In this chapter, we present a cultural analysis of urban residential landscapes in North America, illustrated by two case studies, one from Vancouver, Canada, and another from a suburb of New York. The approach emphasizes both the 'sentiment' and 'symbolism' of landscapes, and the political-economic process by which they are produced and preserved. A number of authors - including Firey (1945), Seeley et al. (1963), Lowenthal and Prince (1965), Duncan (1973), Perin (1977), Duncan and Duncan (1980), Pratt (1981), and Rapoport (1981) - have argued that landscapes are a major repository of symbols of social status. The importance of the residential landscape as a symbol of individual or group identity varies cross-culturally (Rapoport 1981). In highly individualistic capitalist societies (such as the USA or Canada), where status is largely achieved rather than being ascribed by membership in a caste or kin group, a major means of communicating social identity is through private, 'conspicuous' consumption of objects (Agnew 1981). The dwelling, together with the status level of its locality, is one of the principal symbols of social status. Even within these societies, however, the meaning of the residential landscape and its role in communicating social identity vary. For example, Couper and Brindley (1975) distinguish two different English attitudes toward the house or residence: some see the house as an achievement and status symbol; while others believe that it is a right to be provided by the state.

In India, Duncan and Duncan (1976) identified groups whose social networks are relatively open and individualistic. Among these groups, individuals are socially mobile, and, as a consequence, the house and residential landscape provide an important marker of social identity. Among more traditional groups, on the other hand, this function of the residential landscape is less important because the social networks are largely closed, and social standing within the kinship group is well
established by birth and intimate knowledge of one another. Within North America, one finds groups whose class or ethnic backgrounds are such that their social networks are also closed to a significant degree, and among whom, therefore, conspicuous consumption is not needed to establish personal status. The West Enders of Boston (Gans 1962), and the 'old' wealthy families of Vancouver (Pratt 1981), are but two examples of this kind. These contrast with, for example, members of the upper middle class of 'Crestwood Heights', a fictitious name for a suburb of Toronto (Seeley et al. 1963), or some of the 'new' wealthy families of Vancouver (Pratt 1981), who utilize the house and its setting as a personal expression of the owner's identity.

A cultural analysis of urban landscapes requires a comment on our notion of culture. The culture concept, which has long been important to American anthropologists, has generated much debate among practitioners. This debate swirls around two antinomies: structure-action and determinism-freedom. Should culture be considered a superorganic structure which determines action, and therefore explains it, or should culture be seen as a loosely structured system of behavior with little explanatory power? In this chapter, following Geertz (1973), we will argue that culture is not an explanatory variable. On the contrary, it is what is to be explained or, less ambitiously, commented upon. Its complexity must be prised apart; one must not only discover the origins of various cultural elements, but also show what these elements mean to people, their relationship to group and individual identity, to what ends they are put, and the manner in which people struggle or fail to struggle to maintain or change them.

The two case studies we explore are of residential landscapes which signify the culture of two partly closed elite groups. These people are committed to a form of residential living which owes its origins to a particular version of 'English landscape taste.' As the elite, they have influenced landscape tastes, and have been imitated. To a degree, this landscape occurs in modified form, although often more conspicuously packaged, in other Canadian and American cities. The elite landscape is found in some older American and Canadian cities, and in western Canada. It is based on the ideal of an English country manor. As such, it can be viewed as one element in a whole cultural system of practices and ideas. This system has been adapted to North America, and its popularity has spread beyond its original centers.

We shall show that the creation and preservation of these landscapes, which have both class and ethnic connotations, serve in part as a vehicle by which the integrity of a cultural group is maintained. Landscapes and other elements of a culture are used to define membership in a culture group through reaffirmation of members' values, and exclusion of non-members. The process not only involves conscious socio-political action,
but also results from the unintended consequences of collective action based on unarticulated, 'taken-for-granted' values. A residential landscape helps in the reproduction of a class or status group because it is an important repository of symbols of social class and ethnic heritage. Increasingly subtle variations allow it to continue to serve this function for a particular cultural group, while certain elements of the model are adopted by members of the wider society.

Following further elaboration of the link between culture and landscape in the next section, we proceed to sketch the origins of the English country house ideal, and indicate why it is so dominant in English landscape development. With the desire of certain elites in Canada and the United States to emphasize their connections (directly in some cases, but, for most others, by association) to Britain (or, more specifically, England), this landscape is re-created in such different parts of North America as Westchester, New York, and Vancouver, British Columbia. The linkages are delineated, and the resultant landscapes are introduced in the third section.

Such residential districts with their signifying landscapes do not endure without effort on the part of the residents to safeguard the landscapes and their meanings. The struggle is political as the elites successfully use and manipulate land-use control instruments and public opinion; they also enlist the aid of sympathetic public officials to preserve these historic places. The struggle here is not so much with the masses of the working class or the upwardly mobile petty bourgeoisie, as with the nouveaux riches. Members of this group have the economic ability to enter the elite preserves, but, lacking the anglophile culture, must either have their building intentions carefully controlled or be educated into emulating the old elite. The political issues arising from this attempt to impose the landscape of one group within a class upon others now in that same class are described and interpreted, both somewhat generally and with specific reference to Westchester and Vancouver.

