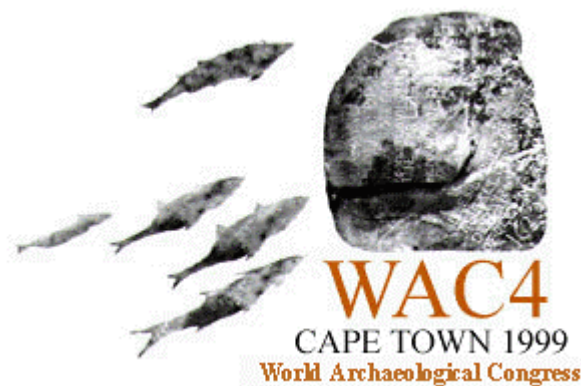


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(Re)Establishing Identity: The Bayview Hunters Point Arts Center

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One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, who dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. - W.E.B. Du Bois

A community's struggle with identity is perceptible through the condition of its civic structures or areas. Bayview/Hunters Point is a community which has been traditionally isolated physically, economically, and socially from the rest of the city of San Francisco. This condition of separation is reflected in the Bayview Opera House/Ruth Williams Memorial Theater which is at the heart of the neighborhood. Built in 1888, the Opera House is the only San Francisco theater to survive the 1906 earthquake and fire.

Christian Norberg-Schulz states "architecture means to visualize the *genius loci*, and the task of the architect is to create meaningful places." A place is a space which has a

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distinct, memorable character (identity). Through the process of memory, a deeper meaning is given to a place, whose significance helps perpetuate its existence. Often associated with places of importance, landmarks are physical manifestations of architecture that contain memorable elements, which contrast with their context and contribute to the identity of a place. Identity is defined as the specific quality which distinguishes a person, group or community from another. This thesis will explore the concept of architecture (re)establishing identity via the development of a *memorable civic landmark* which forms the center of community; this landmark remains part of the contextual urban fabric as the result of placement, program, scale and through the relationship between the street, plaza and building. The proposal is for the Bayview Arts Center, a new creative and performing arts/training facility, to complement the renovation of the Bayview Opera House into a symbol of the revitalization and identity for the community

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Identity and the Built Environment

In designing within a contested/marginalised landscape, identity is a critical aspect for all involved, from designer to client, and to those who live within the community. Built form can convey a powerful message, not only from an aesthetic standpoint but also a social and economic one. What gets built, for whom, and how quickly are often a reflection of one's place in society. In the United States, very often in urban environments, especially where people of color reside, the condition of the built environment is a reflection of the overall health of a community.

A community's struggle with identity is perceptible through the condition of its civic structures or areas. Bayview/Hunters Point is a community which has been traditionally isolated physically, economically, and socially from the rest of the city of San Francisco. This condition of separation is reflected in the Bayview Opera House/Ruth Williams Memorial Theater which is at the heart of the neighborhood. What is identity? How is identity physically manifested in the built environment? What are things which can affect identity? What impacts do contested landscapes have on identity? These questions were explored while completing my Master of Architecture thesis. The first three directly through my theoretical research and the fourth through my physical site research and case study of Bayview Hunters Point.

The focus of my thesis was exploring the concept of architecture (re)establishing identity via the development of a *memorable civic landmark* which forms the center of community; this landmark remains part of the contextual urban fabric as the result of placement, program, scale and through the relationship between the street, plaza and building. In defining a *memorable civic landmark* it is necessary to evaluate and understand each of its components. Civic, which means

of and for the people, is that which relates or pertains to a citizen or a city. Civic buildings/spaces usually have a significance or importance associated with them, either by their function (program), location (placement), size (scale) or all three. Civic buildings/spaces are also places where people come together. Landmarks often occur in or define civic buildings/spaces. Kevin Lynch defines landmarks as physical elements, which have a clear form, are unique or memorable, have prominence of spatial location, and often stand out from or contrast their background.¹ Landmarks often serve to identify a location or destination. While civic buildings/spaces and landmarks have been established as significant places, it is the attribute of memorability, and the process of memory, which gives a deeper meaning to an element or place. It is the meaning of a place, which helps to perpetuate its existence. "Identity is intimately tied to memory: both our personal memories, where we have come from and where we have dwelt and collective or social memories interconnected with the histories of our families, neighborhoods, fellow workers, and ethnic communities. Urban landscapes are storehouses for these social memories, because natural features such as hills or harbors, as well as streets, buildings, and patterns of settlement, frame the lives of many people and often outlast many lifetimes."²

Identity in architecture is most often associated with the individual building which receives its identity through its owner/patron, designer, or function. Identity in architecture can also be connected to a particular style or movement such as, modernism, postmodernism, or deconstructivism. Identity is defined as the specific quality which distinguishes a person, group, building or community from another. Two concepts that have a significant impact on identity are double consciousness and *genius loci*. In the *Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois writes "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense always looking at one's self through the

¹ Lynch, p. 78

² Hayden, p. 9

eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, who dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."³ However, double consciousness also affects others perspectives of African-Americans, especially from a western European viewpoint, which considers itself superior.

