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Modernity and Housing

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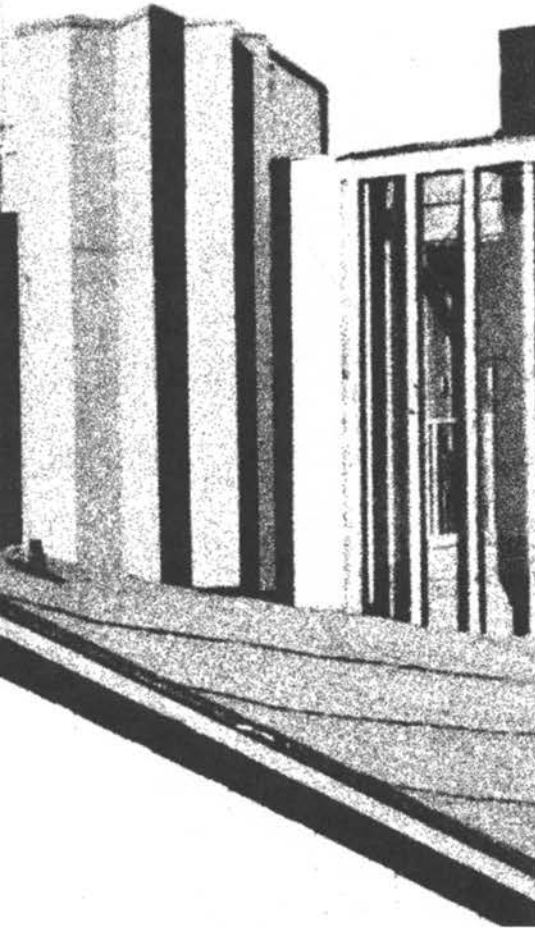
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4 Situating Modern Housing Architecturally



The universality of modernity is undeniable. What were once insurmountable barriers of custom, creed, natural surroundings, and superstition are now readily transgressed by television images, flights in jetliners, and the contents of soft-drink machines. Being convincingly in one particular place for any length of time is becoming difficult. Conversely, however, the full import of cultural and geographical differences was probably never fully realized until well into the modern era. Understandably, it was in the attempt to breach sociocultural barriers that the real nature of those differences became clearer to us. Moreover, in spite of considerable alleviation of human need, at least for some, the effort to bring people closer together and to treat them similarly has had a reverse effect. Most have clung tenaciously to their traditions, striving to identify more precisely those attributes that make them distinctive yet also allow them to reap the benefits of the modern world. Not surprisingly, contemporary housing reflects both faces of modernity: an inherent facility for uniform provision and a renewed call for diversity. Of primary importance, however, is its capacity for symbolically projecting more than the mere rudiments of dwelling. What is required is to ensure that people feel they can reside in a specific locale, a certain place, and, in short, can be at home.

In what follows, various dilemmas and paradoxes for the architecture of contemporary housing, brought about by conditions of modernity, will be examined in detail. In each section an attempt will be made to show how a particular paradox might be resolved, resulting in six underlying principles for the design of good modern housing.