A cultural approach to urban residential landscape

A culture is a complex but amorphous web of ideas and practices that forms the context of social action. It is a meaning system, an interpretive framework that is largely shaped by experience, but also by a continual interpretation of changing events. Within North America, there is a large amount of cultural variation (e.g. Canada–USA). Cultural analysis has tended to focus upon regional and ethnic differences. A less common approach has focused upon cultural variations between social classes. We view class in cultural terms, but pay particular attention to what Weber termed status group divisions within classes. Status groups are marked by
specific patterns of consumption, or, more generally, style of life. Cultural analysis of classes and status groups is important because it firmly ties questions of identity to questions of social and political order.

As geographers, we are particularly concerned with the interaction of landscapes and culture. We want to see how objects within residential landscapes and associated meanings are conveyed from generation to generation, a point of particular interest as a self-conscious link to the past is one of the critical characteristics defining the groups we are studying. We also want to see how political action helps to maintain a particular kind of cultural landscape and, hence, the identity which that landscape symbolizes.

The residential landscapes of the upper-class groups considered here have their roots in a past time and place. It is unlikely that such elite groups are more than partly aware of or understand the historical symbolism of their landscapes. The meaning of many landscape elements has changed, adapted to the nature of late 20th-century North American societies. We will argue, however, that although the overt, superficial meaning of these elements has changed, a deeper underlying meaning remains, symbolizing privilege, inequality, and class interest. A culture is often elusive to those who live in it precisely because, while the past has a massive impact on the present, the meaning systems of the past, the interpretive frame through which earlier generations saw and constructed a world of objects, ideas, and institutions, is only partially understood, if at all.

Cultural change is continuous but rarely cataclysmic. Rather than rejecting the past totally, people more often filter it selectively. They change or forget past meanings, yet artifacts and stylized forms of behavior remain. For example, the Tudor-style house, the symbolism of which we shall discuss later, is seen by the groups we have studied as a prestigious architectural style, but they have only the vaguest idea why this should be so. Were they to know the 19th-century symbolism of the Tudor house, they might be less attracted to it, or at least ambivalent about it. The meaning of objects of this kind is continually being replaced by new or modified meanings. The changes are complex, leaving contradictions between artifact and use, meaning and behavior, and rendering the web of meanings called culture opaque.

The dominant image of the English landscape

Residential landscapes simultaneously contain many different meanings which are conveyed to those who can understand, at different levels of abstraction. The landscapes of elites symbolize social class, and, within class, status groups, and, more personally, memories and sentiments of youth and acquaintances of the past. Why has an English landscape type
been adopted by an elite in America and Canada, and why have the country house and garden become its archetype?

The image of the English country house in contemporary North America is based upon a 19th- and 20th-century English revival of the country-house tradition (Girouard 1981). In the late 18th century, the view of the urban English upper and upper middle classes toward the country and country pursuits became increasingly romantic. At the close of this period, a network of good roads made the estates being transformed through enclosure accessible to an urban-based elite (Girouard 1981, pp. 214–18). The idealized country residence was re-created in peripheral parts of the 19th-century English cities (Lowenthal & Prince 1965, pp. 189–90). In both country and city, the effect that was sought during the Victorian era was both pastoral and picturesque, a landscape that evoked a mood of romantic nostalgia for the rural past. In the countryside, according to Lowenthal and Prince (1965, p. 192):

The favored landscape is what Turner denoted ‘elegant pastoral’ as distinct from merely ‘pastoral’; it calls to mind traditional upper-class tastes and pursuits. What is considered ‘essentially English’ is a calm and peaceful deer park, slow moving streams and wide expanses of meadowland studded with fine trees.

In a city such as London, the picturesque ideal had the qualities of ‘closeness, variety, and intimacy, and the ever-recurring contrasts of tall and low, of large and small, of wide and narrow, of straight and crooked, the closes and retreats and odd leafy corners’ (Pevsner 1957, p. 105). In both city and country in specific instances, the new was made to look like the old and to blend unobtrusively with ‘natural’ surroundings that landscape architects had designed to improve upon nature (Girouard 1981, p. 228). During the 19th century, the country house, and its garden transplanted into the city, was the architectural manifestation of this ideal.

In England during the latter half of the 19th century, nostalgia for the countryside, more specifically the life of the gentry, took the form of a "Tudor" style in houses, which was to blossom into the rage for ‘Old English’ that swept well-to-do suburban areas and diffused down to the middle classes during the first third of the 20th century (Wiener 1981, p. 66). Coupled with the Tudor revival was a dramatic increase of interest in the preservation of old buildings. The result of these two trends was ‘a generalized historicity and rusticity - the purpose of which was to convey a feeling of Old Rural England, rather than to adhere to any particular and consistent style’ (Wiener 1981, p. 650).

At one level, this development simply represented a "yearning for an idealized rural past", a recurring pattern, Raymond Williams (1973) tells us, whereby successive generations of upper and middle class English people idealized a reconstructed and partially "fictional" past. The irony, he
notes, is that in the late 19th and the 20th centuries, 'there is almost an inverse proportion ... between the relative importance of the working rural economy and the cultural importance of rural ideas' (Williams 1973, p. 248). Underlying both the 'Old English' imagery and the preservation movement is another set of symbols; according to Williams (1973), these find their roots in the class struggle associated with the Industrial Revolution.

