SPATIAL CLEANSING
Monumental Vacuity and the Idea of the West

MICHAEL HERZFELD
Harvard University, USA

Abstract
This article comprises preliminary remarks about spatiality and power, with a particular focus on field data from Greece and Thailand (with secondary materials from Italy). I suggest that the creation of large open spaces in city contexts, generating a marked contrast with local tolerance of crowding, represents the intrusive presence of regimentation and aesthetic domination. Within a larger pattern of conceding to hegemonic ideas about classical ornamentation as well as rational town-planning, such idioms of 'spatial cleansing' create a context entirely compatible with the current structures of economic inequality. They also occlude the understandings of past experience that characterize local groups wishing to remain in historic centers; it is noteworthy that in Thailand, where the middle class has not yet succumbed to the global fashion for antique domestic spaces as has its counterpart in Italy (and to a lesser extent in Greece), it is the poor who seem more interested in calibrating their lives to official master narratives in the hope of being rewarded with continued rights to inhabit their existing lived environment.

Key Words • historic conservation • power class • southern Europe • spatiality • Thailand

In this article, I propose to open up an exploration of the symbolic importance of open and closed spaces in the globalizing processes whereby apparently western forms are becoming standard architectural practice around the world. This is necessarily both a provocative and a partial exercise. I intend it as a prolegomenon to more sustained research and analysis. But I feel that while anthropologists and geographers, in
particular, have devoted a great deal of energy to the analysis of space and place, and even on occasion to 'non-places' (Augé, 1992), they have thought a great deal less about the relationship among economic ideologies, the depopulation of urban space, and the reconfiguration of the imagined past. My goal here is thus to open up this topic and to invite reflection on why, in some countries more than in others, the processes that produce urban depopulation appear to reproduce the logic of colonialist evolutionism - a march toward the ultimate in urbanity and 'civilization' - even as they produce ever greater suffering through dispossession and dislocation.

For my materials I draw on my own fieldwork in three different countries: Greece, Italy, and Thailand. The Greek material, centered on historical conservation policy and practice in the Cretan town of Rethymno, is already accessible in published form (Herzfeld, 1991, 1999) and supplemented here by observations drawn from the capital city, Athens (Caftanzoglou, 2000, 2001; Yalouri, 2001). For Italy, I am drawing on fieldwork conducted in Rome, focusing on the district of Monti (roughly bounded by Santa Maria Maggiore, the Forum, and the Colosseum and San Pietro in Vincoli - see Herzfeld, 2001 for a brief description). And for Thailand I am drawing on my research, supplemented by the far longer and more extensive studies of Marc Askew, in Bangkok. Here I focus more particularly on the old dynastic capital of Rattanakosin Island, the object of a deeply contested national restoration plan that specifically entails, among many other changes, the eviction of several populations of which the one that is currently most in the public eye is the tiny community that inhabits the area between the Mahakan fort (pom) and the neighboring canal. The experiences of these three countries have been significantly divergent in terms of historical depth, local attitudes to conservation, ownership of the contested properties, and historical knowledge on the part of the local populations. Nonetheless, these differences serve to pinpoint some common dimensions of a process that is increasingly common throughout the world: the globalization, paradoxical though it may seem, of a sense of national heritage, calibrated both to the demands of an exigent neoliberal economic system and to the politico-cultural as well as financial forces that it has unleashed.

The anthropological literature is rich with analyses of space and place. Whether as considerations of the locality envisaged as the basis of ethnographic research (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997), as a question of the embodied and gendered semiotics of architectonic arrangements [e.g. Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003], or of the more evanescent but scarcely less important sense of culturally salient 'placeness' (Feld and Basso, 1996), this preoccupation flows logically from the sense that social structures are mapped onto physical spaces and that cultural values channel the attribution to them of many kinds of significance. The very idea of
belonging is usually couched in spatial terms; local knowledge is resistant to the imperious claims of transcendence, universalism, and abstraction, but is instead rooted in lived experience. Curiously enough, however, with the exception of ethnographically specific instances such as the burial of the unbaptized outside cemeteries, very little has been written about the interpretation of physical locations considered to be 'out of place'. Even less attention has been paid to the liability of that locatedness; a conceptual quicksand or earthquake, disturbing the logic of *terra firma*, the very idea that the boundaries of place itself are subject to social negotiation introduces a potentially disruptive element into the geographical complacency with which most of us, at least in the industrialized world, contemplate our built environments and their natural settings.

Yet this notion should not really surprise us. The very phrase 'matter out of place' immediately recalls to any anthropologist the magisterial discussion by Mary Douglas (1966) of forms of pollution and taboo. Douglas’s account, published in the heyday of structuralism but in a more orthodox Durkheinian frame, takes the taxonomic systems peculiar to given cultures as fixed entities, just as it presupposes a degree of clarity in the boundaries of those cultures themselves. Yet there is nothing necessary or even empirically persuasive in this static view; and Douglas appears, in at least some of her own later work (e.g. Douglas, 1988), to recognize the possibility that even in the most institutionalized structures it may be possible to recognize the unpredictable and indeterminate state of flux implied by terms such as agency and practice. These terms, which are as popular today as they were virtually unknown at the time that *Purity and Danger* first appeared in print, provide the means of recognizing what we might call the long temporality of architecture and urban planning with the chimerical tempo of human movement. With this development, human bodies enter a socially constructed physical space, reproduce it, and change it.

