Ignoring and Encountering the Tragic Neighbor Through the Built Environment

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Ivan Illich was perpetually aware of how people pursue certain endeavors, employ new technologies, and chase progress while being blind to how those endeavors, technologies, and progress are defining more than their intended object. Likewise, Illich showed a great concern for public space and who used it, occupied it, and, inevitably, defined it. With those concerns in mind, the city still proves to be an important subject for Illich's type of analysis which calls to attention the dramatic shifts of understanding and relationship that occur alongside the drive of progress and development. And, indeed, his reading of the Good Samaritan story still should serve as a part of our moral imaginations as we build our cities and shape ourselves.

The construction of our cities will shape who we see and where our sympathies and compassion will be directed, and so we must be diligent about considering where this attention is allowed to be directed and whether it is directed away from the tragic lives. When we allow the built environment to actively hide persons from our presence, we remove the physical reality of the body which affects the moral formation of responsibility. Contrary to the act of hiding, the story of the Good Samaritan recognizes that the tragic may not be overcome but that the tragedy still should be kept public.

Major cities, in the attempt to revitalize their downtowns, have rebuilt public space in order to make it uncomfortable for the "less desirable" elements to occupy that space. Using San Francisco's redesign of its downtown as a case study, I will show how

the development of space can also serve to define who is a neighbor and the qualities of that neighbor. Design determines who and what will be made public. And, in this way, the construction of the built environment is not just about justice or injustice, but it is also about the greater moral formation of the community because publicity and proximity can affect one's desire and ability to tend to tragic circumstances. Employing Ivan Illich's reading of the story of the Good Samaritan, I will contend that there exists a challenging but realistic and critical imperative to keep tragic lives public through the construction of the built environment.

The Link Between Building and Neighbor

At the beginning of his lecture "Building Dwelling Thinking," Martin Heidegger describes the etymological roots and connections between building, neighbor, and being in order to expose the deeper meaning of what it means to build. Heidegger explains how the "Old English and High German word for building, buan, means to dwell," and that this original relationship between building and dwelling has been lost except in "the German word Nachbar, neighbor," which etymologically means near-dweller.[1] And this etymological relation makes perfect sense as it is hard to define a person's relationships until they are willing to make a claim on a certain space, whether it be a physical space or not. From this relationship between neighbor and dwelling, Heidegger proceeds to explain through describing the relationship between bin (to be) and bauen (to build/to dwell) that the way a person dwells is a part of who they are. He does this in order to

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[1] Martin Heidegger, Basic Writings (NY: Harper Collins, 1993), 349. Kristin Dillman-Jones calls attention to the significance of these definitions in relation to Illich's thought in "Mikvah, Rain, and the Waters of Dwelling," The International Journal of Illich Studies 3, no. 1 (February, 2013): 1-3.

explain what is too frequently lost when people typically describe building.[2] Often building is considered to be just about the physical construction of a building, but it needs to be understood as the acknowledgement of what people choose to be at peace with and what people choose to welcome and gather around themselves.

Another way of understanding this deeper relationship between building, dwelling, and being can be found considering the relationship between the words "house" and "home." Often these words can be used interchangeably when describing the location where one lives; however, "home" can also be used to describe a meaningful relationship that a person has while "house" remains purely for describing a physical construction. One can say to a loved one that "you are my home," but telling someone that "you are my house" will sound quite strange. Construction of the built environment will obviously create houses, but it has to be understood that it forms/deforms homes as well. In part, it influences where and with whom people will feel safe. The built environment affects who will gather and who will be welcomed.