Another interpretation is that this architectural cult of the past was intimately and explicitly bound up in a conservative, upper-class denigration of capitalism, industrialism, and the new manufacturing classes who were increasingly challenging the fading supremacy of the landed aristocratic elite (Wiener 1981, p. 64). Building in this style, and the preservation of the old, not only symbolized but concretized a critique of industrialism, and represented an attempt to return to an older way of life. At the turn of the last century, contemporary ideas of design were excluded because they were modern, and represented a new industrial and social order which was thought unable to provide a satisfactory living environment (Wiener 1981, pp. 64-72).

Some members of the late 19th-century landed gentry saw the rustic, anti-bourgeois symbolism of the English Tudor and country-manor styles, but not all consciously made this link (Wiener 1981). As these styles were imitated more widely, the anti-bourgeois symbolism was submerged. They came to represent a derivation of elite landscapes, but lacking the anti-capitalist connotation.

In North America, as in England, the country house had its urban counterpart. One case we consider, Westchester County, New York, is rural, or, at least, 'exurban,' the other is in the city of Vancouver, Canada. Different elements of the country-house style are stressed in the two areas: the pastoral ideal in Westchester and the 'Old English' house in Vancouver. Both have in common the 'estate character' of the area. In 19th-century England, estates often comprised tens of thousands of acres, but, in 20th-century North America, an 'estate' is much more modest. In Westchester, despite residents' demands for a minimum lot size of 20 acres to preserve the 'estate character' of the area, municipal officials settled upon a 4-acre minimum, arguing that this was sufficient. In marked contrast, in Vancouver, lots in our study area were at least 1 acre. Therefore, the notion of a country estate is vague, and its specifics vary dramatically according to cultural context.

The landscape of anglophilé élites. Westchester and Vancouver

Our first study area, an affluent suburban town (i.e. township) in Westchester County, is a 'picture-postcard' village of unspoiled beauty,
cherished by its residents, some of whose forebears lived in the town in the 17th and 18th centuries. The town consists of several hamlets of white wooden and red brick shops and public buildings, some dating back to 1789. All around are gently rolling hills, open meadowlands with horses grazing, woods of oak and hemlock, rivers, ponds, and swamps. Tall maple and oaks overhang the roads, many of which are of dirt and lined with dry-stone walls and wild flowers. Although passers-by cannot see many of them, the hilltops are dotted with late 19th-century and early 20th-century mansions, now hidden by tall trees and approached by long gravel driveways. Many are complete with one or two gatehouses, gardeners' cottages, and stables. Young couples find that such gatehouses and cottages can be made into sophisticated apartments, now that many are no longer occupied by servants.

As one resident put it, the people of the town see their community as a 'sanctuary from the buffeting of a too-competitive world. To those who know its rich store of natural resources and its priceless heritage from history, it is a sanctified holy spot.'

Interviews with more than 40 residents reveal an almost universally shared preference for a decidedly English style of landscape. The terms 'pastoral,' 'bucolic,' 'rural,' and 'historical' crop up over and over again in reference to what residents value about the landscape. The open meadowlands, stone walls, great oaks and other deciduous trees are all valued, but perhaps the most highly valued symbols of the town are the country estate with its rambling main house and informal, often overgrown gardens, the opportunities for riding on dirt roads and bridle trails, and fox hunting. This taste for the pastoral and old, the respect for old families and 'old money,' for all that is well worn, is English in origin. It contrasts with some of the neighboring towns, where one finds a preference for a more Germanic landscape of conifers and rock outcroppings with well designed contemporary architecture, or a preference for the more Mediterranean formal garden, columns, and neoclassical elegance. The cult of the old allows a certain seediness of house and garden; it is studied seediness, however, such as one finds in the aristocratic English model it reflects.

This Westchester town occupies what was once some of the choicest farmland in the county. Late in the 19th century, the area became a popular location for the building of gentlemen's estates, and for riding and fox hunting. Among the prosperous commercial class, building country estates was a conscious or unconscious mimicking of the English landed gentry, and paralleled the same movement in England. In England in 1900, the new rich set up country houses, were given titles, and took the train to their offices (Girouard 1981, p. 301). For some, country houses symbolize tradition, and standing; the model was clearly outlined for the uninitiated through Country Life magazine: the houses were presented
discretely and made to look as old as possible. As one contributor to *Country Life* put it, 'land had ceased being a major source of wealth and the country house was now valued more as a symbol of ancestry than of economic power.' Yet the rural, 'aristocratic' ancestry of the property owners, both in England and elsewhere, was often fictitious.

Today in Westchester, the model of the English country house has prestige, and its origins appeal to many, even those whose ancestry is not English. The landscape tastes of the residents and potential buyers of houses are clearly reflected in real-estate advertisements. Many are obviously designed to recall the country-estate ideal, usually emphasizing the setting more than the house. Advertisements for houses in the area appearing in the *New York Times* real-estate sections in 1982 and 1983 have such headings as 'In the grand *manor* (sic) - horse country; *English garden*; 'Rolling hunt country'; 'Country gentlemen'; 'English park setting'; 'Maples, meadows, old stone walls'; 'Pastoral views'; 'Dirt road and rolling fields'; 'Listen to the hunting horn'; 'High meadows'; 'Turn of century *estate* in the heart of horse country; and 'Peaceful open rolling land'.

Symbols of the English landed gentry are today considered prestigious among many groups in North America. One finds people of different class and ethnic backgrounds favoring some of these landscape elements. For example, a recent article in *Esquire* magazine (Smith 1982, p. 14) stated:

> The art form favored in the dining rooms of most Wall Street houses is English sporting prints, pheasants, retrievers, shooting sticks, pink-coated riders taking a stirrup cup before pursuing a fox. None of the proper ancestors of true Wall Streeters wore pink coats, and there was no tradition among the urban Dutch, the urban Jews or even the counting-house English, of pursuing foxes. But that British image continues to be projected.