The physicality of the built environment has a very direct relationship to the ideologies that particularly endorse it. Monumentality implies permanence, eternity, the disappearance of temporality except in some mythological sense. Monuments have a metonymic relationship to the entities (such as nation-states) that they serve, and their ponderous ontology discourages thoughts of their potential impermanence - which is why, during wars and their aftermath, the destruction and reconstruction of symbolically charged buildings (often religious structures such as churches, mosques, and temples, see Ratnagar, 2004) reproduces and reinforces attempts to inflict permanent change on both demography and cartography.

In times of peace, however, it might seem that monumentality remains largely unchallenged and unchallengeable. To accept this proposition, however, is to accept the self-serving ideology of the nation-state
or similar institution, and to ignore the agency of those bureaucrats who attempt to create, not only 'facts on the ground' (see for example Abu El-Haj, 2001), but also to inculcate into individual bodies those habitual relationships to the built environment that supposedly induce political docility and ideological complaisance. It also means ignoring the agency of those who are neither docile nor complaisant, have little power to affect the planning that displaces them from their accustomed lifestyles and abodes, and yet manage to 'muddle through' and to change the meanings of those contested spaces (see Scott, 1998: 328).

Admittedly we no longer enjoy such innocence. A series of studies of the contested uses of monumental space or 'historic sites' has put paid to all such illusions (e.g. Abu El-Haj, 2001; Bender, 1998; Hall, 1994; Handler and Gable, 1997; Herzfeld, 1991; Ratnagar, 2004; Yalouri, 2001). 'Contested histories' and related coinages (see also Hastrup, 1992) have become commonplaces of anthropological conversations about the uses of the past, and this focus has not left monumentality in peace - least of all at moments when its pretensions of permanence fall, like the hubris of Ozymandias, to the corrosion of political climate change (e.g. Buchli, 1999). If the state is a highly successful performance of identity and power that has nonetheless often fallen prey to the catcalls of revolution, its monuments are clearly no less performative and, as such, no less liable, at least in theory, to be torn down or reused.

It is perhaps an awareness of that all too human mortality that induces the leaders of nation-states to attempt to define the meanings of monumental spaces as precisely as possible. (We should not forget that the finis from which the word 'definition' is derived meant a physical earthwork, the demarcation of territorial control, in ancient Rome.) But definition, brought to the explicitness that bureaucratic states desire, carries with it an increased risk of subversion. Those who do not accept the official designation of spatial meaning and use are likely to find themselves defined, quite literally, as beyond the pale and, indeed, as 'matter out of place'.

In earlier work I applied this model of pollution to the operation of bureaucracy, already recognized by Handelman [1998 [1990]] as the official business of classification, and argued that the truly skilled bureaucrats were those who mastered the art of appearing to be strict constitutionalists while actually reinterpreting the rules and regulations according to their perception of their own and sometimes also of their clients' interests. This study, however, remained within the gamut of conceptual classifications, albeit classifications with sometimes serious material consequences for those social actors who were subject to them. Despite a plethora of (mostly structuralist) studies of spatial symbolism (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977: 90-1; Needham, 1962: 877-90) moreover, and despite my recognition of a sharp differentiation of intent between what
I called social and monumental forms of time (Herzfeld, 1991), I did not connect the dynamic aspects of this symbolism with the analysis of agency operating in and against bureaucratic power. The first anthropologist to secure that connection in an explicit invocation of Douglas’s treatment of pollution appears to have been Roxane Cautzoglou (e.g. 2000, 2001), working in the shadow of the Acropolis in Athens and thus athwart one of the key symbols of western cultural hegemony – a symbol beset, if that hegemonic discourse was to be believed, by an orientalizing presence that was more representative of everyday life in the modern era.

In this article I propose to bring together, in a very preliminary way, Douglas’s model in the sense used by Cautzoglou and what I have called ‘practical orientalism’ and ‘practical occidentalism’ [or we might lump the two together as ‘practical essentialism’]. I specifically propose to bring these ideas into mutual juxtaposition for the purposes of examining certain attempts, in the final century or so of classic colonialism, to achieve permanence in two countries in which the shadow of occidental colonialism was longer and more troubling than is often admitted in either. These two countries are Greece and Thailand, both countries that have ideologically fetishized their devotion to national independence, both claiming never to have submitted to any of the western imperialisms, and both long caught in a clientelist relationship with western powers mediated by local military and economic elites. Both, too, have been deeply concerned with defining some sort of collective national essence. Despite obvious and important differences, it is precisely this defensive celebration – in an idiom of largely imported symbolic form and supporting the ideal-typical format of the European nation-state – of political and cultural autonomy that justifies our viewing both countries as ‘crypto-colonial’ states (Herzfeld, 2002).