It is our task not just to delineate boundaries of where we feel safe and at home in the built environment; instead, we should be compelled to discern whether the boundaries or the uses of some space prove damaging to a person's ability to dwell, feel at home, or welcome another. Clear property rights within the built environment are not the sole measure of being a good neighbor. In the poem "Mending Wall," Robert Frost addresses both the physical and moral boundaries we set up within our lives; he makes it obvious that a clear boundary and clear rules for an area do not always aim at the good. Frost tells of an annual encounter with a neighbor where they mend the wall that separates their

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[2] Heidegger, 350.

respective orchards. Frost questions why they continually mend this wall between their properties when neither person possesses anything that must be retained by said wall. Frost's neighbor responds with the maxim, "Good fences make good neighbors." However, in the poem Frost declares that this maxim cannot be applied universally. Indeed, Frost is wary of this claim. He writes that "Before I built a wall I'd ask to know/What I was walling in or walling out,/ And to whom I was like to give offence." The built environment is not neutral. When a wall, or any structure, is built, it changes the abilities people have to interact with that space due to physical limitations and the property rights associated with construction.[3] Beyond the limiting of physical freedoms, the desire for a specific built environment alters relationships and how persons are viewed. Frost suggests an understanding of this when he declares that "Something there is that doesn't love a wall." The rest of this paper will address the power of walls and the built environment to affect more than just physical freedom.

Who Might This Neighbor Be?

In an effort to redevelop downtowns, cities define what populations they would like to see enter that space. As cities choose which populations they would like to see in an area, those directing redevelopment logically must make certain assumptions about various populations in the city. But at what cost? Those advocating for the homeless explain how the general population often has certain stereotypes of what it means to be

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[3] The built environment may not be the final cause of one's freedom, but it is certainly substantive. As Jeremy Waldron States, "No one is free to perform an action unless there is somewhere he is free to perform it. Since we are embodied beings, we always have a location. Moreover, though everyone has to be somewhere, a person cannot always choose any location he likes." Jeremy Waldron, "Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom," UCLA Law Review 39 (1991): 296.

homeless, and these stereotypes often lead to a dismissive attitude towards the homeless. These stereotypes simplify the complex lives of those that occupy spaces which are to be redeveloped and thereby provide an inadequate understanding of who these neighbors are.[4] Thirty percent of the homeless fit the stereotype of being on the street due to substance abuse, but 22% of the homeless are employed, 23% are military veterans, and in some parts of the United States 40% of the homeless are homeless as families. During the major push for redevelopment in San Francisco, minors accounted for 20- 30% of the homeless population, 25% were physically disabled, and a large portion of the population was suffering from AIDS.[5] As of last year, homelessness was on the rise in San Francisco, fewer people were homeless due to drug use, the homeless population consisted of twice the percentage (29%) of LGBTQ people than the overall population, and 61% of the homeless population were residents of San Francisco when they became homeless.[6] With all these statistics at play, it is inevitable that there will always exist some simplifications of problems or a population so that some final action can be taken and processed, but this varied population and the forces that lead to homelessness can be appreciated more fully when this population is allowed to interact with other populations in the public space. Indeed, understanding the complexity of their lives may change whether or not the homeless are considered to have chosen their state or whether they are forced into it. The significance of this will become clear in the next section.

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[4] Sam Davis, Designing for the Homeless: Architecture that Works (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004), 14-16.

[5] San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association, "Homelessness in a Progressive City: Targeting causes, proposing solutions" July 17, 2002, accessed 4/16/2014 @ http://www.spur.org/publications/spur-report/2002-07-17/homelessness-progressive-city

[6] "2013 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey." Accessed 4/20/2014 @ http://www.sfgov3.org/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=4819

The Case of San Francisco

The redevelopment of San Francisco proves to be a valuable case for understanding how the altering of the built environment proves to not just define who is neighbor but also to define the status of that neighbor. In San Francisco the redevelopment of downtown required not just the physical space to be altered, but it also required the city and the courts to weigh in on if homelessness was a choice or a status. In an effort to change the built environment of downtown, those in control of the built environment had to define who they were interacting with and who they were attempting to displace.

