

of architecture. Here it seems the task is to create space that is a monument to the originality of the architect.

Our need to belong and to identify places as either exclusively ours or at least associated with us is demonstrated everywhere by the things people do to personalize locations. Most of us abhor anonymity, and yet many spaces and places seem just that – especially, it seems, newly created places. A whole industry exists to provide items for people to use to individualize their houses and cars, and of course themselves through clothing and jewellery. As I move around, I continue to be amazed at the capacity people have to find new ways of expressing themselves in spite of the most banal architecture with which they are often provided on modern housing estates. Also astonishing is the amount of money and time people will lavish on this. The brick house that is covered in artificial plastic stone and fitted out with unmoveable wooden shutters says loud and clear ‘this is where we live’, but at considerable cost. Logically the money would have been much more productively spent improving the insulation, fitting low energy light bulbs or installing solar energy panels.

However, that completely misses the point and fails to recognize the strength of our need to individualize and to express our identity. Desmond Morris is quite outspoken on the importance of this need and the failure, as he sees it, of architects to appreciate it (Morris 1969):

One of the important features of the family territory is that it must be easily distinguished in some way from all the others. Its separate location gives it a uniqueness, of course, but this is not enough. Its shape and general appearance must make it stand out as an easily identifiable entity, so that it can become the ‘personalized’ property of the family that lives there. This is something which seems obvious enough, but which has frequently been overlooked or ignored, either as a result of economic pressures, or the lack of biological awareness of architects.

Of course ‘personalizing’ the family house does much more than this; it also signals to the outside world something about the values and priorities of the people who live there. Consider a house, the front garden of which is totally dominated by a ship’s mast complete with naval flags (Fig. 2.8). The whole ensemble tells us not only that these people are house-proud, but also something about their lifestyles. When faced with this display we might guess at some involvement in the navy, a set of values about orderliness and possibly even their political leanings. We might even hazard a guess at the preferred dress of the inhabitants. Were a socialist political party campaigner about to knock on the front door to canvass, he or she would probably do so without much optimism!

Herman Hertzberger famously designed an office building in the Dutch town of Appledorn for Centraal Beheer, an insurance company, specifically to accommodate possession and personalization (Fig. 2.9).