Gopher Prairie or Prairie Style? Wright and Wharton Help Dodsworth Find His Way Home

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> "That's what I'll do after college! I'll get my hands on one of these prairie towns and make it beautiful. Be an inspiration. . . . Why should they have all the garden suburbs on Long Island?"
>
> —Carol Kennicott in *Main Street*

Perhaps what sustains our attention to Sinclair Lewis's *Dodsworth*, even after several readings, is the multilevel narrative of conflicted, frustrated, and ultimately satisfied desire. On one level, this 1929 novel graphically portrays destructive marriages and beneficial divorces in a way that makes me think that the bohemian 1910s and 1920s were to Lewis what the 1960s and 1970s were to the writers of the 1980s and 1990s; in fact, an ancillary argument in this essay is that a continuum can be drawn through Lewis's work from his days at the artists' colony in Carmel to his wanderings in Europe in the late twenties. Lewis, however, also looks beyond marriage, sex, and family and asks us to confront with his hero, Samuel Dodsworth, another bundle of desires, this time both personal and cultural, which come to the surface as Dodsworth faces the central questions about his own existence. After he has retired from building a successful automobile manufacturing company, and after he has been abandoned by his wife, his son, his daughter, and his best friends; after he has felt unsuited for living in Europe and unwelcomed in America, Dodsworth must decide not only what he is going to do during the rest of his life but also and equally important, where he is going to live. In other words, at the mid-

point of the novel, Lewis has deliberately shorn Dodsworth of job, home, family, and friends. At this most crucial moment of crisis in his life, Dodsworth finds both a life-affirming new career and a new life-supporting place to live. As he looks honestly at himself and his world, alone in Zenith, he thinks, "What the devil was he doing here [in Zenith]? He was as dead as though he were entombed. . . . Then . . . he became very busy peering into the Sans Souci Gardens development," the project that brings Dodsworth and his second wife Edith Cortright back to America to live at the end of the novel (181).

In *Dodsworth*, the right place to live, not in terms of status, but in the most meaningful personal, cultural, and aesthetic terms, is the suburb. For Sinclair Lewis and his central characters, the suburb differs dramatically from what was then and what is still the popular conception of the outrageously spectacular or outrageously monotonous housing development. We can locate the key sources for Sam Dodsworth's and Edith Cortright's idea for garden or landscaped suburbs in the ideas expressed in the writings of Edith Wharton and Frank Lloyd Wright. More than a genealogy of ideas, however, is at stake. The manifold concept of suburb in Lewis leads us to questions not just of urban design but also of health, national identity, and leisure. These are the desires that rise up unexpectedly in Dodsworth and that resonate so meaningfully for us today.

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One of the principal material signifiers of the difference between Europe and America in 1930 was the automobile. The car would be a significant object of study even if its nationalistic significance were not great; it, like the personal computer after it, effected momentous structural changes on both the individual and the collective levels. As a psychological power, the automobile entered both individual and national consciousness as both an object and reflector of desire.[1] As a power in the physical environment, it shaped the physical landscape of the world to suit its own needs.[2] As "the most costly durable consumer product of the second industrial revolution" (Flink 43), the automobile transformed economic systems as it became the focal point of interrelated industries whose dependence upon the success of their product rendered social and environmental reforms ineffectual. The American method of building cars and trucks helped the Al-

lies in World War II to such an extent that it can be claimed that "American superiority in mass-production techniques . . . was indeed the main reason for the Allied victory" (Flink 276).[3] Its all-pervasive controlling nature led historian and philosopher Ivan Illich to call it a "radical monopoly" (Qtd. in Sachs 192). One could even combine the psychological with the environmental levels and consider the automobile as a powerful influence in what the French Situationists call "*psychogeography*: the active study of mental states and spatial ambiances produced by the material organization of the urban terrain" (Kaplan and Ross i).