One aspect of crypto-colonialism was the arrival, at an early point in the history of both countries’ modernization, of architects and planners imported to lead the locals in organizing and decorating public space (Bastéa, 2000: 50–6, 69–80; cf. Peleggi, 2002: 99–101). In both countries, the shift from an imagined state of subjection to ‘oriental despotism’ required the creation of large open spaces, over which government buildings could achieve a commanding presence and in which harmonious design would triumph over the messiness of markets and alleyways. Markets are an especially interesting case in point, since the very meaning of the term has undergone considerable transformation over the past two millennia and since this lability has served the interests of an especially insidious form of ideological legerdemain. ‘The market’ has moved from the public space of an at least partially participatory democracy in ancient Athens to the suq of the Muslim world and its successor, the yousouroun of Ottoman Greece; it has since yielded to
the rationalization of such spaces as tourist attractions and the progressive removal of 'polluting' abattoirs to marginal spaces in many parts of Europe [see, on France, Vialles, 1994: 19-22]. Meanwhile, a more abstract, comprehensive, and economically all-powerful understanding of 'the market' has begun to displace the grounded spatiality of these hives of activity, leading to fears – as in the case of the famous Tsukiji fish market of Tokyo (Bestor, 2004: 292) – that relocation means the end of markets as lived environments with forms of cultural intimacy that defy the surveillance of the state and the international economy. It is perhaps worth noting in passing that the term of choice for common speech and especially for its most slang-inflected variants in Thailand is 'market language' (phaasaa talaad). The gradual disappearance of markets around the world is often justified as sanitary control, moreover, generating in the anthropologist an increasing suspicion that this really has much more to do with politics – with relegating potentially 'dangerous' populations to spaces where they can be subjected to increased surveillance, and away from those spaces where their continuing presence is indeed viewed by the authorities as 'matter out of place'.

It is also noteworthy that much monumental construction, including the recovery of allegedly important archaeological structures, involved the removal of present-day populations. This was the case for much of the Anafoitika area above the Acropolis, studied by Caftanzoglou; it was the basis of Mussolini's decision to demolish the Marforio quarter in order to make way for his triumphal Via dei Fori Imperiali, a celebration of modern romanità as a continuation of the glories of imperial ancient Rome; and it is also the driving force behind the removal of extant populations from central areas in Bangkok. Nor are these the only examples; but they are representative of an overall pattern whereby theme parks, partially made up of ancient materials but heavily restored and refurbished to suit modern ideas about the past, come to replace densely populated areas and in turn create growing zones of disaffected and displaced people.

In particular, then, I am interested in exploring the monumentalization of domestic space, and the reduction, if such it be, of populated urban zones to relatively empty but also imposing large spaces. I shall suggest that this process, which is closely associated with globally dominant images of 'the West', produces social and cultural evacuation of space, and that it especially serves the interests of nationalist and other culturally fundamentalist (Stolcke, 1995) projects of a supposedly post-colonial era.

Practicality and efficiency are often cited as the principal reasons for the destruction of crowded, winding streets such as characterized many urban cultures [including the vast majority of European ones] until the advent of what, with apologies to the James C. Scott of Seeing Like a State
(1998), I shall mischievously call 'high-and-mighty modernism'. Scott, although skeptical of some of the practical claims (such as improved sanitation and more efficient transportation) made for so many high-modernist projects, partially continues the same practical argument when he suggests that most of these schemes failed because they did not meet people's ordinary, everyday needs. I have no quarrel with that argument – indeed, it was an important one to make – but to suggest that the motivation underlying the schemes of Haussman in Paris or Le Corbusier in India were all about some sort of Foucauldian governmentality risks descending into the bathos of teleological utilitarianism: dietary rules are about the regulation of protein (Harris, 1985), grandiose building is a means of social control. There is a question-begging confusion between cause and effect in such arguments, which conflict directly with the more nuanced understanding of symbolic practice to which Douglas's insights, in particular, direct us.

Take the medieval market. Was it an inefficient space? This question is really about the agency underlying questions of judgment, and has more to do with aesthetics than engineering. The concentration of guild members in one space was certainly very convenient for the guilds' own self-management, and perhaps served to maintain standards in the way that today the clustering of restaurants and theatres in districts of London or New York means that everyone has to work just that much harder to survive, but by the same token benefits from the influx of customers who know that this is the right place to come for the desired product. Such markets survive in Europe today in the form of tourist accumulations. In the small town of Rethemnos on the island of Crete, a Veneto-Turkish 'historic center', which is the subject of two of my ethnographies (Herzfeld, 1991), the old bistaktsidhika, the street of the cobblers, has become a row of tourist knick-knack shops flanked at one end by a single cobbler who has held out for years against the final indignity of retreat (and who can provide a detailed Marxist exposition of why he does so, when he is now away and plying his alternative and postmodern trade of globetrotting sailor). Rethemniots are apt to recall this street with nostalgia, as the place where apprentices announced the arrival of a beautiful woman by banging out a signal with their hammers. Today, the proliferation of tourist shops selling goods most of which are not locally produced has generated no such articulation of community. To the contrary, squabbles frequently arise between those who are in direct competition with each other – but most barely even know one another, some being relatively recent arrivals and others being far too focused on the immediate business of grabbing tourists off the street. It is said that tourists 'like' this treatment, rather like foxes, one supposes, in England before the recent ban on hunting; and the animal-like image is enhanced by their metaphorization as a flock of sheep and as such
appropriate prey for these descendants of local shepherds and animal-thieves. But this descent into a cheap form of 'practical orientalism', with its close association with bargaining practices and the contempt it engenders for tourists' avarice and stinginess, occludes the long history of Rethemnos as a literary center under the Venetians and an architectural jewel to which the Ottomans were proud to add their own distinctive stamp.

