

Up vs. Down

Social Theory and the City
Assignment 2
Nomita Sawhney
September 20, 2005

The notion of the Horizon as an axis, which determines a reference of how we see and as a determinant of what is up and down in context is very important to establish. The question which we can ask ourselves is, what is the horizon and does it change in context. The perception of the horizon as shifting ground or as a dynamic system in visual and mental pictures formulates many ideas and points of view. But being on the ground in touch with the earth may be the most simplistic and true form of this idea.

To be able to view the world from a vantage point, giving perspective to what exists below, had always been thought to be sacred ground. The sites which are zoned for the most sacred and prestigious points in the landscape have always been on higher ground. The notion of higher ground as a protected territory and enclosed by physical boundaries forming a natural barrier, creates a position of power. This point also has an ideal position of seeing without in essence being seen, creating a powerful politically charged point of view. In reversal the valley or a point which is located below the horizon is witnessed as a vulnerable location. Open to flooding, and an easy point of target. Thus for obvious reasons higher points on the topography are favoured for building sites.

The creation of a point of viewing from a position of power exalts a sensation of accomplishment and status. The access to a point of view, if it is restricted creates a sense of power to a few.

The transference of power in the relation to a spatial arrangement in space can always be associated with the creation of many levels of perception and the association of the levels of the world with mental maps of the being. Many forms of associations are also built by the way in which we converse. Language and the notion of the creation of a pattern of thought is perceived to create a mental map of where one exists. Up and down in speech create notions of being down and out or of being projected up as emotional stand points.

These frames of reference create common notions of thoughts on up and down. Yet being located on a hill in a slum is contradictory. The notions of space and the persona they take on have a deep impact on the surrounding spaces they control. A skyscraper would demand a certain kind of development to complement its servicing and would dictate the skyline. An imposing structure would be emblematic and would demand a powerful position. Slums on a hill, would create a horizontal mass of structure and envelopment and would be associated with crop farming or any other form of vegetation which has created a mass of material, yet it would not demand attention.