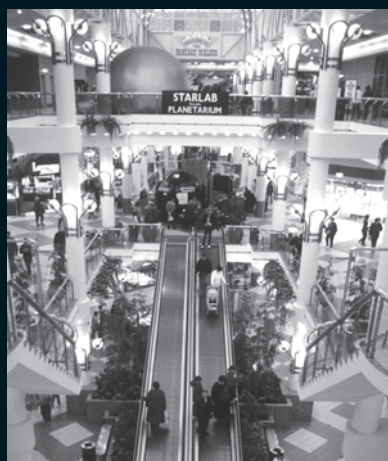


Kim Dovey

Framing Places Second Edition

Mediating power in built form



Architect

Framing Places

Second Edition

Framing Places is an account of the nexus between place and power, investigating how the built forms of architecture and urban design act as mediators of social practices of power. Explored through a range of theories and case studies, this account shows how our lives are 'framed' within the clusters of rooms, buildings, streets and cities we inhabit. These silent framings of everyday life also mediate practices of coercion, seduction and authorization as architects and urban designers engage with the articulation of dreams, imagining and constructing a 'better' future in someone's interest.

This second edition is thoroughly revised with one new chapter. Updates include a look at the recent Grollo Tower development in Melbourne and a critique on Euralille, a new quarter development in Northern France. The book draws from a broad range of methodology, including the analysis of spatial structure, discourse analysis and phenomenology. These approaches are woven together through a series of narratives on specific cities (Berlin, Beijing, Bangkok) and global building types (the corporate tower, shopping mall, domestic house and enclave).

Kim Dovey is Professor of Architecture and Urban Design at the University of Melbourne. He has published and broadcast widely on issues of place and ideology including the book *Fluid City* (Routledge 2005).

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Preface

I have long been fascinated by the meanings and mysteries of places – rooms, buildings, streets and cities; typical and exceptional; wonderful and awful. This book is driven by a belief in the potency of places to touch our lives – in the best and the worst of ways. Such an interest does not fit neatly into the discipline of architecture, which is my background, nor of urban design, urban planning or landscape architecture. Instead it entails a slippage between categories, a crossing of boundaries as regularly as we do in everyday life. I write from a context of teaching architecture and urban design in a university and therefore with a view to the task of designing places. It has always seemed to me that this task is, in a small way, to literally ‘change the world’. But whose interests prevail in this practice of ‘changing the world’? What do justice, democracy or liberation mean with regard to built form? What does ‘change’ mean in a world that is transforming in a bewildering range of ways that often seem both destructive and inevitable? The task of changing the world requires more than a capacity to climb on, or submit to, the Juggernaut.

Architecture and urban design are the most contradictory of practices – torn between a radically optimistic belief in the creation of the new, and a conservative acceptance of the prevailing order. Architects and urban designers engage with the articulation of dreams – imagining and constructing a ‘better’ future in someone’s interest. This optimistic sense of creative innovation largely defines the design professions which are all identified with constant change. Yet architecture is also the most conservative of practices. This conservatism stems from the fundamental inertia of built form as it ‘fixes’ and ‘stabilizes’ the world – space is deployed to stabilize time. It is this antinomial quality – coupling imaginative innovation with a stabilizing conservatism – that makes the interpretation of place so interesting yet problematic.

This book also arises from a certain tension between academic and public discourse. Social theory has turned its attention towards spatial issues in a major way since the 1980s and scholars such as Foucault, Derrida, Eagleton, Giddens, Lefebvre, Habermas, Bourdieu and Harvey are widely cited in architectural discourse. Yet these theorists rarely write about the specifics of built form and the ways in which their work is applied to design practice, and public debate is

generally superficial. Theory can be used as a form of insulation from the world as easily as a tool of engagement. How does such theory help us to engage in the invention of the future? How does one articulate the 'public interest' or decode the meaning of the latest grand project for a public audience? What, if anything, is wrong with another shopping mall, suburban enclave, theme park or corporate tower? The bridge between theory and built forms, between academic dialect and public debate, is crucial to the task of changing the world.