What makes the bistaktsidhika appealing to the tourists, with the result that several eateries and bars have filled in the few empty spaces, is thus its 'orientalist' appearance. It is a winding, narrow street, with an archway of probably Ottoman origin giving it a distinctly 'eastern' cast. It connects the main market street and a small square dominated by a mosque that in the 19th century boasted the tallest minaret in the provinces of the Ottoman Empire with another major street (where, however, it does not meet any open or monumental spaces). The square is small and filled with restaurants, coffee shops, and yet more tourist shops selling locally made leather goods as well as the usual busts, vases, and small-scale models of an antiquity more Athenian than Cretan. Locals are apt to boast of how a progressively minded mayor had destroyed the crowded streets that had concealed the supposedly indolent habits of the local Muslims, who gathered together in what was then known as the Devil's Street (Seytan Sokak) because of its evil repute. Thus, in the aftermath of a process of juridical reform in which relational co-ordinates ('next to so-and-so's house and so-and-so's bakery' and so on) in a completely male-dominated public life (women were concealed behind veils and window-box latticework) were replaced by a bureaucratic and abstract cadastral understanding of urban arrangements (see Herzfeld, 1999), the Muslim presence was reduced to a symbolic historic shadow - itself at considerable risk of demolition during the ultranationalist years of the Papadopoulos and Ioannidis regimes (1967–1974) - and subjected to a respatialization that framed the mosque as culturally upgraded (it is now a music conservatory!) and as a monument to the liberal tolerance of the West.

This is a small-scale version of something that has been happening in many parts of the world - especially where images of Orient and Occident must vie for ideological as well as aesthetic attention. Greece has never been the site of massive ethnic cleansing on the scale of what recently happened in Bosnia and Kosovo. Instead, the less violent but demographically even more drastic device of compulsory population exchange has meant that, with the exception of small enclaves in Thrace and the Dodecanese, Greece experiences the architectural remnants of its Ottoman past as, variously, a dangerous cultural embarrassment and an attraction for the orientalist gaze of the tourist (or, most frequently, as both at the same time). The denial of the existence of
ethnic minorities, a contentious matter which I do not intend to discuss in detail here, has completed the picture of a country that is ethnically, linguistically, and confessionally homogenous - to the point that the smallness of the percentages of actually existing minority populations serves to underscore the almost total dominance of the majority.

There are other places, however, that have been more willing to admit to the existence of significant cultural influxes in the recent and distant past, and where the same spatial denial of heterogeneity appears as a claim on western attention. Thailand, about which I will have quite a bit to say in a moment, is an excellent example of this. There is no shortage of markets in Thailand, and not all of them are designed for tourists; indeed, most are not. There is also, at least in Bangkok, a considerable amount of public space that is wide open and tightly controlled. Some of this is to be found in front of temples, although those spaces are usually filled with markets too. And even in those monumentized spaces that are truly vast, such as the square that surrounds the equestrian statue of Rama V Chulalongkorn - the most aggressive westernizer among the monarchs who built today's Thailand - the rise of a cult of kingly worship has meant that the space takes on a ritual character quite unlike, say, that of the space in front of London's Albert Memorial or the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC.¹

Rama V's role in westernizing the Siamese polity was crucial in forcing Thailand into a measure of conformity with western models and was a significant element in his efforts to prevent the colonial powers from invading. The ideal of 'being civilized' (khwaamsiwilai), which intensified to an even greater degree later on, largely entered the Thai value structure during his and his immediate successors' reigns (Thongchai, 2000). Today, the term is closely associated with notions of cleanliness. Bangkokians with whom I have worked invoke it with a sense of irony, intending it to denote a level of perfection in the deployment of street-level tidiness and hygiene and conformity to western models. This in turn suggests the main motivation behind the attempts by various Thai governments to hide unsightly slums from foreign eyes during such high-profile international events as the World Bank meetings in 1991 (Klima, 2002: 40-2) and last year's APEC event in Bangkok. These attempts to disguise the messiness of the architectural and spatial realizations of cultural intimacy are symptomatic of an engagement in globally dominant models of value that show Thailand, like Greece, to be locked in a status of quasi-colonial ('crypto-colonial') nervousness about making a good impression on foreigners - a nervousness that the present prime minister's frequent protestations of indifference to world opinion in specifically political issues (such as the protection of human rights) only serves, ironically, to confirm.

It might be worth adding two further points here. First, most of the
historic buildings slated for restoration in old Bangkok are constructions of the reign of the great westernizer, Rama V himself [Woranuch, 2002]. Second, among those of Bangkok's monuments that have not acquired an accumulation of market activity in front of them, the Grand Palace – again largely dating to Rama V's reign – is surrounded by a thick wall and busy roads, while the Democracy Monument – curiously a monument to the military coup that led to the change from absolute to constitutional monarchy as itself a wistful but partially unsuccessful attempt to induce a sense of equivalence with the West in Thailand – stands athwart the seemingly inexhaustible flow of traffic down Rajadamnoesn Avenue, the central artery that leads directly to the Grand Palace itself – and that is itself the target of a massive redevelopment project. One planned effect of that project is the removal of significant segments of the local population from the entire area and the creation of expensive western-style shops and export displays. Much of my own field research in Thailand is currently concerned with the social impact of all this aggressive redesigning on these small local communities, which face a real threat of wholesale eviction as a result. That danger is also enhanced by a local perception that being siwilai is incompatible with living in old houses. This is an attitude that is matched in Greece, where earlier generations of Rethemniots viewed the dank interiors and narrow spaces of their centuries-old houses as 'dirty' and hence by definition 'Turkish'. (They pointed to the forward position of the washing facilities, which for the Ottomans had denoted an architectural act of ritual purity analogous to the washing of the hands before the mosque, as a sign of this lamentably oriental state of uncleanliness!! This attitude was also prevalent in Cyprus, where the very notion of antika meant something irremediably filthy; in Italy, similarly, the flight from the so-called centri storici was hastened by monumentalization during the fascist era and the kind of cultural revalorization that Michael Thompson has recognized in Rubbish Theory (1979) has encouraged processes of external restoration and internal reorganization of the domestic spaces.