For Lewis, Wharton, and Wright, however, and for those in the middle of the dramatic changes being effected by the car and all its cohorts, it was first of all a cultural marker of differentiation. Sheer numbers provide an obvious difference: according to *Dodsworth*'s Alec Kynance, president of the Unit Automotive Company and the archfiend of automobility, there were 20 million cars in America (see *Dodsworth* 26); 26.5 million cars were registered in 1929, according to Flink (131). Ann Douglas points out that in 1930 there were 790,000 cars in New York alone, more than all of Europe. In Germany, only 1 percent of the population owned a car in 1932 (Douglas 17; Sachs 33, 36). In fact, the 1984 MIT report on automobile use predicted that by the millennium "only in the United States and a few of the world's other affluent nations" would the car be "'the prime means of personal transport'" (Qtd. in Flink 405). Only in America did the car ascend on the back of mass transit. The reasons are manifold and include the significant and seemingly paradoxical fact of the democratic/imperialistic impulse of American car pioneers. There was no such impulse in Germany, for example. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the car gave the upperclasses a means to separate themselves once again from the masses. It was not only a luxury item but also a physical boundary and a means of dominating the lower classes. German aristocrats mourned the train's democratizing power; even if one had a private train car, one still had to share train stations with the masses. In an automobile, however, one could literally run over the lower classes and speed way from responsibility. In America, on the other hand, not only did Henry Ford and others build cars for everyone, they wanted everyone in the world to own an American car.

Automobility did some work as an agent of classism in America. At the beginning, car use was limited to those who could afford it, while the working class still used mass transit. Tax money was used to improve the roads, so, as Flink points out, "working-class streetcar riders in effect were taxed by city planners and politicians to make possible middle-class automobile use" (364). Nonetheless, the car in America for the most part worked as an equalizer, and not just against class lines. As Kynance says, "In twenty more years we'll have the bloomin' Tibetans and Abyssinians riding on cement roads in U.A.C. cars! Talk about Napoleon!" (26).[4] In more general terms, the car reflected the classic Gramacian formulation that in America, unlike Europe, "there do not exist numerous classes with no essential function in the world of production, in other words classes which are purely parasitic" (Gramsci, 281). The narrative of Sam Dodsworth's life before the novel begins, then, is of a man very much involved in this great symbol of desire and American imperialism, and as such he is a representative American.

Yet, Dodsworth entertained idiosyncratic, almost un-American ideas about his car business. He believed, not so much in af(ford)ibility, efficiency, planned absolescence, and domination, but in quality and durability. His car, the Revelation, sold large numbers by occupying the ground between the cheap and the luxurious. And, like the firms most interested in producing custom cars—firms like Packard, Pierce-Arrow, Duesenberg, and Franklin—Dodsworth's company lost its identity; though it did not fail, it was absorbed by Kynance's Unit Automotive Company. Dodsworth, it turns out, is less interested in "Doing Big Things" (27) than in doing the right thing. Yet what that appropriate action may be proves elusive. After his sell-out to Kynance, he has two conflicting epiphanies about the car: Viewing Notre Dame for the first time, he loses his American snobbery and "admitted the cathedral's gray domination . . . the work of human hands seemed to tower larger than the sky. He felt, dimly and disconnectedly, that he too had done things with his hands; that the motor car was no contemptible creation; that he was nearer to the forgotten, the anonymous and merry and vulgar artisans who had created this somber epic of stone than" those who "uttered pomposities about 'the transition in Gothic motifs'" (133). One can't help but recall Roland Barthes's description of the car as "'the Gothic cathedral of modern times'" (Qtd. in Sachs 91).

The other epiphany occurs in Grand Central Station, after Dodsworth's first return to America from Europe. While watching the commuters he

> fancied that [Grand Central Station] was veritably the temple of a new divinity, the God of Speed . . . an abstract, faultless, and insatiable God, who once he had been offered a hundred miles an hour, straight-way demanded a hundred fifty. . . . And with his motor cars Sam had contributed to the birth of this new religion, and in the pleasant leisure of Europe he had longed for its monastic asperities! He blasphemed against it now. (1554-155)

