

Building Community: The Fundamentalist Mormon Concept of Space

MARTHA BRADLEY

In today's world spatial imaginal types are woven into the social and physical construction of all material places. Although imaginal types exist essentially in the world of the mind, heart, and senses, they are often represented and approximated in the physical world. Most material spaces are thus complex social, economic, cultural and physical constructions, and they are usually the result of some physical intervention in the landscape. The spaces we create also represent and reproduce the dominant order and values of our societies at a given time. Material places, spatial types are created or modified to shape people's activities, relationships, and beliefs in specific ways as well as to further particular values and interests.¹ Social order is taught through the environment.

For the 19th century Mormons the pursuit of an earthly paradise, the heavenly Jerusalem and the millennium, embodied theological ideas basic to their concept of heaven and earth. The church sought to create utopian space through the organization of people in society on earth, rather than only wait for its manifestation in the life hereafter. The temporal lives of church members mattered greatly as did the shape of the communities they built.

This article asserts that the fundamentalist Mormons -- the polygamists of Colorado City/Hildale -- continue to build community at the turn of the 21st century based on the concept of space that emerged in the Mormon world in the 1830s. This concept traveled with the church through Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois and was eventually concretized in the Great Basin of Utah in the second half of the 19th century. Historical and sociological attention paid to the fundamentalists has focused on their distinctive polygamous lifestyle, on their communal patterns of living together in groups, and other distinctive practices. This article considers the spatial world in which they live. What does their distinctive sense of space say about their values, beliefs and history? What does it say about their attitudes and relationships toward each other? What does it say about their relationship with the mother church?

Sacred Space

As human beings we search for meaning in our lives and in our environments. In a complicated and confusing world, we seek wisdom, understanding and peace amidst turmoil, conflict and uncertainty, and much of this proceeds in a spatial arena.

According to art historian Christian Norberg-Schulz, human beings grasp for an existential foothold through space—through the places they inhabit.² We not only understand ourselves in relationship to the spaces that we inhabit; we in part define ourselves by the spaces themselves. In the same way that space defines the relationships between us, it also helps us understand how we come together and stay apart. Norberg-Schulz writes, “Man dwells when he can orient himself with and identify himself with an environment or in short, when experiencing the environment as meaningful.”³

In terms of the world we inhabit, space is not just an ethereal, illusive thing but has concrete characteristics which constitute our world and that are interrelated in complex ways. Because of this, space is an integral part of our existence. In totality, the abstraction of space is composed of concrete things that have substance, shape, texture, and color. It is the essence of place and is comprehensive creating the character that forms a background to acts and events.

Space has a three-dimensional geometry, a perceptual field. But even more important, concrete human actions take place in spaces distinguished by qualitative differences. Spaces possess varying degrees of extension and enclosure; for instance they are defined by boundaries, they have character, and materiality. And they are formed by a system of relationships.

Spaces that are “sacred” serve to center us—they represent an *axis mundi* where worlds come together. Such spaces contain our rituals, embody our myths and shape our identities. They speak to our highest ambitions and what we hold most dear. Buildings and landscapes that speak to spiritual dimensions affect us in many ways, introducing order and meaning into all-too-often chaotic and perplexing realms of existence. Religious leaders therefore often struggle to create spaces and places that respond to pressing social concerns to satisfy crucial needs.

In the effort to better understand space and spatial relationships cultural geographers, urban planners, and architectural historians and other social thinkers have recently begun to rely on a new type of conceptual tool -- the community map. This map (sometimes called a bioregional map) is used as a mechanism with which to better understand the ways human beings relate to their environments; their common space. Rather than simply a two-dimensional representation of geography, place and objects, which places

objects in space, as in a traditional map, the bioregional map focuses on relationship patterns; the ways that relationships occur or play out in space.

This process of mapping the terrain wields power over the way we embody social values. Like a road map, for example, that identifies cultural landmarks and identifies what certain groups believe is true about their place, the bioregional map explains the meaning that space holds in relation to the continuum of activities that transpire therein.

The mapping of sacred space not only describes how human beings relate to each other in spatial ways, but the manner in which space is imbued with meaning. Sacred space is land that has been given heightened meaning, as both backdrop and product, the physical embodiment of belief.

Space, maps and culture interact in immediate and transforming ways. Maps about space form ideas and concepts; they shape values and beliefs. According to historian Richard Bushman, Joseph Smith (like many other revolutionary figures) remapped space for the Mormon world. “One of his most powerful acts was to create a conception of space that governed the movement of tens of thousands of people for many decades.”⁴ For Smith, space was a funnel that “collected people from the widest possible periphery and drew them like gravity into a central point. At that center, he formed another kind of space, this one mapped with lines on paper and not just words.”