In the historic center of Rome, in sometimes sinister fashion, a rash of entrepreneurial speculation on real estate has produced a different mode of 'cleansing' – the local people having been treated, as they see it, as an 'Indian reservation' awaiting removal at the pleasure of the rich, in a classic pattern of the most destructive kind of gentrification. Here I want to note, parenthetically, that the kind of gentrification that Rethemnos, the Cretan town of my earlier study, has undergone, has proved far more benign, since it has permitted the inhabitants to improve their economic status without being forced to abandon their homes; this has led to a revaluation of the aesthetics and antiquity of their houses. Such an outcome offers a happy symbiosis of economic security and effective conservation for a reasonably content population. Rethemnos, a small
town that admittedly does not pose the massive problems of traffic control that we encounter in large cities, also has fewer possibilities for the creation of new open spaces. Tourism has saved the town’s economy, but it has also preserved much of the narrowness of the streets and even fetishized their picturesqueness to good economic advantage.

Large cities, on the other hand, seem to demand imposing public spaces that express in the form of grand vistas the capital’s surveillance of the entire land, and we shall return shortly to this requirement. But they are also more subject to the real estate market. In many parts of Italy (see especially Schneider and Schneider, 2003: 235–51), both historic conservation and controlled construction must run the gauntlet of the mafia; the laundering (riciclaggio, ‘recycling’) of dirty money through a rapid sequence of real estate sales, often by powerful underworld bosses, has become commonplace. Other, more frequent changes further undermine the social character of entire segments of the major cities: district markets (mercati rionali) yield to supermarkets, which in turn flourish because of the convenience they afford the newly arrived, wealthy residents with no real interest in the social life of the neighborhood (and therefore no interest in sustaining the small shopkeepers who until recently comprised a major proportion of its population). Rome and the other major Italian cities are already well equipped with imposing public squares (piazzes); these, once the site of intense social life and the evening stroll or passeggiate, are now contested by increasingly visible groups of obvious foreigners (immigrants and tourists alike), covered with often illegal outdoor extensions of bars and restaurants, or monumentalized to the point of social irrelevance except for major political demonstrations. In Rome, therefore, we do not see the opening up of new vistas; control by the fine arts authorities is strict and the real estate speculators are more interested in subdividing existing properties into even smaller but pretentiously fashionable subunits since that is where their profit lies.

In Bangkok, by contrast, a very different kind of situation arises from the fact that various public entities – from the central government to the municipality and the various temples – own the land itself. Here it is possible to dream, as Mussolini did for Rome, of destructive relocations that would free up vast spaces for western-style vistas and reserve others for displaying the fruits of current government policy in the economic realm. The process is not an uncomplicated one; various forms of resistance have slowed down some of these projects to a crawl, and may even halt the most disruptive examples; Thailand has an active community of socially engaged academics and NGO activists.

Some of these critics have already criticized the over-emphasis on large open spaces and greenery and pointed out that these do not harmonize with local ideas of sociability (e.g. Woranuch, 2002). They emerge
from a western concept of space that is closely linked, I suggest, to that rationality whereby modern town-planning can claim the objectivity of distanced perspective [see Gupta, 1998: 303], a Cartesian rationality that isolates the traditional from the modern and the colonial from the local (Rabinow, 1989), and the military advantages of surveillance (Scott, 1998). It is suggestive that many of the human figures drawn in the planning documents to give a sense of scale look vaguely European, and that their bodily orientation to the spaces in question rarely shows the intense interaction that we would expect in a market or a temple forecourt but generally indicate a relaxed scanning of horizons or, at most, a smiling supervisory eye on the children or a curious but detached gaze at storefronts. This is notably true, for example, of the various master plans that the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration has published for the reconstruction of the old dynastic capital in Rattanakosin Island.

To some extent, the emphasis on large open areas with commanding vistas is genuinely the result of a relatively novel ecological awareness and of the desire to achieve both an improved sanitation and better control over the flow of vehicular traffic. These are real concerns, and we will not achieve any understanding of the difficulties that Bangkok faces if we do not treat them as such. Sociologically, however, as Askew (1996) has noted, the overall emphasis of town-planning in Bangkok is to replace social entities (neighborhoods) with monumental structures that bespeak a collective national heritage. That heritage comprises temples (wat) and palaces (wang), but virtually never includes even some of the more imposing examples of domestic architecture. Askew (2003: 259–60) recounts an interesting exception: the house of veteran politician Kukrit Pramoj was upheld as an exemplar of traditional Thai architecture, and he was extolled for living in it. Note however, that this was clearly seen as an unusual case and, had it not been for his friends' intervention, the house would have decayed after his death, given the government's indifference to its preservation.

