the river, park in Lakewood, visit family and friends or relatives

8. Do you go to any outdoor recreation areas? yes The park by the river? yes, Belle Isle? yes The playground by the church? occasionally

Thank you once again for your time.

Our names are

Worthy -

Vera M.

Janet E.
References


PERSONAL CONTACTS


SUPPLEMENTARY BIBLIOGRAPHY