The city of San Francisco sought to redevelop its downtown space in order to revitalize the economy and foster greater tourist engagement with the city; however, in order to do this it needed to evacuate certain people from occupying those spaces and dwelling in them.[7] As Zusha Elinson explains, due to the inability to address the homeless in public space, "the city has simply removed public seating over the last two decades. Benches in Civic Center Plaza were removed in the 1990s. Those in nearby United Nations Plaza were ripped out in the middle of the night in 2001, to discourage the homeless from congregating and camping there."[8] The desire to evacuate people from

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[7] Even though I look at development and the activities surrounding it in the recent past, this problem still continues today in San Francisco. Recently, San Francisco has sought to redevelop its Tenderloin district, which was a traditional space for the homeless, in an attempt to encourage more young tech workers to move into the city. As a part of this development, a rather aggressive method of street cleaning has been implemented. Massoud Hayoun, "Activists Say San Francisco Trying to Wash Away the Homeless," February 19, 2014, Al-Jazeera America. Accessed 4/20/2014 @ http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/2/18/san-francisco tensionbetweenhomelessandsecondtechboomers.html

[8] Zusha Elinson, "A Renewed Public Push for Somewhere to Sit Outdoors." New York Times January 29, 2012, on page A23A of the National edition. Accessed at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/29/us/in-san- francisco-a-push-for-public-benches.html

certain public areas went beyond the removal of benches. For example, San Francisco's

Union Square underwent a $25 million renovation in part because the space was no

longer used by shoppers because of the relative comfort that the space provided for the

homeless.[9] The redesign of the square opened up the space by removing many of the

design elements of the square which offered some protection and an innocuous place to

place one's possessions -- something required if one has more than just a few shopping

bags to look after. In an effort to clear up items and people from the park, the redesign

eliminated the elements (i.e. hedge groves, benches, solid structures) that provided a

sense of security for one who desired to dwell and rest at length in that space instead of

pass through it or take a brief rest.[10]

In complement to the redesign of the public space and in an attempt to guarantee

the intended goals of the newly redeveloped built environment, San Francisco introduced

the Matrix program which enforced the desired commercial outcomes of the newly

designed public space through hard and soft forms of power, but in doing so they ended

up redefining the legal status of the homeless person. Half of the Matrix program

encouraged people into shelters (soft power) while the other half of the program

reintroduced the police enforcement of ordinances (hard power) which had fallen out of

favor due to political backlash considering these measures too harsh.[11] These ordinances

included the prohibition of a number of activities from the benign such as public

urination, dumping of refuse, public camping, and obstructing sidewalks to the more

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[9] Davis, 60.

[10] Many of these changes which emphasize clear sight lines in order to police an environment are currently formalized through the program entitled Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CEPTED).

[11] Heather MacDonald, "San Francisco's Matrix Program for the Homeless," Criminal Justice Ethics, Vol. 14, 1 (1995):79; See also Maria Foscarinis, Kelly Cunningham-Bowers, and Kristen E. Brown, "Out of Sight-Out of Mind?: The Continuing Trend Toward the Criminalization of Homelessness," Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law & Policy Vol. VI, 2 (1999):152-156.

serious such as graffiti and public drug use. While this may seem like a well-rounded method for addressing the problem of homelessness in a city, when the hard forms of power were challenged in the courts, the city and the California courts claimed that anyone who remained homeless because they did not accept the soft forms of power was rightfully subjected to the hard forms of power because he or she had a choice to remain outdoors and in the public or to live and dwell in a shelter. It was the court's belief that people could be punished for sleeping, urinating, or taking up space for an extended period of time in public if there was some opportunity for those persons to do so in a more private setting.[12] Simply stated, homelessness was declared to be a choice instead of an involuntary status like race, sexual orientation, or physical disability. Ultimately, in an effort to define how a space should be occupied and experienced, San Francisco had to make certain claims about the freedom and agency of persons as it relates to them being considered a neighbor.