The problem is that conservation of domestic architecture, as opposed to monuments, requires a long-term commitment to residing there on the part of a significant number of citizens; this, in turn, requires some provision for maintenance in the long term. As one American architect-planner with many years of experience pointed out to me, however, this has little appeal to the professionals (who in any case belong to the class most likely to have some interest in residing in older houses). Thai planners not only belong to this class; they are also predominantly interested in fixed-term arrangements (usually lasting five or ten years), which allow them to put up new buildings and perhaps reap some profit and kudos but do not encourage people to think in terms of a collective responsibility to the buildings they inhabit. Whereas in Rome most people grow up with a deep appreciation of shared historical engagement
in the city, and whereas in Rethenmos economic security has favored the widespread revision of once philistine attitudes to the architectural environment, there is little desire on the part of most Bangkokians to preserve their old homes, which, except among the most sophisticated (the politician and intellectual Kukrit was emblematic in this regard), are seen as a sign that their inhabitants are not yet siwilai, 'civilized' - a term that has suggestive implications of western aesthetic dominance as well as political control (see Thongchai, 2000).

Even in those areas where some older houses remain, attempts to preserve these as monuments to a local past are usually left in the hands of individuals, or at most in those of local community organizations (Sisak, 2000). They are not supported by the central authorities, who do not hesitate to demolish such buildings if they stand in the way of 'progress'. And progress often means large, empty spaces.

City planners in both Greece and Thailand are very insistent on the value of open (and also green) spaces. Many of them were trained in western Europe and North America, and their models for modern building betray a bourgeois sensibility that would not be entirely foreign to the westernizing ambitions of Rama V himself (see Peleggi, 2002). Curiously, middle-class and upwardly mobile Bangkokians seem much less interested in preserving older houses, whereas the poor not only acknowledge their historical significance but label them (quite literally; see Figure 1) as 'ancient houses'. (Defiantly, in one community, the inhabitants of one such house added a Chinese-style plaque with a Thai inscription reading, 'This house is good, so it is already rich.') For poorer Bangkokians, then, the revalorization of domestic architecture is a way of calling on the authorities to respect ordinary people as participants in national history; it is significant that they will generally ascribe these houses, not to a numerical date, but to the reign of a particular monarch of the present dynasty (which founded the present city of Bangkok).

Particularly striking here is the class-based nature of such knowledge, which is less the 'local knowledge' (phumipanyaa) that more grassroots-oriented conservationists would like to tap (e.g. Sisak, 2000: 75–9) than a claim on a more abstract, scientific understanding of urban needs. In part this is a matter of economic motivation and an unequal distribution of resources; middle-class Bangkokians find it harder to generate solidarity against the threat of demolition and rebuilding than do the poor, for whom the reuse of original material coincides with the need for economic stringency. Anticipating only a monetary compensation for the loss of their houses, some middle-class inhabitants of the older areas of Bangkok openly admit that they are more inclined than the truly poor to pursue self-interest above communal advantage. They still see relocation as a sign of upward social mobility, and will not waste any effort in countering official efforts to change the face of their old neighborhood
in radical ways that would permit them to remain; the fashion of living in historic houses has little appeal, and in truth there is little in the attempts at such requalification made so far that would tempt them away from the prospect of airier and better lighted quarters in the suburbs. The intimacy of the Chinese-style shophouses in which they mostly live at this time has come to seem constricting rather than elegant. One might contrast this with the enthusiasm of Pom Mahakan residents who, while speculating on the kind of housing they would ideally prefer for their reconstituted community, strongly supported the idea of row houses as being more compatible with their desire for sociability in the form of physical proximity. That the design of the houses themselves suggested largely western models (see Figure 2) did not prevent them from anticipating a more self-consciously traditionalist use of domestic and neighborly space – precisely the kind of relationship to the land that most recent planning has sacrificed to paradoxically rationalist models of heritage and conservation.

The case of Pom Mahakan illustrates the adaptability of the poor. When I first encountered the community, they were holding regular community meetings, in which virtually all the residents participated, and built an ornamental garden, in the front area subsequently replaced by the authorities with an empty lawn. At that point, they moved their
communal activities to a smaller space framed by several of the oldest houses; here, too, they set up a display documenting their struggle to remain on the same piece of land. Here the residents would gather around the area in a manner that incorporated the 18th-century city wall into a domesticated space that was both public and intimate – public, in that it was used for communal activities; intimate, in that people could eat, groom and fan each other, and recreate a sense of privileged intimacy by spreading mats that defined the areas in which they were expected to show respect by removing their shoes. As local factionalism made even that space too dangerous, since an emergent if small opposition could spy on the majority’s deliberations and report them to the authorities, the leaders moved the meetings – always in the same direction – to a still smaller space, and occasionally also to a tiny strip alongside the canal. They were truly being pushed to the brink. As they went, however, they constantly reconstituted this same involution of public space, investing it ever more intensely with both the intimacy of the beleaguered and the formality of public respect. Their space became increasingly cramped, but its use never lost the clarity of form that well-disciplined bodies, repeating the organizational format of more solidly built environments, gave to its incidental physical presence. Their self-discipline recalled Fernandez’s ([2003 [1984]]) observations of close
homologies between church architecture and dance forms in Zionist Christian worship in South Africa.