Plat of the City of Zion

The Plat of the City of Zion reflected the influence of the requirement of the United States government’s Land Ordinance of 1785, for the prior survey of the public domain and the imposition of a grid on all land before it was sold. The Plat prescribed a grid town which would be approximately one mile square, with blocks divided into half acre residential lots, with a central area reserved for at least twenty-five communal temples and storehouses to assist in what the Mormons called “consecration and stewardship.” Residential lots were to contain one brick or stone house set back twenty-five feet from the street, and fruit trees and a vegetable garden large enough to sustain a family. Mormon homes were located in town with communal fields located on the periphery. The communitarian ideal was thus promulgated to the Mormon people and was intended to be the blueprint for the population of the earth. “When this square is thus laid off and supplied, lay off another in the same way and so fill up the world in these last days, and let every man live in the city for this is the city of Zion, asserted Smith.”⁵

The plan emphasized community living, with homes in town instead of on isolated farmsteads, and incorporating gardens in line with the pastoral symbolism of Eden and the urban symbolism of Jerusalem. Beyond these

requirements it relied on standard city-building tools—setbacks, zoning, and materials, in the effort to create an orderly, uniform town fabric. Community building became a mixed endeavor of religious and secular activity—public and private enterprise. The atmosphere was charged with an eagerness to do God’s will.

The rhetoric of Edenic imagery frequently paralleled Smith’s concept of kingdom building.

In 1842 the editor of the *Wasp* wrote:

The wilderness has been made to blossom as the rose; and where hazle brush grew and muskitoes cousined, gardens decorate and the saints rest. . . . The country for several miles around is already risen into the great mass of a city, built by the only people of the earth, that while they labor incessantly to make this earth like the garden of the lord, labor also . . . to make men fit subjects for his kingdom and coming.⁶

In giving to his people a blueprint for city building, Smith seized space, what would become “sacred” space, for the backdrop of the Mormon kingdom-building efforts. In this he joined an enterprise engaged in by kings and presidents throughout time. In the Roman Empire, for example, one also found the physical embodiment of empire, of control and domination, religion and commerce. And the Mormon village too would be the embodiment of belief—as Ben Shann says, the “shape of content.”⁷

Smith’s concept of Zion was multi-layered. Here the secular and the spiritual overlapped. Town building and community building were rhetorically and figuratively identified as building the literal Kingdom of God and therefore imbued with sacred significance. This was the work of God. Tilling one’s field, felling wood for fences and barns, digging irrigation canals and diverting springs equaled religious ritual—sacred activity dedicated to God. The clay of the earth, the wood of the forests was the sacred matter of creation here in the hands of the believing faithful making the world anew, redeeming the land. Therefore, space had for the Mormons different layers of meaning.

For some, the recommended shape of the City of Zion resembled the New England town with its common green and centralized activity—tavern, school and church—in a mixture which coalesced and created a sense of community identification, meaning and unity. The tension between dependence and individualism, cooperation and self-reliance, communalism and personal salvation was spatially manifested in the City of Zion.

According to the revelation, it was intended that the first agricultural villages (although 30,000 inhabitants as prescribed in the revelation was certainly not a village but a healthy city) embodied traditional American values—hard work, mastery of the land, enterprise and even to a point

capitalism.⁸ These values were at odds, again, with the essence of what the City of Zion represented spatially. The basic *raison d'être* of these cities was to create a place of refuge, a place of protection, isolation and a place apart from the world, a place to live pure lives dedicated to God, not a place of commerce or cultural life. In fact in the first version of the Plat there was no allowance made for a commercial zone. The boundary around the City of Zion was distinct—from the first a strong insider/outsider consciousness dictated every building enterprise. Zion was to be a city, not a village or a town, and a city for the faithful not one welcoming or embracing the world.

As had been true throughout much of the American experience, what constituted the good society would be a part of this discussion, for Zion was based on a utopian dream. Ideal and reality, tangible and intangibles blended in a weave where it was impossible to distinguish the parts.

Bushman points to the significance of Zion as the center place, the place where it all came together in the Mormon world. “The city of Zion, moreover, was situated differently in its worldwide geography. New England towns were situated more or less on a level plane, with Boston and a few other commercial centers elevated above the rest. The city of Zion stood at the center of a global vortex; all converts were to turn their faces to Zion. It was a place of refuge. The revelations called Zion the ‘center place,’ the point where all the saints were to gather. New England towns were dotted more or less evenly across the landscape; Zion was the point toward which all the gathering routes converged.”⁹

Unlike in New England towns, Joseph Smith added into the mix a large architectural space—at the center of which would be located twenty-four temples. Temples were more like civic structures than congregational meetinghouses. “The city was the center of gathering, and the temple was the beginning of the city—the center of the center—thus connecting the temple to the whole world.¹⁰ This spatial formation played out in the town, the city of Zion. The temple, the city, and the gathering formed a pattern of movement and preparation in a distinctive Mormon geography.”¹¹

The temple represented the formation of a monumental architectural tradition, the highpoint of a hierarchy of buildings that paralleled the pinnacle of Mormon religious activity. Eventually the space in the temple would become increasingly sacred, secret and cut off from public view. Ordinances and rituals were reserved for that sacred space and would not take place in other buildings.