"*Genius loci* or spirit of place is a Roman concept. According to ancient Roman belief every "independent" being has its *genius*, its guardian spirit. This spirit gives life to people and places."⁴ Place is defined as a space which has a distinct character (identity). Norberg-Schulz states "architecture means to visualize the *genius loci*, and the task of the architect is to create meaningful places. The existential purpose of building (architecture) is therefore to make a site become a place that is to uncover the meanings potentially present in the given environment."⁵

Bayview Hunters Point - Past

In determining *genius loci*, history is an important factor in understanding the evolution and identity of a place. Many of the current conditions of Bayview Hunters Point are not the result of sudden major incidents but rather the culmination of years of policies. Bayview Hunters Point is a neighborhood located in the southeastern corner of San Francisco, California. As a contested landscape, Bayview Hunters Point covers past, present and future, shifting from events of physical conflict to less discernible issues of social, economic and environmental justice. The early history of the Bayview Hunters Point area includes the original Native American inhabitants who in 1775 encountered the Spanish Fathers of Mission Dolores there to convert the "savages" to Christianity. Mission Dolores was then secularized by the Mexican government in 1832. Following the

³ Du Bois, p. 5

⁴ Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, p.18

Mexican-American War in 1848, Mission Dolores along with the rest of the territory of California, came under control of the United States. In 1848, San Francisco was a settlement of 812 people, one year later, with the discovery of gold in 1849 the population grew to 40,000. However, Bayview Hunters Point, then South San Francisco, was separated from the rest of the city by acres of salt marsh that prevented people from settling into the area. This separation also saved the area during the earthquake and fire of 1906 which engulfed the rest of San Francisco. Residential development in Bayview Hunters-Point only began to increase after 1868, when the city relocated the slaughterhouses to "Butchertown," thus beginning a trend of environmental abuse which the community still faces today.⁶ The trash and debris from the meatpacking business provided materials which would be used as fill used to create new land. The majority of the filling occurred in the 1920's with the other major filling done by the Navy in the 1940's. Between 1940 and 1950 the employment opportunities offered by the naval shipyards during World War II and the construction of temporary wartime housing brought a four-fold increase in population to Bayview Hunters Point. The majority of the new residents were African Americans who migrated from the southeastern region of the United States. By the 1950s, 50% of the 45,000 people of Bayview Hunters Point were African-American, with the remaining 50% white, with the larger portion of the white population being Italian-American. However, after the War ended, many people moved into other areas of San Francisco or to the suburbs, except for African American workers who were socially and economically discouraged from doing so. The community received another influx of African American residents in the 1960s under the "urban renewal programs," when the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency razed most of the Western Addition neighborhood and many of the displaced residents moved to Bayview Hunters Point. In addition to the havoc wreaked by

⁵ Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, p. 5 & 18

⁶ Rifkin, p. 22

urban renewal, in 1966 race riots erupted in the neighborhood which were serious enough for the National Guards to be called in and put the area under curfew.⁷ The post World War II decline of Bayview Hunters Point culminated in the closing of the Naval Shipyard in 1974. This was a devastating blow to the community, which it has yet to recover from.

Bayview Hunters Point - Present

Present day Bayview Hunters Point also known as South Bayshore, contains residential, commercial and industrial districts. The community's current 24,000 residents are concerned with public safety, drugs, crime, unemployment and gentrification. Historically it has been the location of the City's heaviest industries, some of its poorest residents, and its greatest concentration of public housing, characteristics which frequently placed it outside the mainstream of San Francisco life.

One of the most serious issues facing the community is that of environmental justice. "South Bayshore has been the locus of some of the city's most noxious and unhealthy industries, including steel manufacturing, ship repair, junk yards, and auto wrecking. Extensive landfill was carried out along the entire bay line with little regard for soil stability and toxicity. The development of South Bayshore as a predominately industrial and residential area was thereby achieved at extensive costs to environmental health and through extensive conflict between housing and industry."⁸ Although Bayview-Hunters Point has less than 4% of the city's residents, it has one-third of the city's hazardous waste sites. The area contains four times as many toxins as any other city neighborhood, according to a 1995 Health Department study. Of the 39 pollutants measured by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District in San Francisco neighborhoods, the highest concentration - 20 pollutants - was in Bayview-Hunters Point. The Hunters Point Naval Shipyard,

⁷ Rifkin, p.14

one of the nation's biggest military dry docks, is so saturated with pollutants that it will cost more than \$100 million and take at least 20 years to make it safe for human habitation. South Bayshore is also one of the primary locations for the City's sewage treatment facilities, many of which are located in close proximity to residential areas. While a direct cause has not been linked, hospitalizations for chronic illnesses are nearly four times higher in the Bayview Hunters Point area than the state average.⁹