I shall focus primarily on issues of coercion, seduction and authority in built form, addressing only indirectly issues of empowerment and liberation. This negative focus, however, is not an exercise in pessimism. It is infused with an optimistic desire to see the potency and exhilaration of place experience deployed in the public interest. The impulse towards such a role for architecture and urban design is quite rightly strong among design students. Many of the movements and 'isms' of design can be seen in light of the attempt to bypass or resist the appropriations of the market and political power. 'Rationalism', 'archetypalism', 'critical regionalism', 'community design', deconstruction and the various retreats into 'gallery architecture' or cyberspace can all be so construed. As will become apparent, I reserve both respect and scepticism for most of these movements. However, I have a primary aim to disturb any illusion of autonomy from the mediations of power. The world of architecture and urban design is saturated with struggles over the meaning and use of places. I suggest there is no way around such issues, only ways into them. As human interests are more clearly articulated so are the possibilities for new forms of design and discourse. What follows is a critique born of the desire to clear a space for the realization of dreams; and for a more rigorous debate over whose dreams get realized.

PREFACE TO THE 2ND EDITION

This is a book about the ways in which place stabilizes power, yet my views about the ways in which this happens are not stable and this is a field that has developed a great deal in almost a decade since the first edition of this book was written. Two of the case study chapters have been replaced with new work and the remainder of the book has been updated and rewritten. A chapter on representations of democracy in Australia has been replaced by one on the struggles for democracy in public space in Bangkok. Another chapter on Melbourne entitled 'On the Move' has since been subsumed by a full book on the topic ('Fluid City', Routledge, 2005) and is replaced here by a critique of the Euralille project in France which brings together some of the material on shopping malls and corporate towers as global types. My general shift in thinking about these issues in recent years is reflected in an update of the theory chapters that comprise Part I of the book. Theories of 'place' are particularly unstable. Another change has been the incorporation of Deleuzian thinking and concepts into the various theories and critiques.

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Partners are usually left until last but Sandy Gifford has been an astute, tolerant and loving critic whose contribution to this work has been fundamental. Tony King and Tom Markus generously agreed to launch the Architext series with this book and have been incisive and challenging with their comments. Ross King and Quentin Stevens supplied highly useful critiques of the first edition. A large number of other colleagues and Ph.D. students have supplied encouragement, references, debates and responses; foremost among them are Clare Cooper Marcus, Stephen Cairns, Kess Dovey, Karen Franck, Ruth Fincher, Philip Goad, Greg Missingham, Bob Mugerauer, David O'Brien, Sitthiporn Piromruen, Kasama Polakit, Darko Radovic, Julia Robinson, Leonie Sandercock, Steven Whitford, Ian Woodcock, Stephen Wood, Larry Vale and Zhu Jian Fei. Caroline Mallinder has been a supportive and effective editor at Routledge. Andrew Simpson and Craig Tan have assisted with illustrations.

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Introduction

The most successful ideological effects are those that have no words, and ask no more than complicitous silence.

Bourdieu (1977: 188)

Architecture and urban design 'frames' space, both literally and discursively. In the literal sense everyday life 'takes place' within the clusters of rooms, buildings, streets and cities we inhabit. Action is structured and shaped by streets, walls, doors and windows; it is framed by the decisions of designers. As a form of discourse, built form constructs and frames meanings. Places tell us stories; we read them as spatial text. The idea of 'framing' contains this ambiguity. Used as a verb, to 'frame' means to 'shape' things, and also to 'enclose' them in a border – like a mirror or picture. As a noun, a 'frame' is an established 'order' and a 'border'. 'Framing' implies both the construction of a world and of a way of seeing ourselves in it – at once picture and mirror. In each of these senses, the design of built form is the practice of 'framing' the places of everyday life. A frame is also a 'context' that we relegate to the taken-for-granted. Built form can 'frame' its subjects in a place where not all is as it seems – as in a 'frame-up'. Through both these literal and discursive framings, the built environment mediates, constructs and reproduces power relations. The ambiguities of 'framing' reflect those of the nexus between place and practices of power. This difficult nexus is the subject of this book.