In this effort to find a viable form of social and environmental organization the Mormons were not unlike the Shakers, or other communitarian groups. In important ways their communities were prodigious feats of consistent social and physical design. Driven by common sense as

well as an ethereal vision of earthly paradise and moral superiority, building processes were driven by questions about social organization as well as a heavenly vision. The Mormon temple was a clear articulation of ideas about hierarchy, priesthood and gender in a spatial as well as social sense.

As creators of model communities, many communards described themselves as “social architects.” In some cases they called for a complete redesigning of society, a restructuring of city and country in response to changes initiated by the industrial revolution or rapid social change in 19th century America. Their goals therefore incorporated both social and physical change. Most wished to establish self-sufficient settlements based on industry and agriculture, offering the advantages of both city and country. The city of Zion represented the Mormon effort.

As their prophet, Joseph Smith moved his people into a spatial vacuum. The relationship their towns expressed to the land as well as to the environment around them signified particular attitudes he shaped. In most religious traditions, land is claimed for the use of human beings. In this way, the grid of the Mormon village claimed dominance over the land and established the Mormons as the conquerors—they reclaimed the land for their God and tamed it for their use as was taught in the Bible. Their homes symbolized their belief in the sanctity of the family, in hearth, facade and plan and were models of the family kingdoms they believed they were heirs to in the hereafter.

In choosing an ideal dwelling, the home, as a symbol of social and economic success or religious faith, they resisted the national acceptance of isolated family dwellings located on individual farms. Model Mormon villages were reminiscent of Puritan covenant communities and featured clusters of homes in town in close proximity to each other. The model community, another type of ideal home, was a place where conviviality and collective economy would prevail. The ideal hearth was expected to “knit us together mentally and spiritually” in love.¹² In each, gendered work spaces prevailed; regular routines of work proceeded in the spaces and gave men and women specific roles critical to the endeavor.

Brigham Young’s Colonization Efforts

After Joseph’s death Mormon space moved west and became part of the story of the expansion of the United States into the frontier. Regardless of whether one accepts Frederick Jackson Turner’s Frontier Thesis, unarguably the West represented for most 19th century Americans another chance, a place of refuge and regeneration as individuals or as members of groups. Even during the 20th century the West is often called the “Last Best Place.” Virtually since the beginning of our country’s history it represented an escape from civilization

and the social and economic ills that accompanied it, to the freshness and clean palette the West seemed to promise. For the Mormon people the West held out this certain promise—a refuge on the western side of the Rocky Mountains would allow them to build their towns and raise families away from the persecutions they had experienced in the Midwest. Two themes run through the 19th century story of the Mormon people: the escape from persecution to refuge as well as a belief in a chance to build the world anew.

According to Bushman, “The city of Zion rose at the foot of the Wasatch Mountains, and Brigham Young filled up the world with smaller satellite cities. Until the end of the century, the Mormon vortex gathered people with ever-increasing force. And at the center of Salt Lake, the temple anchored the whole system, as it had done in previous Zions.”¹³

History of Fundamentalism

As was true of the history of the mainstream church, the origins of the fundamentalist Mormon movement was located in persecution. Those who chose to continue the practice of plural marriage after the official Manifesto of 1890, became increasingly polarized and ostracized and were eventually excommunicated from the Mormon Church after 1910. (The 1890 Manifesto began the process of ending church-sanctioned plurality and the two-decade denouement of the practice of plurality.) Believing they still had priesthood authority to perform plural marriages and that the mother church did not, clusters of polygamists grew around the charismatic leadership of men like Joseph W. Musser, John Y. Barlow, and Rulon Allred. Eventually these separate groups became more self-conscious in their group identity and claims to prophetic leadership and they located in specific sites. In the mid 1930s, for example, the Barlow group moved to Short Creek, a town straddling the Utah/Arizona border.

When the polygamists first started moving into the Colorado Strip region of southern Utah/northern Arizona, it was once again perceived as a place of refuge. Only this time the fundamentalist Mormons were escaping the persecution of their own people and were excommunicated by the Mormon Church for a continued practice of plurality. In the effort to escape prosecution by law (polygamy was a felony under the Utah Constitution) as well as persecution by the mainstream church, small groups of fundamentalist polygamists settled outside the Wasatch front in a variety of locations. This was an effort to find a place to practice their lifestyle in peace, build homes and raise families, attempting to escape the attention of Mormon Church leaders in the process.