Currently there are over 30,000 jobs in Bayview Hunters Point, however, only 25% of the residents work within the neighborhood. The 1990 census reported the unemployment rate was 13.6% in Bayview Hunters Point compared to 6.3% in San Francisco and that 25% of the families in Bayview were below the poverty level compared to 10% for the rest of the City. While some efforts have been made to improve the area by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, they have done little to improve the lives of the residents. Because of the prevailing economic conditions, Bayview Hunters Point has been unable to attract private, community oriented investment. Currently, all Bayview Hunters Point is considered a Redevelopment Survey Area and the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency has commissioned a Revitalization Concept Plan. The plan takes a comprehensive view of social, economic and physical interventions to improve the community. The Bayview Hunters Point Concept Revitalization Concept Team found the community's highest priorities included economic development and jobs training. In addition, the plan is supposed to identify strategies to prevent gentrification and displacement of the current residents. Bayview Hunters Point has the City's highest rate of home ownership. This statistic reflects the strong history of the area as a vibrant and stable community which defies the negative perceptions associated with the area. Based on the 1990 Census, 53% of the housing units in the

⁸ South Bayshore, p. 9.2

⁹ Rojas, p. A13

area were owner occupied, compared to 35% for the city of San Francisco. Of this housing stock 56% of it is owned by African American residents.

Bayview Hunters Point – Future as a Contested Landscape

As a contested landscape, the future represents the greatest threat to the current residents of the Bayview Hunters Point community. The physical area of San Francisco including Bayview Hunters Point is only 49 square miles. With most of San Francisco already developed or slated for development and the fact that Bayview Hunters Point contains the largest percentage of vacant land that remains in the City, the area is becoming more attractive to investors. In addition, San Francisco is facing an unparalleled housing crisis and people are starting to view Bayview Hunters Point, as the last affordable place to buy a house in the City. If not remedied, the housing crisis in San Francisco will make the City an economically unviable place to live except for the extremely wealthy.

Future development in Bayview Hunters Point has already begun, the San Francisco 49ers football team are finalizing the development proposal for Candlestick Mills, a new 75,000 seat football stadium along with a 1.5 million square foot shopping mall to be built next to the old stadium. With the completion of the new stadium, comes the promise of hosting Super Bowl XXXVII in 2003 along with future Super Bowls dates to be determined. Also, MUNI has already begun design on the Third Street Light Rail project. This project also to be in operation by 2003, calls for the implementation of light rail on Third Street, which in the spine of the community and the main route to downtown San Francisco. These two projects potentially represent one billion dollars to spent in the Bayview Hunters Point area over the next five years. However, the question of who will benefit is still unanswered. While Bayview Hunters Point fought for the Third Street

Light Rail project, there are still some mixed feelings about the proposal. While MUNI has promised approximately \$5 million to provide streetscape improvements along Third Street, the reality is that many of the current businesses on Third Street will not survive the construction of the Light Rail. In addition, to the north of Bayview Hunters Point, both Pac Bell Park, the San Francisco Giants new baseball stadium under construction, and the development of Mission Bay are indications that change is quickly approaching. While the redevelopment of the Naval Shipyard is a 30-year plan, other projects are rapidly becoming a reality. A critical issue for Bayview Hunters Point is whether the community is prepared for the changes that will be occurring? The development of these new projects will make Bayview Hunters Point a more attractive place to live which increases the threat of gentrification.

Summary

The *genius loci* of Bayview Hunters Point is inherently tied to the double consciousness of within the community. For the past thirty years, Bayview Hunters Point has been the stepchild of San Francisco, subjected to environmental injustices and physical, social and economic isolation. Now that the City has no where else to grow and development is in the very near future, Bayview Hunters Point now becomes a viable place for investment. However, Bayview Hunters Point is not only about land and resources, but about people, people who when called upon during World War II, had to fight two battles, one abroad, and one at home.

The battlefield which the contested landscape of Bayview Hunters Point has been fought on is radically and rapidly changing. Where physical conflict was once the standard between factions such as the Native Americans and Mexicans, Mexicans and Americans, and African-Americans and the Police/National Guard, potential future conflicts are now less physical but just as threatening. Soldiers and traditional armies have been replaced by lawyers, developers, and

politicians. The weapons of choice have also evolved, where guns and knives were once used, in the information age the new weapons are gentrification, speculation, policy making, and access to information, capital and resources.

Explanation of Thesis Project

As previously mentioned, the basis for this paper was research for my Master of Architecture thesis. The final design proposal of the Bayview Arts Center as a *memorable civic landmark* incorporated the metaphor of the ship as a reflection of the *genius loci* of Bayview Hunters Point. In addition, the design of the building tries to reflect double consciousness on two levels; architecturally, the building attempts to stand out as a landmark, yet still tries to assimilate/fit into the surrounding context. Socio-culturally, the identity of the architecture reflects a Western European influence on the emphasis of the individual building, while the form and design of the building are meant to facilitate the aspects of gathering and coming together as a community.

Acknowledgments

"If I can see over the tops of mountains, it is because I stand on the shoulders of giants."

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Finally, I would like to recognize William L. Fitzgerald, my grandfather, who instilled in me the value and privilege of receiving my education. His support and encouragement have made many of my accomplishments possible, and whose passing this March left me deeply saddened but to whose memory I dedicate the following work.

K.W. - 1998

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