*Builder* (1982 p. 32), a magazine for home builders and architects, recently published a survey of American preferences for different types of houses. The two most highly favored were farmhouses and Tudors, which suggests both an anti-urban bias and the influence of English styles. The Vancouver neighborhood we have studied makes explicit the tie to England. More than any other neighborhood, it symbolizes the prestigious cultural (i.e. British) heritage of the city in the minds of citizens and city officials alike. This suburban district was located and designed in the first quarter of the 20th century under the control of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), a major landowner in Vancouver then as now (thanks to outright grants to induce the railway company to locate its Pacific terminus in the city). It was the culmination of a series of
fashionable districts developed by the CPR in the burgeoning cities of the Canadian west. Company officials (and their surveyors/designers) were undoubtedly familiar with the elite residential areas in such major centers of socioeconomic power as Toronto and Montreal, and with certain parts of Ottawa (the nation's capital), where railway and national politics were commingled.

The design reflects a late 19th-century vision of residential architecture and landscaping (Hardwick 1974 pp. 105–6) expressed by such phrases as 'picturesque landscape,' 'garden city,' 'naturalism,' and 'country life.' These were key phrases defining the later phases of the romantic movement in architecture and landscape design both in England and North America. Streets were laid out to follow the contours of the hilly topography. The district was consciously designed to reflect the picturesque 'country home' approach to the residence that had been popularized by A. J. Downing and Calvert Vaux in America, and J. C. Loudon and P. Webb in England. Most of the houses which dominate the area's architecture recall half-timbered Tudor structures and the romanticism of the neo-Gothic. The area was designed to have, what the residents now like to term, a secluded estate-like quality with 'grand-scale' houses partially hidden behind landscaping. Access to the typical property is marked by entrance posts and, in the case of the largest properties, by gatehouses. The climate, which is like that of southern England, contributes to the image.

The anglophile culture of the elites that we have examined helps to explain why they have copied the manor-house style. Presumably this particular style was adopted because it has been the elite cultural model in Britain from the 1850s to the present. In Vancouver at the turn of the century, members of the Canadian-born elite went so far as to bring over some of the most famous country-house architects in Britain (such as Baillie Scott) to create 'authentic' Tudor-style houses for them. Of course, as Prince suggests with respect to England, 'the Tudor we now look upon is not sixteenth-century Tudor, but what twentieth-century builders think Tudor ought to look like' (quoted in Lowenthal 1975, p. 32). The style of the gentry represents for anglophile elites, in both the USA and Canada, the image of themselves which they wish to convey.

These elites are the New World counterparts of the bourgeoisie that the late 19th-century British aristocracy was trying to fend off (Wiener 1981). They are the children of trade, people whose families made their money in dry goods, timber, steel, and the like, among whom 'old money' is money that may have been made as late as the early 20th century. Yet, at a deeper level, the disparagement of 'new money' embodied in the aristocratic critique of the bourgeoisie remains. What one finds in North America is a distorted image of the struggle between the aristocracy and the new bourgeoisie in 19th-century England. In North America, the
struggle, as one would expect within a social context with no aristocracy, is taking place entirely within the bourgeoisie, between the old commercial class and the new. The old commercial class, which forms the elite in the two North American areas, has followed in the footsteps of successful 19th-century English businessmen in taking on the trappings of an older aristocratic tradition. It displays an appreciation for the Old English style and tries to preserve its residential landscapes, with early 20th-century Tudor and neo-Gothic copies, and despises the nouveau riche who have moved into its preserves and put up either late 20th-century copies or houses of contemporary design.

What often exacerbates the division between old and new money are the ethnic and cultural differences between an old Anglo-Saxon elite and a new elite whose background is more diverse, drawn not only from non-Anglo-Saxon Western Europe but also from Eastern and Southern Europe, and, increasingly in British Columbia, from Asia. The distance separating them is not merely that between a newly affluent English bourgeoisie and an established English gentry, but the distance between a North American bourgeois copy of that gentry and a newly moneymad group, of which many know nothing of English landscape tastes and some even find them unattractive.

In our examination of the origins of the English country-house tradition and its transportation to the New World, we have focused upon a set of cultural symbols in the built environment. Throughout this discussion there has, of course, been an undercurrent of the class and status-based nature of this landscape. Although the English symbol is crucial for understanding this upper-class residential landscape type, it does not exhaust the messages that can be read in it. It also symbolizes class and status in a way that is analytically separate from its image of England.

Controlling the residential landscape

For our purpose, the residential landscape has two interrelated but analytically distinct sets of cultural meanings, one having to do with class, the other with status. These meanings will have communicative value extending across the society. The size, style, and decoration of a house, the size of the lot, the type and amount of landscaping, and the location and reputation of a neighborhood within a city or town all represent class. That is to say, they represent economic power in a society where personal success is largely marked by the possession of objects (Agniew 1981). Social-class distinctions are clearly acted out in the residential environments for all to see.

