STRATEGIES FOR DWELLING:

Les médias ont grandement diminué les contraintes du lieu et du temps, nous donnant accès au passé et à l'ailleurs. Cette destruction de la distance et de l'oubli rend impossible l'intimité, l'isolement qui sont nécessaires à l'habitation authentique. Dans ce monde homogénéisé par la technologie, l'architecte a un rôle à jouer dans la reconstruction critique de la distance spatiale et temporelle.
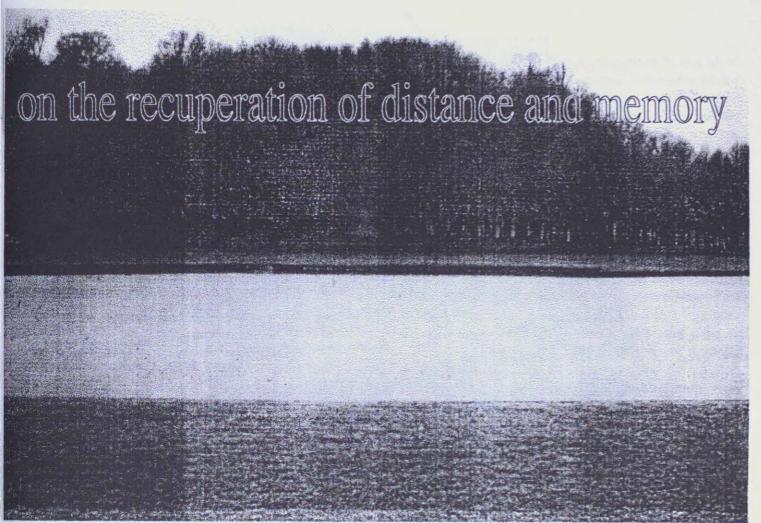
I
ATTACK ON DISTANCE:
INTERTEXTUAL REFERENCE

Karsten Harries, in a brilliant article entitled **The Ethical Function of Architecture,** advocates the reestablishment of the lost ethos, of environments that will make, as he claims, a genuine dwelling possible.[1] "From the very beginning architecture has had an **ethical function**, helping to articulate and even to establish man's **ethos**," contends Harries. This domain, to which the notion of "edifying" or building is akin, has been lost due to a commit-

ment to objectivity on which science and technology rest, accompanied by technological progress. Objectivity demands, argues Harries, homogeneity and indifference of place.

The main action by which modern man has been able to create the current homogeneous world has been by overcoming distance, the consequences of which are still unpredictable. This attack on distance, its conquest, in a word, with the help of various technological devices--radio, tv, high speed vehicles-- has brought about the obliteration of the sense of intimacy. Harries rightfully contends that "intimacy requires distance." He adds, "eliminate one and you eliminate the other." For him " the chaotic state of our architectural environment which yet goes along with a high degree of interchangeability and uniformity is part of our technological culture, which insists not so much on dwellings as on machines for working and living."

Harries concludes with an optimistic remark , pointing out that the architect, even in this desperate condition, is the person best equipped to reestablish true dwelling environments. The corol-

on the recuperation of distance and memory

lary of the message is that in order to decide what is involved in building the architect has to understand first what it is "to dwell." And this demands, of course, the recognition that genuine dwelling without both distance and intimacy is impossible.

2
ATTACK ON TIME:
SPEED AND CONSUMPTION OF IMAGES

Appearing almost simultaneously photographs and trains are among the many inventions we inherited from the nineteenth century.[2] Their repercussions on everyday life have often been taken for granted.

Photography, via advertising, has had a noticeable impact on the environment. Buildings, highway billboards, campaign posters, T-shirts, packages, vehicles printed with any conceivable image, are just a few of the examples that illustrate the continuous change effected by the medium on our visual surroundings.

While the arrival of trains and the subsequent transport revolution helped bring about the attack on distance described by Harries, the invention of photography contributed to a new environmental perception that affected our ways of seeing, communicating and recording the world around us. The past ceased to be distanced from the present as it became possible to capture reality, even the most fleeting moment, with optical and chemical processes. With the aid of photography images of loved ones, exotic places, unusual events could be consumed visually by practically everyone.