It's as if Dodsworth, at first understanding himself to be a William Morris artisan, discovers that what he wrought by hand was a machine for universal destruction. In the early twentieth century, the automobile was perceived as a threat, concretely to personal health (both the stink of gasoline and the decline of open-air walks) and symbolically to our collective myth of America as a garden of eden. Yet at the same time that these characters (and we can include Carol Kennicott and Hayden Chart, from *World So Wide*) advocate walking as a necessary social as well as physical activity, they praise the car and the skill to drive it well. This struggle of mutually exclusive desires shares strong affinities with another central American locus of desire: addiction. Speed, for Dodsworth, is a drug—impossible to satiate and impossible to resist—and his relation to it is that of an addict. The desire for and of the thrill itself may have an underlying psychic charge or drive, but it certainly underlies such common and seemingly disparate symptoms as fast driving and drug use; this is the common wisdom that undergirds, for example, Alcoholics Anonymous, which was formed out of the personal experiences of men—like Dodsworth—who lived the high life of the late twenties. It is, therefore, no surprise that we find Dodsworth, later in the novel, drinking alcoholically.

Before he has these epiphanies, Dodsworth, in the throes of the disillusionment engendered by the transferring of his company to Kynance, dreams, like Frank Lloyd Wright of all people, of what we now call mobile homes.

> a very masterwork of caravans: a tiny kitchen with electric stove, electric refrigerator; a tiny toilet with showerbath; a living-room with a radio, a real writing desk; and on one side of the caravan, or at the back, a

> folding verandah. He could see his caravanners dining on the verandah in a forest fifty miles from any house.
>
> 'Kind of a shame to have 'em ruin any more wilderness. Oh, that's just sentimentality,' he assured himself. (27)

Maurice H. Needham of Needham, Lewis, and Riorsby advertising agency in Chicago, a Dodsworth-like character, had the unquenchable idea for motor caravans, too, and he enlisted Frank Lloyd Wright into his cause. In a 1936 telegram to Walter Chrysler, he wrote:

> It is obvious that whatever large motor car manufacturer first goes into the trailer business on a production basis will capture a major part of the trailer market. It is also obvious that important improvements in trailer design including appearance as well as convenience and comfort are coming fast. Further it is obvious that this job is a natural for you. Through an arrangement with FLW the architect we are in a position to contribute to your organization suggestions for revolutionary improvements which would enable you to lead in the trailer business as you have led in the motor car field. Trailers are homes as well as vehicles. Wright combines the functions of architect with those of engineer. His freedom from hampering traditions and his experience in modern functional design specially equip him for this job. . . . A discussion with him would enable you to come to a quick conclusion one way or another. Please advise if he should see you.

Apparently, neither this meeting nor Needham's trailers ever materialized. Wright, however, in 1952 designed Paradise on Wheels, an offshoot of his Usonian/Broadacre City projects. He envisioned it as a trailer park for nearly 400 mobile homes arranged outside of park land and shopping areas, an attempt "to unite themes of mobility and stability that pervaded his own imagination and that of the larger culture" (Gwendolyn Wright 92). Dodsworth's plans also never pan out. Ultimately he decides against helping build the caravans because he knows Kynance will pervert his intent. But there is also that sudden, almost perverse realization that cars in the wilderness destroy the wilderness, leaving no place for cars to go. Lewis, as prescient as he was about automobility and the automotive industry—UAC predicts GM's rise over Ford—seems to have done little research in the topic. He does include a scene in which Sam and Tub discuss cars, where Sam excitedly wonders if Ford will pull the Model T from the market (he did on 27 May 1927) and an-

nounces that Citroën and Opel will enter the low-end market to compete with Ford (168). But Lewis was more interested in the car as a cultural artifact of desire. Dodsworth can no more successfully realize his dream of cars in the wilderness than his dream of being happily married to Fran in Europe.[5]

The failure to build car caravans and his two epiphanies prompt Dodsworth to try yet again. Dodsworth attempts to resolve his ambivalence toward automobility by dreaming of garden suburbs, and his new desire is also linked with a woman, Edith Cortright, who shares his ambivalence toward the automobile. For Dodsworth, garden suburbs, or garden cities, represent a complex unification, only partially realized however, of traditional values (in particular, leisure and antimaterialism) and modern technology. Sans Souci Gardens, without its awful name of course, is not an idle rich man's hobby. It is Dodsworth's and Lewis's idea of significant social reform.