Evident in San Francisco's redesign and policing of the space is the distinction of single-minded space and open-minded space and the resulting consequences of these viewpoints. The key distinctions between these two spaces involve the activities allowed in the space, the speed at which a place is used, and the desire for human interaction within the space. As Michael Walzer explains, single-minded space is designed by those who have only one thing in mind, and it is used by similarly single-minded citizens who tend to be privileged and who are "characteristically in a hurry."[13] As Walzer claims,

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[12] Maria Foscarinis, "Downward Spiral: Homelessness and Its Criminalization," Yale Law & Policy Review, Vol. 14, 1 (1996): 36-41; MacDonald, 80. Also see ch.5 of Don Mitchell, The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space (NY: The Guilford Press, 2003).

[13] Michael Walzer "Pleasures and Costs of Urbanity," in Metropolis: Center and Symbol of Our Times, edited by Philip Kasinitz (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 321, 324.

single-minded spaces tend to favor commerce, which has been the primary reason for redevelopment of space.[14] Ivan Illich echoes this relationship between single-mindedness and the limiting of the functions of common space. Illich claims that the enclosure of the commons often functions as an "environmentally-induced redefinition of people as consumers."[15] In contrast to single-minded consumerist space is open-minded space which does not have singular intended uses and which is designed for people willing to accommodate and take an interest in other people and their activities.[16] And associated with this accommodation and interest is the willingness to move more slowly through a space and to appreciate others who want/need to dwell in an area. While he ultimately values open-minded space, Walzer makes clear that there is a necessary balance. There exists both room and a need for both types of spaces, but as Walzer writes, "the reiteration of single-mindedness at one public site after another seems to me something that civilized societies should avoid…. Open minded space has in the past been a breeding ground for mutual respect, political solidarity, civil discourse, and it makes sense to suggest that without it all these will be put at risk."[17] As is evident in the case of

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[14] Walzer, 328.

[15] Ivan Illich, In the Mirror of the Past: Lectures and Addresses, 1978-1990 (NY: M. Boyars, 1992), 52.

[16] Walzer, 321.

[17] Walzer, 324. The distinction and concern between these two types of space easily goes unnoticed when we have possession of enough space and tools. The lack of open-minded space is not easily noticeable when this lack does not interfere with basic needs. Jeremy Waldron helps make clear how often we define certain spaces based on our ability to provide for ourselves. He writes: "The streets and subways, they say, are for commuting from home to office. They are not for sleeping; sleeping is something one does at home. The parks are for recreations like walking and informal ball-games, things for which one's own yard is a little too confined. Parks are not for cooking or urinating; again, these are things one does at home. Since the public and the private are complementary, the activities performed in public are to be the complement of those appropriately performed in private. This complementarity works fine for those who have the benefit of both sorts of places. However, it is disastrous for those who must live their whole lives on common land." Waldron, 301. Obviously there is a relationship between defining these spaces and claiming whether one chooses to perform an act in the public or whether they are compelled.

Recent recommendations by a San Francisco Civil Grand Jury about the use of Golden Gate Park make it abundantly clear that single-minded uses favored by a wealthier citizen still actively dominate policy. City and County of San Francisco Civil Grand Jury, 2012-2013, "Golden Gate Park's Homeless Population Are San Francisco's Policies Serving Us Well?"

San Francisco, the transformation of the built environment into more single-minded

spaces required the redefinition of the people who occupied those spaces and justification

for the use of hard power against those people. The critical need for the preservation of

open-minded space and what is required to guarantee it is what Ivan Illich speaks so

forcefully about through his reading of the Good Samaritan story.

Ivan Illich and the Parable of the Good Samaritan

Much of Ivan Illich's work concerns itself with the malformation of people and of

certain activities when the activities are institutionalized and detached from the reality of

everyday lives. His reading of the famous Good Samaritan story (Lk 10:25-37) suggests

something similar, and it should do this given that it is one of the key lenses Illich uses to

sum up his career and work in his interviews with David Cayley. Illich believes that the

story is often misread and that the story is not about how to act towards a neighbor;

rather, focus must be paid to verse 29 and the question of "who is my neighbor?" For