So what shape did their efforts take on? What was the shape of their new sacred space?

No longer the “funnel” Bushman described, bringing the saints in from across the world, Short Creek was more like a “cushion.” Albeit in a dry and dusty, godforsaken place, it gave many a relief, created a place of refuge. Here was a place no one else seemed to want. Here the polygamists could stay. The shelter seemingly created by the Vermillion Cliffs to the north, was the perfect, fitting metaphor for their new town.

As the fundamentalists built their new community, they relied on the Mormon sense of space and created an ordered town. They laid out straight streets, arranged in a grid, which deviated at times from that pattern when geography required it. They reserved a town square for a church and a schoolhouse and set back their homes from the street in regular patterns. Two decades after settlement Short Creek looked like a traditional Mormon town in every way. In terms of cooperation, of communal activity, it acted like a Mormon space—construction was often done cooperatively, fields and herds managed in shifts and by teams of men instead of individuals. Homes, businesses and other enterprises were oriented toward the community—recognizing the ties that connected individuals rather than competition that might separate them.

In some ways the values, beliefs, and practices of American capitalism guided settlement here as it had in other areas of the West. But underlying the whole drama that played out in this dry and dusty town in the shadow of the Vermillion Cliffs, capitalism too was reconfigured by the fundamentalists. Their town became sacred turf; it was here that they could live godly lives, experimenting in the doctrines they had been told were essential to their salvation and raising their families to do the same.

The constructed environment of this place -- the buildings, patterns of roads, the ways that human beings interact with them, the map of the terrain -- encode in tangible form deeply-held and often otherwise unstated cultural, social, and economic values. They reflect the encouragement of folklorist, Henry Glassie, to move “away from a concern for the [specific] fabric itself toward the ideas that were the cause of the fabric’s existence.”¹⁴

Cultural geographers recommend a paradigm of “cultural diffusion” in examining the building traditions of folk cultures. This assumes that building traditions and ideas about space traveled into the West with settlement¹⁵ and despite original ethnic diversity, exhibited a unique response to the particularities of the American environment. This is certainly true in the Short Creek case.

When Short Creek finally was settled in the 1930s after a few aborted attempts, the West was already industrialized in places, and exhibited as a region a combination of agricultural, commercial and industrial exploitation that tied it to the East. What went on there was not just the diffusion of the

American pattern of settlement, nor a variation on an American theme. Instead, it is necessary to examine the built or spatial history of Short Creek in relationship to the Mormon Church. The bond between the parent community (the core) and its offspring (the periphery) was largely intangible and cultural. To clarify this concept, consider Bernard Bailyn's description of this same process in the colonization efforts of Great Britain in the 17th and 18th centuries.

This arc was nothing so simple as the trade route of an empire in the traditional sense, commercial or territorial. Nor was it merely an expanding frontier line. It was not a line, an edge, comprehensible in Turnerian terms as such, but a ring of territories, or marchlands, separated in important ways from the territories on either side of it. In these linked territories a central culture encountered a variety of different human and physical environments and formed a variety of subcultures, all of which were contained within a single overall system that might be designated "British."¹⁶

While the core-periphery theory did not originate with Bailyn, it is useful in this discussion to identify the "orbits of cultural affiliation and derivation." This is based on the assumption that developing communities -- in this case the polygamists -- may be physically separated both from each other and the core culture, but nevertheless continue to be linked through a similar peripheral relationship to the core.

The underlying premise of this article is that despite differences on doctrinal issues, the building tradition of the fundamentalist community exhibits a peripheral relationship to the Mormon core culture in its concept of space.

Housing

In order to be significant, architecture in and of itself must be forgotten, or must present only an image for reverence, which subsequently becomes confounded with memories.

The use of the past as a template for the future is not new, nor is it exclusive to designers. In fact, it seems to be a basic condition of human thinking, and like many processes, seems to occur automatically. In this process, manipulation of the image during design alters the original experience, redefines or understands it in a different light, as a response to active contemplation and new conditions. This memory presents more than an initial remembered percept to the mind; it contains as well multiple versions of involvement that stretch beyond the experiential to the emotional and intellectual realm. The memory continues to order the world and, within its own structure, retains meaningful detail and complexity.

