

The opposite of adaptation in buildings is graceless turnover. The usual pattern is for a rapid succession of tenants, each scooping out all trace of the former tenants and leaving nothing that successors can use. Finally no tenant replaces the last one, vandals do their quick work, and broken windows beg for demolition. There are two forms of surcease. If there is a turnaround in local real estate, the succession of owners and tenants might head back upscale, each one adding value. Or the building may be blessed with durable construction and resilient design which can forgive insult and hard swerves of usage. A brick factory from the 1910s, with its intelligent daylighting and abundant space, can stand empty for a decade and still gain value.

Age *plus adaptivity* is what makes a building come to be loved. The building learns from its occupants, and they learn from it.

There is precedent for thinking this way. In classical Greece and Rome, *domus* meant “house” in an expanded sense:

People and their dwellings were indistinguishable: domus referred not only to the walls but also to the people within them. Evidence for this is found in inscriptions and texts, in which the word refers now to one, now to the other, but most often to both at once, to the house and its residents envisioned as an indivisible whole. The architectural setting was not an inert vessel; the genius of the domus, honored by a cult, was the protector of both the place and the people who lived in it.⁹

That kind of bonding between building and inhabitants still occurs. We can consider seemingly opposite examples of it—two kinds of buildings that easily become loved. One, grand and deep, I call the High Road—durable, independent buildings that steadily accumulate experience and become in time wiser and more respected than their inhabitants. The other, quick and dirty, is the Low Road. Their specialty

is swift responsiveness to their occupants. They are unrespectable, mercurial, street-smart.

Among buildings as within them, differences of pace are everything.

Notes

1. Francis Duffy, “Measuring Building Performance,” *Facilities* (May 1990), p. 17.
2. R. V. O’Neill, D. L. DeAngelis, J. B. Wade, T. F. H. Allen, *A Hierarchical Concept of Ecosystems* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 98.
3. Kevin Lynch, *What Time Is This Place?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972), p. 8.
4. Anne Vernez Moudon, *Built for Change* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), p. 188.
5. Garreau is the author of *Edge City* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).
6. Rick Bevington and Arthur H. Rosenfeld, “Energy for Buildings and Homes,” *Scientific American* (Sept. 1990), p. 77.
7. Alexander’s “yellow books” from Oxford University Press, each with a variety of co-authors, are: *The Timeless Way of Building* (1979); *A Pattern Language* (1977); *The Oregon Experiment* (1975); *The Production of Houses* (1985); *The Linz Café* (1981); *A New Theory of Urban Design* (1987). A reviewer in *Architectural Design* called *A Pattern Language* “perhaps the most important book on architectural design published in this century.”
8. Christopher Alexander, *The Timeless Way of Building* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 231.
9. Yvon Thébert, “Private Life and Domestic Architecture in Roman Africa,” *A History of Private Life*, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1985, 1987), vol. 1, p. 407.

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