Americans, and, to a lesser degree, Canadians, are ambivalent about
social class (Porter 1965, Sennett & Cobb 1973). On the one hand, and especially in America, there is the ideology of equality, the notion that all are born equal, and in some sense remain equal for the remainder of their lives. On the other hand, there is the ideology of social mobility - the ideal of the self-made man who rises in social class. Both stem from a bourgeois critique of aristocratic privilege and of a society in which position is based on ascriptive status, rather than success in economic competition. Although all segments of American society would reject the idea of aristocratic privilege as the basis for an acceptable social order, there is evidence to suggest that important segments of the upper class in North America mimic an aristocratic tradition, and adopt ascription as (in part) a basis of social life, at least in the realm of consumption. Forms of ascriptive behavior were also to be found within the realm of production, and perhaps still are. The importance to the eastern business establishment of attending an Ivy League university, and the exclusion of Jews from many large corporations, are examples of ascriptive behavior. In short, there appears to be a persistent tendency among those who have risen to the top of North American society to block the type of social mobility that they themselves experienced. Charlotte Curtis, a journalist who has long observed the American rich, describes this tendency nicely when she writes (Curtis 1976, p. x):

While professing a dedication to the principle of equality, Americans have consistently worked at being unequal. They close ranks, change rules and move onward whenever threatened by whatever levelling-up the marauder appears to be gaining on them, which seems to have been constantly.

This ascriptive social organization within the upper class creates status groups, which, as Weber pointed out, have different styles of life centered around consumption. The existence of status groups within a class-based society poses some interesting dilemmas, both of a theoretical nature for the social scientist, and of a practical nature for the actors themselves. The principal dilemma is this: in a society based on economic class - one in which there is no formal ascriptive basis such as an aristocracy — the upper class may be extremely permeable. In theory, those who earn great wealth enter, and those who lose a portion of their wealth drop out and become members of the middle class. But the workings of the upper strata of North American society show that they are not quite so permeable. In a class society where success is largely marked through the possession of objects, houses, cars, jewels, furs, and the like, identity, in part at least, can be bought. The link between objects and identity has been readily grasped and exploited by manufacturers who assure us that, if only we will consume their products, we will become
more beautiful, wiser, and achieve a higher status among our peers. An example of this marketing of identity is to be found in one of our study areas where a developer built some expensive townhouses on the former property of one of the area's old families. The advertising campaign for these townhouses stressed the fact that they had been built on a former estate, and suggested that the future owners of the units could acquire an upper-class image by purchasing a unit. The advertisement concluded by stating that one could demonstrate one's social standing by living in such an environment.

The fact that identity in capitalist societies can, at least in part, be bought, and no formal mechanism for marking status exists, is a problem for segments of the upper class, which we call the old elite. Put slightly differently, there is an 'internal' struggle within the upper class between different status groups — between an entrenched old elite and a newer segment of the upper class that is vying with the old elite for social prestige. This status struggle within a class is in part a conflict over the residential landscape. The conflict sheds light not only on the role played by the environment in the formation and maintenance of identity, but also on the concepts of class interest and class identity. The old elites that we have studied, both in Westchester and Vancouver, form what Weber calls status groups. They comprise the 'old' families, entrenched elites whose money goes back at least one generation, and often several. They see themselves as a kind of local aristocracy, modeled upon their version of the English upper class, residing in an environment that has been designed in the English image over several generations.

The old elites show little solidarity with other members of their economic class, at least in consumption. Quite the contrary, members of these elites single out the newer members of their class, the nouveau riche, as the people they must oppose. Individuals who may speak about the poor, and even the middle class, in quite generous terms are invariably hostile toward new members of their own class. One influential member of the Vancouver old elite said, in particularly evocative terms, 'We would like to encourage artists, professors, and other nice people without a great deal of money to purchase coach houses in our area. These are the sorts of people that we want, not those awful nouveau riche people who build monstrosities.' Implicit in all this is the assumption that middle-class professionals would not change their landscape: they would move into the coach houses and no one would notice them. New money, on the other hand, has deployed its economic power to change the landscape by constructing new mansions that reflect tastes not shared by the old elite.

If an old elite's control over residential land breaks down, and if enough money can buy property in the neighborhood, in North America such a conflict could be seen as one between status groups rather than classes. However, the old elites have skillfully manipulated the political process in
order to reassert some control over the landscape. Zoning laws have been used, both in Westchester and in Vancouver, to protect their landscapes from unwanted values do not simply survive; they must be fought for.

Westchester There is politics in preserving landscapes, which may involve zoning and environmental protection (as in Westchester), or the institution of strict design guidelines (as in Vancouver). Lowenthal and Prince (1965, p. 193) say of England:

From the condemnation of planning and regimentation, one might well suppose the picturesque to be a series of happy accidents, and conclude that the desired impression of roughness and irregularity was entirely fortuitous. Nothing is further from the truth; the picturesque is contrived and composed with as much care as any geometrical layout.

The picturesque landscape of suburban Westchester is carefully planned and vigorously monitored. As early as 1928, members of the local garden club, and other politically active groups in the Westchester town who were concerned about the natural environment of the area, instituted a zoning code for the town which would preserve its beauty for future generations. The present residents still care deeply about protecting the natural environment and preserving the town's historical heritage. This is done through tightly controlled zoning laws, wetlands ordinances, historical preservation districts, and the vigilance of citizens willing to devote their time to opposing new development by forming neighborhood organizations and attending town meetings.