This is certainly true with the evolution of the Mormon house type to the fundamentalist Mormon residence. It is critical to consider the private space of the individual polygamous household. Utah folklorist Austin Fife captured the essence of the 19th century Mormon home in this colorful description:

In shaping the house exterior, the Utah builders made their meaning clear: gold camps and railroad towns might come and go, but the Mormon communities would stay as permanent fixtures on the land. The West might indeed be wild and woolly, but the civilized world of middle-class America reigned in Utah. The house goes beyond the practicality of shelter in affirming Mormonism as a “correct, wholesome, and successful way of life.”¹⁷

As Fife reminds us, “their [the houses] every line bespeaks the will to survive with dignity and the rationale of a well ordered household in a well-ordered world.”

Without doubt, the interior of the polygamous family’s house -- whether shared by multiple wives or inhabited by a single wife and her children -- is gendered space, it is a female sphere. In most situations, polygamous women prove to be ingenious in their ability to create homes for their children with a version of voluntary simplicity. Frugality, industry, and simplicity are values that play out in the home and shape interior space and its use. According to one anthropologist who studies living arrangements among polygamous women these were “women who built homes and living arrangements in the face of extremely cramped surroundings and scant materials. The patterns . . . show that women access communal goods and rely heavily on the ‘sisterhood’ for comfortable living.”¹⁸

Each time a polygamous woman welcomes a new wife into her home she is required to sacrifice some of her space, her privacy, and her material goods. In the same way, the reverse is true. The new wife also must change her expectations about space in the name of the family, the sacred circle she now enters. Each newcomer shares the wealth she brings with her, her time and private space, with her new husband and with his other wives and their children.

There are basically three dominant patterns of living arrangements. These arrangements are particularly significant because they impact the ways family members move through family space, cooperate or function in the family unit in the space, and define the space.

In the first type, the single family dwelling, the dyadic or conjugal, one wife lives in a unit separate from the other wives. Her home includes a bedroom, kitchen, bathroom and some sort of parlor or living room. The plural wife thus lives somewhat independently though this does not mean that she has no interaction on a daily basis with the other wives. Many, for example, share

communal yards, driveways, laundry rooms or other areas. Interesting, this was the most typical residential pattern among 19th century pioneer families. Jessie Embry's oral history study suggests that 55 percent of plural wives lived in separate dwellings in the same community (in later stages of marriage) and 16 percent lived in separate homes in different towns.¹⁹

In the second type of living arrangement, the dyadic type of unit is doubled up in duplexes or other complex building structures with two distinct homes attached by a contiguous wall. The third type -- and perhaps the most challenging living arrangement to negotiate -- is the communal configuration. Here wives each maintain separate bedrooms but use all other parts of their home together. A more truly communal organization, this living arrangement also is more trying in terms of the personal sacrifice required, in order to maintain a harmonious spatial arrangement. Because family harmony, love, and respect are high values in this culture, religious goals, spatial modifications and orders reflect the effort to maintain peace in the home and facilitate the living of righteous lives. In these situations, according to Bennion, "women were found to be forced into both cooperative and competitive activities by virtue of their constant 'elbow rubbing.' In the single or separate dwelling (dyadic), however, there were fewer opportunities for either cooperation or conflict and competition."²⁰

The ideal in each situation is communal harmony among family members but in reality the ideal frequently falls short of the mark. What creates this incongruity? Financial restraints, for example -- unemployment, lack of funds, strained resources, family size or different budgeting abilities -- put particular strains on polygamous families. Bennion speaks of two types of living arrangements, which illustrate the way finances impact lifestyle: the house of necessity and the house of choice. In the house of necessity, polygamous wives live together because of limited resources. This condition, always considered transitional, is considered by all to be less than optimal and is instead a waiting time until each wife can be placed in her own home. The house of choice, on the other hand, is one in which each wife has her own home.

Size, choice, and finances -- along with the ways that individuals relate to each other -- seem to dictate whether or not individuals are satisfied with living arrangements. Because there is no prophet-sanctioned blueprint, however, each family struggles to make their private space work as well as possible. These living arrangements are dictated by the fundamentalist Mormon religio-social philosophy as well as the desire that each wife have a space of her own -- a place to work, create and dwell with her own children. The tension between the belief in the idea of total unity and complete communality on one hand, and privacy and individualism on the other, is rarely reconciled completely.