Illich, the emphasis of the story must be placed more on when the Samaritan chooses the

beaten man as his neighbor and less on the acts of service because Illich believes there is

no end to the abuse which one can inflict when service is the only goal. The Samaritan

story also proves to be a critical text for this issue because exegesis of the story often

addresses issues of purity and order which are frequently invoked when people advocate

removing the homeless from certain parts of town.[18]

The first key part of Illich's reading of the Good Samaritan story is that the story

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[18] For an account on the various ways disease, purity, and order are invoked in relation to the homeless and experienced as threat to "civility", see Randall Amster, "Patterns of Exclusion: Sanitizing Space, Criminalizing Homelessness," *Social Justice*, Vol. 30, 1 (2003).

presents a radical break in defining the neighbor that was motivated by an encounter with a suffering body. Illich explains that in antiquity one had an obligation to be hospitable to those within his or her culture, but there was no necessary commitment outside of one's social group.[19] Illich describes that the story shows how the Samaritan owed no act of hospitality. The Samaritan chose to be hospitable against the dominant understandings of what was appropriate behavior. But, according to Illich, this new form of hospitality requires "bodily presence" and the witness of someone who was "being drowned in carnality."[20] Any attempt to move a person and his or her bodily presence out of public view will make the Samaritan's much lauded act improbable if not impossible. That is true even if one forces the person to move in order to help them. In removing the person from public view Illich claims that "the 'I' who experiences is replaced by an abstract point where many different statistical charts intersect," and that "the most destructive effect of development is its tendency to distract my eye from your face with the phantom, humanity, that I ought to love."[21] We need to be present to others, and Illich's reading of the Good Samaritan story reminds us not to abstract people in the construction of a process to help them or the greater community. The failure to heed this warning and the failure to pay attention to the body leads to nothing less than the disembodiment of the I-Thou relationship, which serves as the ground for respect and the integrity of the subject

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[19] Ivan Illich and David Cayley, The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich As Told to David Cayley (Toronto: Anansi, 2005), 51.

[20] Illich, Rivers, 51, 207. Likewise, Illich pays special attention to the physical nature of the discomfort of the Samaritan when he saw the wounded man. He points to the Greek word for disease splágchnon, meaning an inner physical discomfort, and Luther's translation of this as jammern, which signifies a guttural lament. Illich, Rivers, 222. Illich's focus on the role of bodily presence in this parable would seem to be supported by the many theologians over history who have seen the Samaritan story as a parable that reiterates the significance of incarnation and Christ's saving work. James F. Keenan, Moral Wisdom: Lessons and Texts from the Catholic Tradition (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 118-120.

[21] Ivan Illich, "Twenty-Six Years Later: Ivan Illich in conversation with Majid Rahema," in The Post-Development Reader, complied and introduced by Majid Rahema with Victoria Bawtree (Zed Books, 1997): 106.

according to Martin Buber.[22] The second key aspect of Illich's reading of the Good

Samartan story is the formalization of service that often occurs as a result of ignoring

carnality. He suggests that there always exists a desire to legalize and formalize the

relationships that we must have with one another.[23] In doing so radical hospitality, which

the Samaritan showed, is turned into a more formalized service. This completion of this

formalized service replaces the actual person as the telos of one's action.[24] Illich claims

that this shift is at the heart of "liberal fantasy" which can do horrible things to people in

the guise of helping them.[25] While this shift to a more formalized service certainly

enables mobilization of resources to address the problem, it quite frequently enables a

dominating power over the people it initially claims to serve. Indeed, on this point Illich

is even self- critical of his earlier work.

Later on in life Illich believed that his own claims for persons' greater social

responsibility towards one another often quickly devolved into the type of liberal

development he vehemently critiqued.[26] Almost paradoxically, he admits that people will

be better served at times if we accept a degree of powerlessness to fix all the elements of

our society. The drive to perfection often enslaves and an appreciation of some tragic

elements in life may liberate. In a speech on another social issue, Illich claims that against

some injustices people must first physically enter a space and propagate a "horrified

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[22] Illich, Rivers, 222.