This nexus of built form with power is, at one level, a tautological truth – place creation is determined by those in control of resources for better and for worse. Places are programmed and designed in accord with certain interests – primarily the pursuit of amenity, profit, status and political power. The built environment reflects the identities, differences and struggles of gender, class, race, culture and age. It shows the interests of people in empowerment and freedom, the interests of the State in social order, and the private corporate

interest in stimulating consumption. Because architecture and urban design involve transformations in the ways we frame life, because design is the imagination and production of the future, the field cannot claim autonomy from the politics of social change. Such a rejection of autonomy entails no suggestion of determinism; the relations of architecture to social behaviour are complex and culturally embedded interactions. Like the frame of a painting or the binding of a book, architecture is often cast as necessary yet neutral to the life within. Most people, most of the time, take the built environment for granted. As the quote from Bourdieu above suggests, this relegation of built form to the unquestioned frame is the key to its relations to power. The more that the structures and representations of power can be embedded in the framework of everyday life, the less questionable they become and the more effectively they can work. This is what lends built form a prime role as ideology. It is the 'complicitous silence' of place as a framework to life that is the source of its deepest associations with power.

A study of the framings of 'place' at a range of scales entails engagement with a range of audiences and paradigms of knowledge. The practices of architecture and urban planning have taken divergent routes and adopted different paradigms of knowledge over the past 40 years. Despite its flirtations with the social sciences, architecture remains decisively wedded to a formal aesthetic paradigm where the impact of the architecture is found in its image. Urban planning, which began in physical planning, has progressively retreated from spatial design to build a base in social theory and urban studies where power is located primarily in process and programme. Yet this has never been a complete nor satisfactory separation and has led to a revitalization of urban design as the bridge between paradigms. If I slip rather easily between references to 'architecture', 'urban design' and 'built form', it is because the boundaries between them are slippery, and because we all slip easily between them in everyday life.

Any study of 'place' also entails a bridging of interest across different academic paradigms, particularly the fields and sub-fields of cultural studies (based in post-structuralist critique) and human-environment studies (with a humanist and empirical base). There is no singular methodological position or school of thought on which this book is based. This is a key starting point which deserves some comment. One of the important and liberating lessons of the postmodern movement has been the recognition of difference; the end of singular and privileged 'metanarratives' (Lyotard 1984). The proliferation of paradigms of knowledge seems to reflect such a condition. Yet a cursory observation of the internecine battles within these fields and sub-fields would indicate that this lesson has not gone too far. A radical acceptance of difference entails exploring the relations between incommensurable methodologies and interpretations. While rigorous critique and refutation is necessary for the development of theory, in studies of place the deployment of different and even incommensurable paradigms of knowledge is both necessary and enlightening. This does not entail collapsing them into newly totalizing metanarratives. Rather, it is a recog-

dition that different knowledges, soundly based within their own paradigms, may be useful to a multiplicitous understanding of built form.

It is the very nature of the mediations of power in place that make this pluralism necessary. There are three primary intellectual paradigms which I will draw upon: spatial syntax analysis, discourse analysis and phenomenology. These paradigms are reflected in the titles of the three theory chapters – program, representation and place. There is no suggestion that these critiques, of spatial structure, narrative and everyday experience respectively, are discrete or unified forms of enquiry. Indeed the intersections between them are often most interesting and the cutting edge of thinking is often to be found between such fields where program, text and place intersect.