One woman in Bennion's study argued "that the concept of unity was not communality per se but of unity in heart and mind and spirit, which occurs only when there exists physical, emotional, and spiritual freedom."²¹ She concluded: "Living arrangements are an interplay of ideal and real components, where a husband's perception of his kingdom is the ideal and where co-wives' strategies to meet their economic, sociological, and interpersonal needs are the reality."²² According to Altman, when changes in living arrangements occur it is usually as a result of "pragmatic, psychological, and social factors."²³

But it is in the communal living situation that the Mormon notion of consecration and stewardship, the ideal of the plural family and communal living is given its fullest range of exploration. In the fundamentalist residences, sacred space, or the interior of the home becomes the drawing board where the shape of the plural family is drawn anew—free of expectations from the monogamous world. New types of family arrangements are drawn with each new attempt at creating a family that works in every way. All wives, children and the husband share a kitchen, dining room, living room, bathrooms and other areas within the home. Women typically organize this gendered space—coordinating and sharing responsibilities for cooking, cleaning, caring for children or working outside the home. They also decide how to use public areas, set up work schedules and manage and negotiate relationships and other things. Wives typically have their own bedrooms although children frequently sleep in groups—dorm rooms with boys and girls separated, mixed families from different mothers in the same rooms.

Generally the type of living arrangement also dictates the size, shape and configuration of the home. Typically in the nineteenth century, the Mormon house was a basic rectangular two-story hall parlor house (two rooms on the main floor, one slightly larger than the other, and two rooms on the second level). Variations on that central theme would extend the house two rooms deep on both levels; add wings to result in a plan shaped like an "H," "T," "L" or other variations. But the idea was basically the same. A single, centralized block, easy for just about anyone to build was the best approach to providing shelter for one's family. This type of house was relatively simple to design and construct, in fact most common farmers had the knowledge requisite to build them. Furthermore, they could be constructed with virtually any material—brick, adobe, timber or stone. Decoration was moderate, usually Greek Revival, and again required no special expertise. These were vernacular buildings constructed by common folk with little pretension to style. Literally hundreds of these homes are still extant in Mormon territory and are a potent reminder of the pioneer heritage of this place.

Function, finances, and a pragmatic attitude toward style also dictate the

20th century polygamous home. A new vernacular, the “big house” of Colorado City/Hildale, is ordered primarily by the size of families, limited resources and the climate. Homes represent in tangible form the achievement of earthly paradise. In Colorado City blocks are divided into spacious lots, allowing families to have ample room for orchards, gardens, outbuildings and other spaces for family activities. Large, spacious and solid homes are habitations not unlike those described by Brigham Young as those “angels may delight to come and visit.”²⁴

Although the first generation of builders in Short Creek in 1935 sometimes constructed log or timber homes, and in the 1940s an occasional basement house, more substantial houses were built as soon as they could be afforded. As a group these are rectangular blocks with moderate if any decoration. As families grew they added wings or other additions to the central block, often in unimaginative but straightforward ways. Overall aesthetics or styles were not the driving forces behind house design; function was. These were pragmatic workhorses, the backdrops to the more important family activity -- the sacred work that took place in the space inside. Often left unfinished, these structures seemed to anticipate growth.

In the same way landscaping was practical—fruit trees in lines on the edges of lots, gardens with tomatoes, corn and other foods, allowed the family a certain measure of self sufficiency and independence.

According to Altman, “Transition, change, and experimentation with living arrangements are a hallmark of contemporary Mormon polygynous families. The factors that account for variability in dwelling practices are finances, family size, work requirements, child care, personal desires, interpersonal relationships between wives, and other issues faced regularly by modern plural families.”²⁵ Furthermore, “When families described the ideal living arrangement that they would like in the future, they consistently mentioned housing arrangements that include a blend of dyadic and communal features. On the one hand, they want a home for each wife and her children, where they may live independently from day to day, much as in a traditional monogamous family. On the other hand, they also aspire to live near one another and to have a unified, cohesive, and communal family. Thus, they seek a blend of dyadic and communal living arrangements in their hypothetical “dream” home of the future.”²⁶

So how did this town change over time? The relationship between the fundamentalist Mormon town and the now secularized Utah town changed from the original core/peripheral relationship. For both, outside forces—increased competition with other Western communities for markets, growing diversity and the secularization of society--have impacted these places dramatically. The on-going association with the core culture has varied over

time and has been devalued, and at times seemingly severed. But in a potent and essential way this relationship was at the core of all endeavors.

In the wake of the media attention paid to the 1953 raid and the persecution that followed in its wake, Short Creek changed its name. The Utah side took on the name *Hildale* and the Colorado side assumed the name *Colorado City*. With this decision a conscious effort was made to start community building again despite the disruption caused by the federal government: to build new community institutions and begin where they had left off two years earlier. A subsequent increase in isolation based in part on distrust of outsiders but also on a firm belief that intercourse with the world outside threatened the moral fiber of their experiment, became the standard procedure and policy. Colorado City/Hildale became virtually self-sufficient and increasingly self-conscious as a place apart, distinct, perhaps otherworldly, for here was a community -- a space -- totally dedicated to what they considered the work of the Lord.