Photography made people aware of places that had previously only been in the realm of the imagination, thus contributing to the homogenization of the world. With the emergence of the new medium any location could, no matter how exotic and distant, in a matter of a relatively short time, be recorded and then reproduced ad infinitum. Postcards became a sort of substitute for reality whose three-dimensionality could be explored, at least during the beginning of the century, through stereoscopic viewing devices.

In the area of architecture, the publication of photographs in popular and specialized magazines and periodicals contributed to a faster diffusion of architectural ideas and realizations. This potential was exploited by architects and artists of the avant garde. Suffice it to consider the photographic experiments of the the members of the Bauhaus, and its Russian equivalent the Vkhutemas, the Constructivists, without forgetting the agile manipulation of the medium as a propagandistic tool by such architects as Le Corbusier.

It is also a fact that since the second half of the nineteenth century architectural photography established itself as a genre in its own right, on the way to achieving its current pervasive and sometimes perverse taste-molding role. Consider the endless number of slick architectural periodicals that contribute to the transformation of both laymen's and professionals' taste for buildings, interiors and gardens.

If the invention of the steam engine and its applications to transport led eventually to the invention of other high-velocity vehicles such as blimps, airplanes and high -speed trains, photography paved the way for the invention of the animated image, and, subsequently, movies, television, holography, and more recently the all-pervasive video. Movies made it possible to see history literally unveiled and re-enacted.

With the advent of television and of video technology the immediacy of any event could be appropriated. It was possible to bring it into the home --our most private domain. From this interior vantage point--currently with the help of satellite transmission-- it has been possible to witness the space odyssey with its tragedies and triumphs, to observe any cataclysm, or even to be the detached participant in a royal wedding while sipping Coke and gorging on popcorn. Furthermore we can play back and simulate--re-enact--any historical moment to the point of ludicrous exhaustion. Distance, spatial and temporal, increasingly and paradoxically becomes more distant.

As examples of visual technological progress, photography and its more recent extensions, movies and video, have contributed to demise of forgetfulness. While in spatial terms, as has been shown by Harries, the conquest of distance has meant the loss of intimacy, in temporal terms it would seem that its equivalent, the contraction of the temporal dimension, has meant the obliteration of forgetfulness and with it that of its antipode, memory. This is not unlike the process of losing one's memory for simple arithme-

tic operations such as adding and subtracting, by relying on the powerful capabilities of binary systems which govern tiny computers and calculators.

We seem, thus, to be undermining our own ability to apprehend the real, succumbing to a world of simulation constantly nourished by the advertising world and the new visual technologies. As the present becomes continually registered in the video-strip of ubiquitous security cameras, of anonymous cam-cords, to become a magnetic impulse easily retrievable, our sense of now and then becomes increasingly dulled and with it the notion of memory. If, as Harries contends, it is necessary to reestablish the lost ethos, the lost sense of dwelling, by redefining boundaries, it is also imperative that we reestablish in a critical way our contact with the world around us and its temporal dimension.

Without a critical re-evaluation and recuperation of both temporal and spatial distance we seem condemned to become fictional beings, as the main character of Percy Walker's novel **The Moviegoer**, the successful stockbroker John Bikerson (Binx) Bolling, for whom the reality of a place, the reality of dwelling, could only be accepted after he had seen the place re-presented, hence certified, in a film's moving image.[3]

Ricardo L. Castro is an associate professor of architecture at McGill University.

Notes

1. Karsten Harries, "The Ethical Function of Architecture: A Philosophical Standpoint on the Anonymity and Homogeneity of Contemporary Architecture," **Journal of Architectural Education XXIX**, (September 1975): 159-65. All citations in the text appear on page 160.

2. The transportation of goods and passengers began in England in 1825, and the birth of photography was marked by the production of the first stable image, a feat accomplished by the Frenchman Joseph-Niécephore Niece, in 1826.

3. Percy Walker, **The Moviegoer**, New York: Knopf, 1961.