Middle-class space has its own imperatives, but these do not include the same degree of collective self-deployment. The growing individualization that accompanies economic and social mobility has largely dispelled that capacity. The spaces themselves seem to retain little appeal, although a few still speak fondly of their neighborhoods as real social environments. Gentrification, long recognized as a growing and perhaps problematic phenomenon in the West, thus still seems quite fragile in Thailand; its success depends on creating a desire for old houses (however radically restructured internally), and this has yet to come about. Of its incipient stirrings there can be little doubt, although fear of the ghosts of long-dead inhabitants and a persistent streak of *nouveau-riche* abhorrence of anything that looks dilapidated also provide an undertow of support for what we might call *spatial cleansing* by the municipal and state authorities.

This term incorporates an intentional allusion to the notion of ethnic cleansing, since, although the latter is usually far more physical in its violence, both entail the disruption of fundamental security, and especially of ontological security, for entire groups of people. Spatial cleansing means the conceptual and physical clarification of boundaries, with a concomitant definition of former residents as intruders (usually called 'squatters' or described with similarly demeaning language). The progressive move toward formal mapping of properties gave this impetus legal weight, so that relationships defined in terms of neighborhood were replaced by abstract description, enumeration and measurement, and location in streets now named for persons of significance (albeit sometimes only locally) in the national master-narrative of history. It means regulation of pavement commerce and strict price controls in the marketplace (to bring the local *agora* or *talaad* into line with the national economy). And it means zoning laws, safety standards, and, above all, clear demarcations between public space and zones of intimate social life. The people of Pom Mahakan, realizing that they could not oppose such a cherished principle outright, attempted a land-sharing arrangement that would have preserved their community at the back of the stretch of lawn that is now in fact in place, the first segment of what is intended to be an almost entirely empty and totally uninhabited space (see Figure 3).³

In Bangkok this spatial cleansing meets little resistance from those who already have money and the power that goes with it. In Rome or Rethemnos, the non-utilitarian value of historic houses has overcome the older tendency to replace them with modern buildings; the difference is that in Rome the financial stakes are much higher and the capacity of long-standing tenants to resist eviction is consequently much weaker
than the desire of house-owning Rethemniots to remain together in a socially intense environment. In Bangkok, neither motivation reinforces the still relatively feeble interest in conserving domestic architecture of any sort or age. As a result, planning that elsewhere is now seen as destructive offers instead a fast route to what is generally seen as civilized living.

But in all three countries, whatever the fate of domestic architecture, the market spaces that define communal life as well as interaction with encompassing economic spheres are rapidly disappearing, or being replaced by new kinds of market that embody the principles of a rationalized economy. In Greece, the notion of the yousouroum – a term for the Athens [Monastiraki] ‘flea market’ with a ‘Turkish’-sounding name that is sometimes attributed to the name of a Jewish merchant from Istanbul, but now used more generically of such markets – almost automatically conjures up images of disorder. As recently as 2004, for example, a government official – significantly, perhaps, the deputy minister of development – complained that the yousouroum ‘have gone beyond all bounds because the law is not clear’. He went on to say that ‘they’ve reached the point of selling everything, from blouses and electronic equipment to meat and fish’ [reported in Angelioforos, 18 November 2004: 48]. One sees here the taxonomic panic of a high
government official confronted not only by a violation of conceptual limits but especially by a ‘confusion of categories’ - a classic case of what Douglas calls ‘matter out of place’.

In Thailand, too, the desire for order is constantly pitted against practices that for some, especially food vendors, are a matter of survival and that for most residents are the familiar sights and smells of everyday life. There have been many attempts to control the food vendors’ use of pavement space, none of them very successful or long lasting. The previous governor of Bangkok, Samak Sundaravej, notoriously declared at one point that stray dogs and homeless people should be removed from the symbolic center of the city, as they were unsightly and inappropriate. This harsh judgment resonated negatively with many foreign and local academic observers and with the NGOs most concerned with ameliorating social hardship, but probably reflected the bourgeois values of a rising middle class uncomfortable with the propinquity of sometime slums (see Herzfeld, 2003). While this evidently arises less from humanitarian concern than from worries about the alarming crime figures and the widespread use of drugs, it is noteworthy that in recent years significant numbers of students, many of them from incomprehending middle-class families, have begun volunteering their time and labor in support of some of the more beleaguered poor communities.

The case of Pom Mahakan is quite indicative in these respects. The Bangkok authorities have, at least until recently, insisted on viewing this community as drug-infested and dangerous. It does seem to qualify for the label most commonly applied to slums, *chumchon ae ad* - literally, ‘crowded community’, and, as such, considered especially prone to drug use. Current plans call for its replacement by an empty park space; one section of empty lawn has already replaced the garden the residents had constructed (the military were called in to do the job, creating tremendous fear), and the plan is to raze the remainder of the community (including several old wooden houses) to the ground and cover the rest of the area with yet more lawn. It has never been explained why this plan, which concerns a space hidden between a high 18th-century wall and a canal, would not become a safe haven for serious pushers and users of drugs. Here, in fact, we see a European project of bringing ‘clean’ (because controlled) ‘nature’ to exercise its benign effects on the definitionally filthy and sinful urban space; this contrast has a long history in the European past (Mosse, 1985; Williams, 1975; see Darby, 2000, on gardens). But a market space that once existed here has already been obliterated, and the authorities have seemed bent on completing this spatial cleansing with all the means at their disposal. The reconfiguration of other markets as exhibition spaces for official economic policy offers a glimpse of the underlying logic, which is to turn the capital into a dramatic microcosm of the country at large (in that sense perhaps
partly reproducing the concentricity of the older galactic polity model [Tambiah, 1976]], while at the same time turning into monuments those lived spaces that have hitherto been foci of social interchange.