The preservation of this picturesque, idyllic landscape, with its unspoiled country atmosphere, absence of neon signs or other symbols of the modern commercial era, and authentic historical townscapes, has not been without social cost. To understand the degree of government control and planning that has produced a landscape of such 'natural' beauty, one must place it within the context of the larger social, economic, and political realities of the New York metropolitan region of which it is a part. More people are now employed in suburbs than in central cities. Many suburbs, however, are able to regulate the numbers and types of people who can live there by establishing zoning laws, building codes, subdivision regulations, and restrictions against multifamily housing and mobile homes. Such exclusionary activities have exacerbated the fiscal problems of central cities, restricted the access of urban residents to suburban jobs, and contributed to house price escalation in suburban districts (Cox 1979). The Westchester study area has over 90 percent of its area zoned for single-family housing at a 4-acre minimum. Given that the
majority of towns surrounding it also have exclusionary zoning (80 percent of the residential land in the county is zoned for a minimum of 1 to 4 acres), over 90 percent of the New York metropolitan area's population cannot afford to live in most of this exclusive county (Shipler 1974, p. 114).

How are we to account for the residential landscapes of Westchester? Who or what is to be credited with preserving the natural beauty and historical heritage of this Westchester town? And what explains the inequitable distribution of private and public resources within the county that necessarily goes hand in hand with the preservation of picturesque landscapes? The answer, in part, lies in the individualistic ideology found in North America which refuses to acknowledge collective responsibility (everyone, it is believed, earns his own place in society). Interviews among town residents and less affluent residents of nearby towns confirm this. The nearly universal attitude is that if one can afford to buy a 4-acre lot, one deserves it.

The zoning is taken for granted as right and natural, and the interdependence between the various types of environments throughout the county and metropolitan region is not acknowledged. Therefore, highly restrictive planning measures can be used to achieve the illusion of an unplanned, natural environment populated by gentlemen farmers. None of them, however, could privately afford the amount of land one would have to own in order to live in such a landscape, without a strong local government to control development and restrict the access to the town of people who, simply by their numbers, would spoil the environment for those who live there.

Even the more subtle landscape features that make the town appear so attractively quaint, such as dirt roads, are not simply a relic from the past, but are carefully preserved at great expense to the taxpayers of the town. Dirt roads require far more time-consuming maintenance than hard-surfaced roads. Time and again, controversy over dirt roads in the town has resulted in passionate pleas to retain them. Very proper, upper-class ladies have been successful in halting the paving of such roads by lying down in front of town trucks and bulldozers!

There has been a threat of lawsuits against the town over the issue of exclusionary zoning. However, of more than 40 residents interviewed, only 4 mentioned exclusion as one of the purposes of the zoning. These four lived near one of the hamlets behind the commercial district where housing was poor and the lots were small. Thus they did not represent the socioeconomic status of the great majority of the town's residents. However, less affluent residents of the town and surrounding areas generally agreed that the large-lot zoning was beneficial, protecting the rural atmosphere of the town, and giving hope to those who could not afford 4 acres but enjoyed the thought that, if they worked hard and were
successful, they, too, might be able to live in such a beautiful setting. They felt that, in any case, those who could afford it, deserved it.

Environmental protection, a socially acceptable rationale, was often cited as the purpose for large-lot zoning, (see also Frieden 1979). Whether this is a genuine cause or a conscious manipulation to mask the underlying rationale is open to question. The town and its lawyers have been able to make environmental concerns the basis of defending the existing zoning code and the increasing restrictions on development through new wetlands ordinances and even more stringent subdivision regulations. The popularity of the ecology movement throughout the wider society has greatly aided the town in its efforts to maintain the quality of the environment for the residents.

The following is a trivial example, but one which clearly illustrates several points that have been made: the reverence for what is old; the love of nature, particularly of deciduous trees in open meadows; and the ability of members of the town to convince the wider public of the value of preserving the town's green spaces and historical resources. There is a very large oak tree, that is thought to be 500 years old, standing at one end of one of the town's most prestigious residential roads, a long winding dirt road. The tree stands on a small plot of land owned by the town and enclosed by a stone wall. Beyond is a large open field which was bought by a builder. Residents of the town, particularly those who live nearby, were distressed at the thought of any new construction so near the revered tree. They launched a campaign to raise enough money to buy the land back from the builder, and succeeded in doing so. One informant disclosed that donations to the fund to save the open space around the tree included the proceeds from a bake-sale held by children from a poor neighborhood in a city 25 miles away.