I realize that such pluralism leaves many kinds of readers uncomfortable – phenomenologists, cultural studies and spatial syntax folk alike. It is an aim to disturb these categories a little, to undermine singular viewpoints. In the later chapters I will slide between methodologies, seamlessly at times, with a view to revealing the tensions between them and the opportunities for multiplicitous interpretation. The aim is to show that the practices of power as mediated in built form are multi-dimensional; they cannot be simply addressed as forms of spatial structure, representation or lifeworld experience – rather places are constructed, experienced, practised and understood within the tension between these paradigms.

The book begins with theory and proceeds to interpretations of specific places and project types. The first part, 'Frames of Theorization', will briefly outline some theoretical frameworks and deals first with the use (and misuse) of the concept of 'power'. It defines some terms and lays the ground for a more specific understanding of practices of 'force', 'coercion', 'authority', 'seduction', 'manipulation' and 'legitimation'. These concepts are linked to a set of oppositional dimensions, along which it is argued such practices are mediated in space. Chapter 2 explores the spatial programming of buildings based on the social theories of Giddens, Bourdieu, Foucault and Deleuze coupled with methods of spatial analysis. Giddens' structuration theory suggests that spatialized practices of power can be modelled as enabling and constraining relations between 'structure' and 'agency'. Bourdieu's theory of the *habitus* suggests that the built environment constructs the real as spatial ideology – a congruence between the 'division' of space and our 'vision' of the world. Foucault's work suggests that modern power is a dispersed set of micropractices, many of which operate through the normalizing gaze of surveillance regimes. Spatial practices construct subjects employing architecture as disciplinary technology. Deleuzian theory suggests ways of re-thinking spatial programs as forms of striation and as congealed desires. As a means of analysing mediations of power through spatial segmentation I have adapted methods of spatial syntax analysis of building plans developed by Hillier and Hanson. Such analysis maps the 'social logic' of architecture to reveal ideology embedded in architectural genotypes.

Chapter 3 explores the theoretical bases for interpreting architecture and urban design in terms of representation. Much of this work stems from the discursive turn in social theory which seeks to problematize the relation of language to reality. The human 'agent' is in this sense replaced by the 'subject' who is enmeshed and constructed in discourse. Forms of discourse and representation can construct desires, joys, fears and identities; oppositions between the normal and the deviant. Truth-effects are produced in representation as reality is socially constructed. Important here is the early work of Barthes in the construction of mythology – the manner in which arbitrary meanings are naturalized and the discourse of power is rendered benign. The chapter includes a critique of post-structuralism, deconstruction and Bourdieu's account of aesthetic taste and symbolic capital.

Chapter 4 proceeds to an account of theories of 'place'. These begin in phenomenology, the lived-space of the body and the ontology of dwelling stemming from the work of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger. It explores ways in which built form mediates the spatial dialectics of vertical/horizontal, inside/outside and local/global – tensions between the primacy of the lived and its ideological framings. The ideas of Lefebvre, de Certeau, Harvey and Massey are introduced in the quest to frame place as a conjunction of practice, representation and experience.

Part II on 'Centres of Power' involves interpretation of three narratives of power in urban space in Berlin, Beijing and Bangkok. Chapter 5, 'Take your Breath Away', explores the Nazi use of architecture and urban design, well known for its use of monumental neo-classical imagery. This narrative suggests that such spatial propaganda was marked more by instrumental eclecticism than by style, deploying the combined effects of a range of themes with echoes to follow in other chapters. Chapter 6, 'Hidden Power', is an account of the Forbidden City and Tiananmen Square in Beijing. Constructed as the antithesis of the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square is the largest open space in urban history, a signifier of 'liberty' and a representation of the 'people'. Its meanings and global visibility were then mobilized for purposes of resistance in 1989. Tiananmen shows the possibilities of semantic inversion and the inseparability of spatial practices and representations; meanings and uses are never guaranteed. Chapter 7, 'Paths to Democracy', is an account of the use of particular public spaces by the democracy movement in Bangkok and the ways that practices and meanings have intersected. The Democracy Monument, produced by a fascist regime, becomes the focus of a struggle for democracy that veers from joyful to bloody. This is also a struggle over memory and over whose meanings are to be represented in public space.