But what does it mean when the inhabitants of a city become ‘matter out of place’? Is Douglas’s view of pollution itself a product of a western proclivity to view messiness as a confusion of categories? Her own sense of order has rather explicitly Christian (and specifically Catholic) roots. But there is certainly a strong sense of categorical order in Thai society as well. Whether the present concern with order is of local or external origin, then, it is the forms of order, rather than the desire for order in general, that attest the clothing of authority in the legitimacy of a western-derived model of statehood. Rama V understood that principle very well, which is why he commissioned such a rich array of Italian architects to design royal and public buildings in Bangkok [Peleggi, 2002]. The perceived equation of occidentalist display with power soon filtered down to the wealthier residents and generated a domestic architecture as Italianate in its surface forms, despite its modest materials [Phusadee, 2002: 187–8]. Similarly, Greek bourgeois houses began to mimic in cheap stucco the neo-classical elements – also later mass-produced for the housing market in Bangkok – brought by the royal court advisers of the Bavarian king of Greece in the third decade of the 19th century [Iakovidis, 1975].

But resistance is both architectural and, in a broader sense, spatial. People use space according to their own understandings, rather than by following the prescriptions of protocol, and the resulting configuration is almost always a palimpsest representing the many phases of struggle that is rarely conclusive in its results and that also rarely comes to a clearly defined end. The story of Retemnos is a clear example of this process of constantly shifting accretion, responsive to the winds of ideological change but also to local understandings of past and present. In Athens, the proximity of the Anafiotika quarter to the Acropolis produces a revaluation, not only of the value of the illegally constructed modern houses, but also of the ancient monuments. While tourists and environmentalists may appreciate the glorious view of the Acropolis towering above the city and ringed today with a belt of green and shaded pedestrian paths in place of some of the formerly chaotic streets, what they have lost is the social linkage of the classical monuments with the agora and the vousourom [although the former, excavated by the American School, provides a visual reminder of the former spatial relationship, while the latter has been preserved as an orientalist curiosity]. The locals have incorporated the Acropolis into their own understanding of the sacred [Yalouri, 2001], but there are fewer and fewer locals around to cement that connection; it has now become a generic, national association, rather than an aspect of daily life. In a future thus appropriated by state-sanctioned order, will the rich disorder of lived experience ever be able to reclaim these spaces?24
The various patterns of spatial cleansing and historic conservation that I have described represent three different glosses on a shared understanding, European in origin, of what 'civilized living' should mean. The Greek pattern sprang originally from a heavily classicizing ideology that, while it recast ancient Hellas in the image of modern German rationalism, also came in time to yield to the appreciation of an equally essentialized nativism that exalted instead picturesque images of Byzantine, Venetian, and Ottoman cultural elements and their links to an idealized rusticity from which in fact the vast majority of urbanites were eager refugees. In Italy, the church conserved and reshaped the classical heritage to its own ends, defining (and indeed creating) as public spaces piazze physically dominated by ecclesiastical buildings. And in Thailand, where the engagement of local people in these processes has yet to break through the combined forces of an older feudal system and the authoritarianism of a bureaucracy that imitates its much older western precursors, these large spaces displace ordinary people in the increasingly fervid pursuit of a national cultural policy designed to make Thailand a convincing player in the regional and perhaps international struggle for cultural and economic hegemony.

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Notes
1. One should nevertheless beware of overplaying such differentiations. The personal signs and commemorative devices left at the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial, for example, suggest a more personal use of the space. Nor are such connections confined to the recent dead. I have been unable to discover, for example, who regularly leaves flowers at the altar of the deified Julius Caesar in Rome - admittedly a rather covert space, but within an archaeological zone of high visibility.
2. During my fieldwork, for example, I came to know two taxi drivers who are avid collectors of old books about Roman history. One of them will resort to any amount of subterfuge to gain access to academic resources in order to learn more about the documents that have come into his hands. Both are able to give detailed guided tours of entire neighborhoods, especially in the historic center of the city. I have never encountered any voluntary expression of such expertise on the part of their Bangkok counterparts, many of whom are recent arrivals in the city and find it difficult enough simply to find their way around.
3. A number of projects have been advanced by students and architects working with Thai NGO activists and the local population. All presuppose ceding some 80 per cent of the land to the municipality for its lawn. But empty space, it seems, is as voracious as a vacuum; the bureaucrats have not wanted to yield.

4. Local interpretations of the categories of ‘open’ and ‘closed’ space may also conflict with the rationalist vision of western-inspired planners; for an important discussion of the Greek case, see Hirschon [1978].

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MICHAEL HERZFELD, Professor of Anthropology at Harvard University, works in southern Europe and southeast Asia, with a particular emphasis on the politics of the past, bureaucracy and the state, and artisanship and knowledge. He is the author of nine books, including The Body Impolitic (2004) and Cultural Intimacy (second edition, 2005). Address: Harvard University, Department of Anthropology, William James Hall, 33, Kirkland Street, Cambridge, MA 02138, USA. [email: herzfeld@wjh.harvard.edu]