[23] Illich, Rivers, 47. On this point Illich parallels Adam Smith on sympathy. For Smith, the formalization of these ties and commitments is valuable and desired as it allows proper treatment of each other not to exist simply on whim, but Smith warns of the great harm that can occur when sympathy, which is enlivened by personal connection and proximity, is not allowed to reinvigorate and critique that formalized process.
Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), III.I.94-109. See also, Fonna Forman-Barzilai, "Sympathy in Space(s): Adam Smith on Proximity". Political Theory. 33, no. 2 (2005):189-217.

[24] Illich, Rivers, 52.

[25] Illich, Rivers, 207.

[26] Illich, "Twenty-Six Years Later," 108.

silence."[27] This of course requires bodily presence. Accepting powerlessness or entering a space with a horrified silence should not be confused with inaction or pointless ritual. Indeed, Illich makes it abundantly clear throughout his work that ritual has the ability to train, diagnose, and heal.[28] His suggestions are an attempt to come to term with some degree of inevitable tragedy and to acknowledge that often a certain quality of life is sacrificed in the drive for progress.[29] Illich certainly is not against development itself; the concern is a development that narrows our moral boundaries and shifts the goal of our attention in the process.

Illich's reading of the Samaritan story should be held apart from other arguments which privilege face-to-face relationships because he avoids the traps often created by those advocating face-to-face relationships. As Iris Marion Young makes clear, those who favor developing face-to-face relationships as a central practice of justice often argue for near-utopian small decentralized communities as the solution to anonymous and bureaucratic institutions.[30] This desire for small decentralized communities suggests an ideal purity in politics and can actually foster greater homogeneity which serves to exclude those who don't meet the community's norms. Illich avoids utopian purity by preserving room for the tragic, and he suggests the possibility of dwelling with the tragic instead of exerting undue force to overcome it. Similarly, Illich's reading of the

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[27] Illich, In the Mirror, 31.

[28] Lee Hoinacki, "Reading Ivan Illich," in Lee Hoinacki and Carl Mitcham. The Challenges of Ivan Illich: A Collective Reflection (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 4-5.

[29] For example, think of the person who in the effort to fight disease finds themselves forever interned in a hospital apart from the people and the things that make them feel at home. In the guise of progress the person finds that the sense of dwelling has been sacrificed. What occurs in this example as well as in city redevelopment is the process Illich described as "iatrogenesis" in which the cure for a problem often defines agency, has implied values, and undermines the people taking part of the cure. See Ivan Illich, Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health (NY: Pantheon Books, 1976).

[30] Iris Marion Young, "City Life and Difference," in Metropolis: Center and Symbol of Our Times, edited by Philip Kasinitz (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 258-260.

Samaritan story preserves the encounter with the stranger instead of lapsing into the idealization of community because he does not suggest that the difference between persons must be overcome. For these reasons, his reading of the Samaritan story proves a compelling resource as development is considered because his response preserves the heterogeneity and complexity of the city.

Conclusion

As redevelopment of cities continues, it will be critical that at least some of the spaces built will foster the presence and interactions necessary for those in the Samaritan's position to make the choice that the Samaritan made. The central lesson from Illich's reading of the Good Samaritan story is that even with the best intentions one's ability to properly attend to the other will irrevocable be altered when the one who is to be served becomes anonymous and displaced. This ability will require even more attention when attention to the other is not the primary act. While certainly worried about the injustices performed by the powerful, Illich draws attention to those processes which allow injustices to flourish. As this paper has claimed, our attentions should be drawn to the power of the built environment to accomplish more than physical displacement of persons. Even those who have power to construct the built environment end up being subjected to it. As was evident in San Francisco, the construction of the built environment redefines neighbors and affects the ability to even see another as a potential neighbor with compelling needs who suffers through no choice of his or her own. With this in mind, our cities should be recognized as sites that significantly form our attentions and that our attentions must be allowed the opportunity to attend to the hopeful as well as to

the tragic.