Part III, 'Global Types', explores the framing of places in everyday life, using examples of global development types including the corporate office tower, shopping mall, suburban house and gated community. Chapter 8, 'Tall Storeys', explores the meanings and contradictions of the corporate tower through the lens of its advertising. The successful corporate tower offers corporate identity, authenticity and authority. It embodies metaphors of strength, stature and strategy, of physical dominance translating into financial domination. The symbolic

capital of the skyscraper is not so much created as it is moved around from one temporary landmark to another. In the global quest for height, the tower is converted into an anti-urban building type. Chapter 9, 'Inverted City', is an interpretation of the suburban shopping mall as a form of urban inversion. As a collective dream world of mass culture, the mall at once captures and inverts the urban. It is a realm of relative shelter, safety, order and predictability which is semantically and structurally severed from the city. The mall constructs a permanent festivity within an illusion of urban civic life, carnival minus community. In its quest for size, community and authenticity the mall evolves into mega-malls, skyways, lifestyle malls and dead malls.

Chapter 10, 'Domestic Desires', explores the meaning of the suburban dream house and gated community. Model houses display an ideal world as a mirror in which a suburban subject is constructed and in which we can read the suburban condition and its cultural values. The house plans reveal genotypes which reflect and reproduce ideologies of family life – the mediation of age, gender and class relations. The nostalgic linking of the ideal home to an unchanging past reflects both a desire for escape and for ontological security in an uncertain world. Many of these structures and meanings are writ large in the gated enclave – a retreat in both space and time to a purified 'community'.

Part IV, 'Localities', proceeds to critiques of two specific places. Chapter 11, 'A Sign for the 21st Century', is an account of the innovative urban design project of Euralille in northern France. This is a vision for a twenty-first century generic city, geared to new sensibilities of globalization, time-space compression and virtual space under the urban design direction of Rem Koolhaas. Euralille seeks the redemption of over-determined, banal and manipulative building types such as the mall, tower and plaza, but is interpreted here as a future locked in a past and as place reduced to text. Chapter 12, 'Rust and Irony', is a more personal narrative which explores the dual nature of place/power relations as both liberation and oppression. Rottneest Island was a prison that became a holiday camp and then a luxury enclave; where military space enabled liberation; where the vicissitudes of history opened spaces for the imagination. This is a story of the contingencies and ironies of place experience; of the mutability of meaning and the perils of determinism.

In the afterword I open up the question of a liberating design practice – the dream which has long prevailed as a guiding narrative in architecture and urban design. This issue is explored through the interpretation of several places, each driven by such imperatives yet caught in the complicities of power. Such complicity is the condition of environmental design. As the invention of the future, practices of placemaking are inherently political. Architecture and urban design are highly social arts wherein the task is to link aesthetic imagination to the public interest. 'Community architecture' is, in a sense, a tautology. Is there any architecture which exists outside the 'common' interest? The academic task is to make clear whose interests are served. This may produce a certain pessimism in those whose passion it is to avoid engagement with the 'meaning market' or the

instrumentalizing functions of the program. I can only suggest that this is a temporary condition born of the collapse of illusion. Beyond lie more interesting and diverse forms of both theory and practice.

