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The University of Auckland

THE MEANING OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT:
DWELLING ENVIRONMENTS AS MEANING
HOUSEHOLD IDENTITY

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of Architecture
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Susan Katharine Niculescu

Auckland, New Zealand
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"There should be as many kinds (styles) of houses as there are kinds (styles) of people and as many differentiations as there are different individuals. A man who has individuality (and what man lacks it?) has a right to its expression in his own environment."

F.L. Wright (1941, p. 33)
ABSTRACT

The thesis is an attempt to find whether there is any perceived or actual correlation between people (personal characteristics, or characteristics of subgroups) and the environments they choose—in particular, their houses; that is, to correlate identifiable physical aspects of environment with various identifiable personal or social characteristics, and to attempt to explain why such correlations occur; thence to postulate theories which will enable environments to be designed to be acceptable to particular groups of people.

"The thesis", part 1 of the thesis, is a theoretical statement comprising, in Chapter I, an explicit statement of the theoretical framework in the form of five premises derived from philosophy and theories of psychology, art and architecture, and sociology. And, in Chapter II, a statement of the two hypotheses (that dwelling environments are perceived as "meaning" the people who live in them and that people choose dwelling environments, other things being equal, according to their concept of the kind of people they are) and the assumptions necessary to test them.
In Part 2: "The Research Method" Chapter III covers the development of the measure of closure in dwelling environments. Closure was chosen in Chapter II as the environmental variable to be used for the purposes of this study. The final measure comprises five sets of four bird's eye view perspective line drawings depicting five situations in a typical house in which closure is varied in four steps from very open to very closed. Chapter IV describes the development of the measure of household identity. The measure of household identity was developed especially to be of relevance to the choice of degrees of closure in dwelling environments. The measure is derived from actual verbal responses of the respondents to open ended questions asked in pilot studies. In Chapter V, the last chapter in Part 2, the research design of the survey study is described: the research model used, the design of the questionnaire, and the sampling method.

The first chapter of Part 3: "The Results and Discussion of the Results", Chapter VI, presents the sample size (610) and shows that the sample is representative of the population of the Auckland greater urban area. In Chapter VII, the results relating to hypothesis 1 are presented and discussed. The results weakly support the hypothesis but the correlations are
not of sufficient strength to be used predictively. In Chapter VIII the results of hypothesis 2 are presented and discussed. These results also support the hypothesis but even less strongly so than for hypothesis 1. Chapter VIII also covers sub-hypothesis 1, that people choose dwelling environments according to their "objective" household identity. In Chapter IX the results of the hypotheses are compared and summarized. And in Chapter X the implications of the results are outlined: an attempt is made to relate the results to the theoretical framework and from this implications for a possible theory of aesthetics are drawn. The implications of the results for the theory and practice of architecture are delineated and finally suggestions for future research are outlined.
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