The belief, expressed by the residents, in the value to the wider society of preserving large, open areas of green space, and protecting the historical heritage of the town by halting further development, is sincere. Not only those who live in the town, but many others who are confined to poorer, more urbanized areas and therefore do not benefit directly from the town's country atmosphere, do not appear to recognize the interdependence among the towns and the negative effect that large-lot zoning has on the housing situation of the metropolitan region as a whole. Seventy percent of those who were asked if they believed that large-lot zoning in one town affected surrounding areas said no. This privatism, or the belief that individuals or towns are independent of one another and should have the right to decide use of the land without regard to others, is a characteristic of highly individualistic societies which has proved advantageous to those wishing to preserve their own neighborhoods.
Vancouver  From its very creation in the early 1900s, the builders and residents of the Vancouver study area have struggled to maintain an English image. The Canadian Pacific Railroad, which owned and developed the land on the outskirts of their city, also controlled the layout of the streets and even checked the plans of the 1150 homes that they helped finance in the area, to assure that they conformed to the company's standards on price, quality, and appearance (Holdsworth 1977, Bottomley 1978). The railway had the area zoned for single-family housing, and produced the most expensive and fashionable residential area in the city, thereby greatly increasing the value of their unsold adjacent land. In the 1920s, in order to increase their control over the neighborhood, residents, with the company's blessing, successfully lobbied the provincial government to give the area a special zoning code that would limit the land-use control powers of the city. But even with such political gains, the area could not withstand the economic pressures of the Depression, which drove many owners of larger mansions to abandon them, and others to take boarders in secretly. (The latter threat to the single-family nature of the area was increased when the federal government passed a wartime edict in 1941 allowing boarders in all residential districts in Canada.) During the 1930s, a property owners' association was created whose purpose was to preserve the character of the area and to lower taxes for the residents so that they could afford to maintain their mansions. This association has continued to serve as the watchdog of the area, reporting violators of the area's codes to the province or the city, and taking violators to court when necessary. In the late 1960s, despite a massive lobbying effort by the property owners' association, the province turned the zoning control of the neighborhood back to the city. The association then persuaded the city to create a special zoning category for the area and amend the city's charter to allow special interest groups, such as the property owners' association, to prosecute violators of the zoning code. Within a few years, the association decided that these restrictions alone were not going to preserve the nature of the area completely, as some demolition of large homes and subdivision of properties continued. The property owners fought these changes, preparing briefs that were presented to the city planning department whenever a subdivision or demolition application arose. They were constantly on the lookout for violators of the area's zoning; they patrolled the neighborhood looking for unauthorized construction, and even hired private investigators to weed out illegal boarders. Although their action greatly retarded change in the area, they could not stop it completely. The association therefore decided that stronger political action had to be taken, in the form of a new and more restrictive zoning code for the area. Not only did they want subdivision and demolition to stop, but they wanted to control the appearance of all future development in the area. This degree of landscape
control was to go even beyond that exerted by the railroad in the early days.

The association successfully lobbied the city, and was allowed to create a citizens' committee to draft a plan to preserve the neighborhood. The committee, which was dominated by members of the association, was to work in conjunction with the local area planner, and the resulting plan would guide all future development in the neighborhood.

The shaping of this plan, and hence of the landscape, took place within the broader arena of Vancouver politics. Political opinion in the city over the past decade has focused on two major issues, one of which was a liability and the other an asset from the committee's point of view. The liability was that the city was experiencing a housing shortage which stemmed from a lack of land, while the association planned to increase minimum lot sizes. The asset was that the other major political issue in the city for the past decade had been 'livability,' which stressed local community participation in government, the fostering of visually and socially distinct neighborhoods, and the preservation both of green space and of areas of historical significance to the city. The association successfully played down the impact of the plan on the housing shortage, and argued its case on the basis of livability.

It was fortunate for this committee that the ideology of livability provided a culturally acceptable way of putting forward its own landscape tastes, not simply as being in the interests of an elite, but of the whole city. The ideology of livability was used to convert class interest into general interest.

The plan which was finally worked out with the city planning department was to institutionalize English landscape tastes in the neighborhood. The preamble to the official plan made this quite clear. The architecture in the area, it stated:

was greatly influenced by the Romantic Movement and consists of a sophisticated manipulation and blending of various styles based on earlier historic examples. Many houses are modelled after the Tudor style. The dominant approach, however, was to create a country-estate in an urban setting.

The plan hoped not only to preserve this image, but to enhance it. As a sympathetic city councillor who attended one of the planning meetings stated: 'The problem is you want to design guidelines to make people imitate a 1920-style imitation Tudor.' The committee realized that it would not be a simple matter to make new development resemble English country houses of the early 20th century. Some imitation Tudors that had been recently built were considered unacceptable. A committee member summed up the association's feelings:
A new house has recently gone up which is a Tudor imitation. But the timbers are matchsticks and the leaded windows are tape. This is simply awful. How can we avoid it? How can we legislate against it? What we want are houses built with traditional materials.

Perhaps nowhere in the plan does the English landscape ideal emerge more clearly than in an architectural rating of existing houses that was appended. The houses were divided into categories according to how closely they conformed to the country-house ideal. Unacceptable architecture did not meet the standards of the English picturesque landscape tradition . . . and . . . the building could be removed entirely with little or no regrettable loss to the architectural fabric of the area. The plan further guaranteed that no more houses that are not compatible with the English picturesque landscape tradition would ever be built. Moreover, its design guidelines are simply the latest and most thorough attempt to exert a kind of cultural control over those who move into the area. They cannot keep the new elite out, but the design guidelines can maintain the old elite's taste, forcing newcomers' housing and landscaping to look like their own.

It may seem odd that the old elite should seek to force others to emulate their tastes, since one might think that they would wish to mark the differences between them and people they disdain. However, since the new elite has already entered their neighborhood and taken over a part of their identity, the old elite's goal is simply to make them disappear from view. Since they are excluded from the old elite's networks and clubs, the design guidelines that will make future development resemble the old elite housing will accomplish this. As an observer at the planning committee's meetings, one often has the impression that, in many respects, the old elite is primarily interested in creating an illusion: they make new houses resemble old ones; garages appear to be coach houses; and new houses look like the coach house or the servants' quarters of the large house on an adjacent property. But they can only create the illusion of an English landscape of the 19th century, of estates with servants. Even their cherished priority of maintaining the area as one of single-family detached houses was negotiable so long as the illusion remained. As one committee member said, reflecting the general committee's views: If the house is well designed, who cares what the use is, so long as it looks single family and the parking is concealed. It is indeed ironic that members of the old elite insist that there should be an honest use of materials' in the design of buildings when the whole landscape is fakery.