Edith and Sam's (and Carol's) partially articulated ideas about suburbs and right living are more fully developed by the like-minded Edith Wharton and Frank Lloyd Wright. Lewis blends together Wharton's belief in the creative stimulus of a life of wealthy leisure with Wright's belief in a democratic, antimaterialistic, technologically advanced American architecture. We can easily forget that the construction of suburbs was once an attempt to join together the best qualities of city and country living. As Henry Binford has pointed out in *The First Suburbs*, suburbs were created not by mass transportation or "large-scale commuting" but as "products of a community-building process" equivalent to the process that created "the frontier town" (Binford 2). In the best sense of the word, the garden suburb was a utopian idea, and some of its earliest builders—Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and Calvert Vaux, for example, who planned Riverside, Illinois—succeeded in creating a built environment at peace with its natural surroundings—a place where both walking and driving were pleasures. In America in 1929, American architects and planners sought to re-create the utopian, Arts and Crafts ideals of the English garden cities in garden suburb design. The suburb could be a place for good health, fellowship, consensus, and religious freedom.

Perhaps because the suburb was a new environment filled with new opportunities, many saw it as the potential birthplace for a new American architecture. And to an extent, those dreams were realized. Lewis Mumford has observed that

> from the suburb, in fact, sprang a new domestic architecture, organically at one with the life within and the landscape without: houses and gardens that brought to conscious perfection the traditional virtues of the farmhouse with new utilities possible only in our own day. . . . From H. H. Richardson to Frank Lloyd Wright the most graciously original expressions of modern form were achieved in the suburban house. (490)

A vast majority of Wright's completed structures are suburban houses (and 80 percent of his work still standing at his death was built west of Buffalo, New York). It is possible that Wrightian houses, and certainly the Prairie style, inspired Carol Kennicott to return to her dream to "recreate villages" as she "walked back through Wilmette and Evanston" and "discovered new forms of suburban architecture." This inspiration, quite in the spirit of Wright's and the Chicago School's general project of revamping American architecture, is, unfortunately, not to be realized by someone like Carol. She is sensitive and intelligent enough to sense that something new is happening, but she is untrained and so cannot give the new movement a name, let alone participate in it. She is, of course, the typical Lewisian character, whose sincerity always takes a wrong turn and thus is ready to be deflated. Carol dreams of a garden suburb—a notion too big for her—and then constructs it with "'darling cottages and a quaint Main Street.'" As she admits at the end of the novel, "'I may not have fought the good fight, but I have kept the faith.'" Carol and her perverted dreams of Wrightian suburbs is yet another example of how Lewis prepares the reader to be surprised by satire (11, 16, 432).[6]

These new forms of suburban architecture appear in Lewis's description of the Sans Souci Gardens development in *Dodsworth*, which sounds at first very much like Riverside, Illinois, Olmsted and Vaux's Chicago suburb whose parkways run in curving sympathy with the Des Plaines River, or the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development at Mason City, Iowa. Here is Lewis:

> To the north of Zenith, among wooded hills about the Chaloosa River there was being laid out one of the astonishing suburbs which have appeared in America since 1910. So far as possible, the builders kept the beauties of forest and hills and river; the roads were not to be broad straight gashes butting their way through hills, but winding byways, very inviting . . . if one could only kill off the motorists. (151)

Lewis's last cutting remark (satire by surprise again) points to one major reason why more suburbs do not resemble Riverside. The ideal or utopian suburb proved to be practical in only limited scale. The more it appealed to people as a place that offered solutions to the problems of the city, the quicker the delicate balance between land and car broke down. Lewis (and Dodsworth) would have agreed with Mumford when he said,

> We are faced by a curious paradox: the suburban form now produced an anti-urban pattern. With the destruction of walking distances has gone the destruction of walking as a natural means of human circulation: the motorcar has made it unsafe and the extension of the suburb has made it impossible. (506)

Sam, after he has had his epiphany in Grand Central Station, consciously and unconsciously assimilates new principles that will restore the balance of suburb and car. He (and Wright) loathed the materialism of their age, and they acknowledge that greed (in the specific form of real estate overdevelopment) and speed (in the form of one of Dodsworth's cars) had destroyed the utopian suburb. Yet both saw the possibility for its renewal, and interestingly enough the two principal figures would be the architect and the enlightened businessman. For Wright, "Even cultured men and women care so little for the spiritual integrity of their environment. . . . There were exceptions, and I found them chiefly among American men of business with unspoiled instinct and untainted ideals" (Smith 17). Dodsworth could be one of those businessmen.