Over the past five decades the town has changed at the same time that it has maintained much of its original character. It continues to be a distinctly communal organization through the United Firm, through which much of the property is owned co-jointly. Many new construction projects are United Firm projects, and therefore community building is largely communal activity. Certainly in this regard, the process of growth is the expansion of sacred space, a theological process, not the secularization of their society. Anthropologist Robert Bee recommends paying careful attention to “the interaction of causal factors so as to produce a transformation of one condition into another.”²⁷ It would be easy to do this in the Colorado City/Hildale case. The polygamists were mistreated by the government, therefore they retrenched and became more isolationist and suspicious. The fundamentalists were also excommunicated by their mother church and socially persecuted by the Mormons in nearby regions and in the same way they retreated from social intercourse with them. Because of this, their community, Colorado City/Hildale has distinct boundaries every bit as potent and formidable as if they were twenty-foot stone walls.

When you turn off the main highway and drive toward town you sense you are in a unique place. What you see are straight wide streets lined with a surprising number of very large houses, many unfinished with insulation board exposed to the front and sides. But the buildings are intact; they provide the requisite shelter for families. You most likely would sense industry and see men and women working in fields, in gardens, in orchards or in doorways to their homes. A work ethic seems to prevail and in fact seems to be a necessity.

The cooperative store, restaurant, various factories and other enterprises speak to cooperative economic endeavor. While it is not physically explicit, it is

evident that this is a group of people who join together for various work activities. The LeRoy Johnson Meetinghouse is the single example of monumental architecture although there are several very large homes and structures in town. But this is an exceptionally large building—an ecclesiastical structure, which at first glance resembles a Mormon Stake Center. The Johnson Meetinghouse is however, easily the size of two stake centers and features a central chamber that is larger than two basketball courts. Used for general conferences of the Fundamentalist Church, dances and other socials and religious rituals, this room is clearly sacred space. The fact that it is not subdivided into smaller units with specific functions speaks to the group orientation of the church. Coming together for religious and social activities accentuates the reality of their unity.

Surrounding the central chamber are kitchens, classrooms, offices and other smaller rooms. All run around the periphery and are clearly of lesser importance than the central chamber. The finest building materials, craftsmanship, and elaboration of space are lavished on the production of a physical monument to their belief in God and in the community of saints.

This is a people who are truly communal. Owning property together is a technicality in a way, although it demonstrates a high level of commitment to communal living, but the way in which the men, women and children relate to each other is perhaps even more important. They share the Johnson Meetinghouse, for example, for the key events in their social lives. This building becomes not just a church or even temple, but the sacred backdrop for the spatial activities of this communal organization. It is living tangible evidence of their beliefs. It is the shape of their content.

There is a passage in *The Republic* in which Socrates is describing an ideal man of wisdom and understanding, who, unlike his contemporaries, fails to see the value in pursuing wealth or power. Socrates is asked how it would be possible to follow this ideal if one lives in the city? Socrates maintains that in fact he lives in an ideal city, what might be called heaven. “In heaven there is laid up a pattern of it, methinks, which he who desires may behold, and beholding, may set his own house in order. But whether such an one exists, or ever will exist in fact, is no matter; for he will live after the manner of that city; having nothing to do with any other.”²⁸ In another place in the *Laws* Plato says, that priorities must change for human life to flourish. “There are in all three things about which every man has an interest; and the interest about money, when rightly regarded, is the third and lowest of them: midway comes the interest of the body; and, first of all, that of the soul; and the state which we are describing will have been rightly constituted if it ordains honours according to this scale.”²⁹ Joseph Smith attempted to provide his people with the spatial concept requisite to build the heavenly city on earth. The Fundamentalist

Mormon community addresses the needs of the body and the soul. Each in this town is spatially manifested.

The rural village, based on the Plat of the City of Zion, became the kind of town it is today via the same type of process that the fundamentalist community continues to experience. As architectural historian Thomas Carter has argued, almost as soon as the initial stage of settlement was completed, the Mormon pioneers started improving upon the ideal place, building in quite a different way. But this time their model was the genteel city, the refined city, which spread through European courts and then to the upper middle classes. The genteel, civil or urbane resulted in what was called in the 18th century—polite society. A material culture supported the effort to create an environment that would sustain life and provide order but that was beautiful and civilized as well. Gentility instituted a campaign for beautification, a standard for exclusion as well as association, and means for the enjoyment of refined persons. It held out the hope that regardless of the economic realities of one's life, however undignified the scope of one's work, gentility was possible through discipline and the adoption of a few outward forms of genteel living. This was an effort to elevate life to a higher level of beauty and grace – it required support from an environment of beauty.

In the 19th century, just two years after initial settlement in Nauvoo the Mormons were busily adorning their city with every imaginable accouterment.