This debate over neighborhood preservation reflects nostalgia (a belief that a city should have an area of historic significance), but also, and this is an element not often noted in regard to preservation, the use of a tool by which one status group within the upper class tries to fend off another. Not all members of the old elite see this connection. For some, the issue is
simply historical preservation; for **others**, there are strong elements of status struggle symbolized by the fight to preserve a particular landscape; and, for yet others, it is simply a sentimental attachment to the landscape of childhood memory.

It is interesting, although not surprising, that while many members of the old elite see this as a struggle between themselves and what they term the **nouveau riche**, this fact is suppressed in the political arena. While drawing up the plan, the committee consistently downplayed class, and emphasized the physical nature of the area or its historical merit. In societies as ambivalent about class as those in North America, this is strategically necessary. For example, the following interchange took place at a committee strategy session regarding an early draft of the plan:

*We should decrease the emphasis on the well-to-do exclusiveness of the area. Is this emphasis good public relations? Does it add to our claim of historic preservation?*

*We must present the neighborhood as an area of historical significance to people in the suburbs as well as the rest of the city. Perhaps any mention in the plan of rich people will turn them off.*

*Yes, remove any reference from the plan to helping people maintain large properties. The press will pick this up as a preoccupation of ours. Do you want to see this printed in the press?*

Not only did the old elite skilfully define the debate around the popular issue of preservation, they were also able to portray it as a struggle between the interests of residents and those of developers. Opposition to developers, which is genuine among the old elite, was used to gain allies, which they could not have done had they portrayed their adversaries as the new rich moving into the houses built by developers. Opposition to developers was, in this instance, a successful political stratagem because it cut across class lines in a society that prefers not to think in terms of class. One does not have to be wealthy to dislike developers, whereas the dislike felt by the old elite for the new would have been dismissed as upper-class snobbery. As objects of nearly universal scorn in **1970s** Vancouver, developers were useful scapegoats for the purposes of the old elite because they serve to mask class sentiment.

Three years after the committee was formed, the plan passed through the city council and became law. For the old elite, it represented a great victory, for it institutionalized their taste. All new development had to conform to the design guidelines which they had created, and the acceptability of a proposed dwelling was to be decided upon by a permanent design-guidelines committee that was dominated by area residents. The preservation of landscape and, more broadly, of cultural
values usually does not just happen, but must be fought over within the political arena, for our society is heterogeneous, different classes, and often status groups within classes, have differing values, tastes, and material interests that they wish to preserve.

Conclusion

We have focused our attention on a particular urban residential landscape, the English country-house complex, and argued that it has symbolic meaning within North America, particularly among certain upper-class groups. This landscape conveys multiple messages which differ according to time, group membership, and individual knowledge. We have shown (following Wiener 1981) how the symbolism of this landscape in late 19th-century Britain was aristocratic and anti-bourgeois. We contend that this landscape was progressively adopted by a bourgeois elite in 20th-century Britain and North America as a symbol of privilege and high status. For North American anglophile elites, it came to represent a symbolic link to pre-industrial Britain, and a form of cultural resistance to the nouveau riche. Membership in the old elite is signified through a set of cultural symbols. The landscape is a tangible statement of who the group is, the past they claim as their own, and their current values. It has come under increasing pressure during the 20th century. The large lots that are integral to this landscape type would not survive if there were a free market in land, for it is more profitable to divide them. The landscape can only be maintained through political action, which has taken the form of zoning laws and design guidelines which effectively legislate taste. In both case studies, the preservation of the cultural landscape typical of a particular class is skilfully portrayed as being in the interests of the wider society. This is accomplished through the use of culturally acceptable themes such as environmental and historic preservation, and livability, and the downplaying of culturally unacceptable categories such as class.

The fight to preserve this landscape in North America has gone on for over a century. Attempts to portray this landscape style as a valuable historical and environmental resource have been successful, perhaps too successful in the eyes of certain members of the old elites, for it has helped to boost its popularity, as shown by the mass production of so-called bypass Tudors in Britain and mini-Tudors in North America. Among the new, moneyed upper class, it has also appeared at times in large developer-built Tudors, which the old elite consider poor replicas of early 20th-century models. As it has diffused, the symbolic meaning as well as the physical form have changed, and each group has disdained its successor's model.

The irony, then, is that the propagandizing that has been necessary to
preserve the landscape has resulted in a profusion of what old elites consider to be unacceptable copies of their houses. When modern copies are built, they threaten the meaning of the landscape held by these groups and thus the integrity of the groups themselves. The very effort of cultural preservation, therefore, contains within it the seeds of cultural change. Political action can retard this change, but cannot ultimately prevent it.

Notes

1 For a discussion of these antinomies in geography, see Agnew and Duncan (1981); and for a critique of the structural-deterministic view of culture in geography, see Duncan (1980). The most recent review of cultural theory is to be found in Ley (1983b).

2 The term old is used in a relative sense here. In some areas, an old elite goes back several hundred years, while in others it might not stretch back beyond the early 20th century. The term old simply distinguishes it within an area from newer members of the economic class.

3 A discussion of some of the political implications of livability is found in Ley (1980, 1983a), and Ley and Mercer (1980).

References


Builder 1982. 5(12), 32.