This text cannot stand outside the power relations and theories that it addresses. Languages of representation are primary tools in the practices of power. Like built form, language is a structure which both reproduces and frames our experience. As Heidegger (1962) put it, language is the 'house of Being'. Language is slippery, subject always to shifting social constructions, to Derrida's (1974) play of *différance*. While I accept Derrida's arguments, I am also compelled by Habermas' (1971) view that systematically distorted communication is a primary tool of power. In writing this material I have felt persistently torn between the enlightenment desire to uncover and clarify power/place relations in general (to generalize) and the post-structuralist desire to unpack, to deconstruct. I write from within this problematic. This is no easy task because each of these tendencies creates the space for new and destructive practices of power. To generalize and universalize is to totalize and repress difference. Yet the rug-pulling, neologisms and paren(theses) of post-structuralist critique can be equally complicit with new currents of power and can embody new forms of closure. The retreat into private dialects that characterizes much academic discourse often says more about the struggles between fields of discourse than it does about the subject in question. It divides its readership into those who are willing and able to follow in such an intellectual retreat and those who are not; it immunizes theory against attack from those who are left behind. I find much of this move towards private dialects unnecessary and disempowering and I will avoid it where possible. To the extent that theories of power in architecture and urban design become intellectual enclaves, they also become ineffective in public debate. This is a particular problem for a book that attempts to reach a broad audience and to weave together a range of methodologies, each of which has its dialect. While there is a good deal of what I would call necessary jargon, my goal is to use the simplest possible language consistent with rigor. I am inspired in this matter by the work of Berger who writes:

One does not look through writing onto reality – as through a clean or dirty window-pane. Words are never transparent. They create their own space, the space of experience, not that of existence . . . Clarity, in my view, is the gift of the way space, created by words in a given text, is arranged. The task of arranging this space is not unlike that of furnishing and arranging a home. The aim is similar: to accommodate with ease what belongs there and to welcome those who enter. There are hospitable and inhospitable writings. Hospitality and clarity go together.

(Berger 1992: 241–242)

My aim is to be hospitable to a broad range of critiques and audiences, to let theoretical differences coexist. Indeed I believe that it is in the friction between paradigms that a good many insights are to be discovered.

The book has a critical tone, focusing on the most problematic mediations of power in place. However, there is no intended implication either that there is anything wrong per se with the nexus of place with power, or that there is some ideal form of placemaking that operates outside such framing processes. The design of built form is intrinsically hinged to issues of power precisely because it is the imagination and negotiation of future worlds. The invention of the future will always be contentious and places will always mediate power relations. I have no firm prescription for how designers should practise, except that they should not do so with heads inserted in sand. The hope is that a greater transparency of the practices of power can lead to more imaginative, liberating and empowering placemaking practices.

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Part I

Frames of Theorization

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Chapter 1: Power

Power is one of the splendours of man that is eminently prone to evil.

Ricoeur (1965: 255)

DEFINING POWER

The term 'power' is widely used, and misused, in a rather global manner to refer to a variety of different capacities and effects. The danger is that 'power' can mean anything and therefore nothing. I want to try to avoid this through a short analysis of 'power' as a concept. The term derives from the Latin *potere*: 'to be able' – the capacity to achieve some end. Yet power in human affairs generally involves control 'over' others. This distinction between 'power to' and 'power over', between power as capacity and as a relationship between people, is fundamental to all that follows (Isaac 1992: 47; Pred 1981). Yet the former of these has a certain primacy. According to Rorty (1992: 2) 'Power is the ability . . . to define and control circumstances and events so that one can influence things to go in the direction of one's interests'. The 'capacity' to imagine, construct and inhabit a better built environment is what we mostly mean by empowerment here. The capacity to appropriate a room, choose a house, walk to a beach or criticize an urban design scheme are all forms of empowerment. When we say that someone is empowered, we mean their capacity to act is increased. Empowerment is linked with 'autonomy' and 'freedom', both of which imply a 'liberation' from arbitrary forms of 'power over' us. The primacy of power as capacity stems from the fact that power over others has a parasitic relation with power as capacity (Isaac 1992: 41). Power over others is largely driven by the desire to harness the capacities of others to one's own empowerment. These two forms of power, as capacity and relationship, are reciprocal. Yet power as capacity is both the source and the end of this relation.

In everyday life we tend to notice power *over* while power *to* is taken for granted. This creates the illusion that power *over* is somehow primary –