Our city now presents a lively and beautiful appearance. While it is adorned by the hand of nature in its richest dress, all hands seem engaged in adding to the comforts of the inhabitants. Numbers are employed in improving the streets and in removing every nuisance, whilst others are engaged in ploughing, digging, fencing, etc. The female part of the inhabitants are busily engaged in their flower gardens, and all around is health, peace, and happiness; and the songs of Zion are to be heard on every hand, united with those of the feathered tribe in almost every tree.³⁰

Brigham Young often encouraged his people to be ambitious and to expect much of their cities.

Let the people build good houses, plant good vineyards and orchards, make good roads, build beautiful cities in which may be found magnificent edifices for the convenience of the public, handsome streets skirted with shade trees, fountains of water, crystal streams, and every tree, shrub and flower that will flourish and grow in this climate, to make our mountain home a paradise . . . enjoying it all with thankful hearts, saying constantly, 'Not mine but thy will be done, O Father.'"³¹

Gentility was not only about appearances but produced practical benefits.

It bestowed concrete social power on its practitioners. “It was a resource for impressing and influencing powerful people and a prerequisite for inspiring trust . . . Moreover, it afforded a convenient identity and a definition of position in the confusing fluidity of democratic society. . . Refinement held out the hope of elevation from ordinary existence into an exalted society of superior beings. That promise and hope, rooted in the memory of a forbidden old regime, gave gentility its strength.”³²

In Colorado City/Hildale fundamentalist Mormons are making the same shift--from the rural Mormon village to the Gentile City. They are making a conscious effort to create not only a more attractive city (hence more luxurious landscaping) but a refined city which provides a variety of resources, including a university, city park, city zoo and various new commercial enterprises. These represent a new reaching out to the world but also a growing sophistication and new set of expectations about what represents or creates the good life. The fundamentalists have proven they can survive in the desert land of Southern Utah. They have learned to successfully eke out a living in the dry arid lands of the Colorado Strip area. They have in a literal way made the land “blossom like a rose,” a tangible sign of the efficacy of their communal lifestyle and their devotion to their God. Now they are refining their efforts.

From their Mormon ancestors the fundamentalists developed the belief that a paradisiacal landscape and fine buildings were signs of inner spirituality, which would be recognized at the Second Coming. Therefore, seeking perfection in even the smallest details of the environment helped them to participate in creating earthly paradise. House types, landscaping, community structures and networks of roads, create and develop an image of a desirable environment and lifestyle, which reflects the seriousness of their faith. Such participation in improving the communal environment is far more important to the fundamentalists than creating monumental architecture.

ENDNOTES

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³ Norberg-Schulz, 5.

⁴ Richard Lyman Bushman, “Making Space for the Mormons,” *Leonard J. Arrington Mormon History Lecture Series, No. 2*, Special Collections and Archives,

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⁵ Feramorz Young Fox, "Notes Concerning Joseph Smith's Plat of Zion City," mimeo, LDS Archives, 3. Fox corrects mistaken versions of the plat published elsewhere.

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⁸ See Lowry Nelson, *The Mormon Village: A Pattern of Technique of Land Settlement* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1952).

⁹ Bushman, 10.

¹⁰ The importance of building the temple was reiterated by Elder Francis Moon, quoted in Robert Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 69.

¹¹ Bushman, 12.

¹² John Humphrey Noyes, address on "Dedication of the New Community Mansion," *Oneida Circular*, Feb. 27, 1862, 9.

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¹⁴ Henry Glassie, "Eighteenth-Century Cultural Process in Delaware Valley Folk Building," *Winterthur Portfolio* 7 (1972): 29-57.

¹⁵ See Fred Kniffen, "Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 55 (December 1965): 549-77; Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk culture of the Eastern United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968); and Fred Kniffen and Henry Glassie, "Building in Wood in the Eastern United States: A Time-Place Perspective," *Geographical Review* 56 (January 1966): 40-66.

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¹⁹ Jessie Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987).

²⁰ Bennion, 118-119.

²¹ Bennion, 121.

²² Bennion, 121.

²³ Irwin Altman and Joseph Ginat, *Polygamous Families in Contemporary Society*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 187.

²⁴ Brigham Young quoted in Richard Francaviglia, "The Mormon Landscape: Existence, creation, and Perception of a Unique Image in the American West," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oregon, 1970, 95.

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²⁶ Altman, 212.

²⁷ Robert I. Bee, *Patterns and Processes: An Introduction to Anthropological*

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²⁹ *The Dialogues of Plato*, 2:509.

³⁰ *Nauvoo Neighbor*, 3 May 1843.

³¹ Brigham Young, Discourse 16, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, ed. John A. Widstoe, Salt Lake City, 1925.

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