In fact, Frederick C. Robie, the first owner of the most representative Prairie house, the Robie House, could have been the model for Dodsworth.[7] "His passion was the automobile," and from 1901 to 1912 Robie worked for and owned bicycle and automobile supply companies. His house included "a three-car garage with a built-in car wash and a pit for working on engines" (Connors 6). It is a testimony to Wright's ability to integrate automobility into architecture that the garage seems invisible to the viewer. Wright, of course, was not the only architect who sought to solve problems raised by automobility through architecture; I believe many of the best designs came from those with affinities to the Arts and Crafts movement, whether strictly Prairie School or not. They were consciously engaged with the problems of craft and machine, writing manifestoes, lectures, and essays on the topic. Interestingly Carol Kennicott would

have seen one such solution in Lake Forest, Illinois: Market Square. "Market Square," writes one architectural historian, "was possibly the first automobile shopping center designed and erected in America" (Wilson 226). Designed by Howard Van Doren Shaw, a prominent Chicago Arts and Crafts architect, the square's buildings resemble traditional European buildings, borrowing without copying from several styles to make an eclectic whole. The plan's Americanness, and originality, comes from the way the architect unobtrusively incorporates automobility into everyday life. The whole plan "expressed the spirit of domestic tranquillity and community that the Arts and Crafts movement sought to foster" (Wilson 226).

Wright's relationship to the English and American Arts and Crafts movement is dialectical, and this relationship is best expressed in his famous 1901 lecture at Hull House, "The Art and Craft of the Machine." "William Morris," says Wright, "pleaded well for simplicity as the basis of all true art. . . . Rightly understood, [it] is a synthetic, positive quality. . . . A thing to be simple needs only to be true to itself in organic sense" (Wright, "Art and Craft" [1960] 64).[8] Some principles of Art, like simplicity, according to Wright, survive the periodic cataclysmic manifestations of the Machine. Thus, for American Arts and Crafts adherents like University of Chicago professor Oscar Triggs to rail against the machine and machine work is to miss the Machine's potential to render the ideal in art.[9] William Morris protested against the Machine—and rightly so—but it is now time, asserts Wright, to realize the Machine's potential and to put an end to its abuses. Without giving up on Arts and Crafts principles, Wright designed against Victorian abundance and eclecticism by advocating both simplicity and the machine's importance in daily life: "The Machine is Intellect mastering the drudgery of earth that the plastic art may live; that the margin of leisure and strength by which man's life upon earth can be made beautiful, may immeasurably widen" (Wright, "Art and Craft" [1992] 61).

Out of leisure come beauty, comes art. The site of leisure is a natural, or organic, one, both in the sense of "the natural world" and the sense of "logical growth," but also in a grander, transcendent sense: "organic law, the law to which the great solar universe is but an obedient machine" (Wright, "Art and Craft" [1992] 69). "Organic law" would be just another name for cosmic indifference if it were not for art, for art gives soul to this

machine. Thus, incorporating these three levels of meaning, organic architecture "*develops* from within outward in harmony with the conditions of its being, as distinguished from [architecture] that is *applied* from without" (Wright, "Second Paper" 127). An organically designed house in the midwest, for example, would naturally follow the lines of the landscape, and Wright described the evolution of his prairie architecture as the elimination of dormers, attics, chimneys, and in general, artificial protuberances.[10] "The house," he explained, "began to associate with the ground and become natural to its prairie site" (Wright, *The Natural House* 34). The prairie aesthetic, though it was many things, centered on the landscape. In a letter to Harriet Monroe, who had written a negative review of Wright's work on display during the 1907 Architectural Club's exhibition in Chicago, Wright insisted on the traditional and organic qualities of his work: "In the average of his work you saw merely a curious experiment with certain boxes . . . that offended your dainty love of fleshly curves and sensuous graces," qualities more Victorian than modern. "Is it impossible," Wright continues, "that the exquisite delicacy of the living nature that we all love may bloom more vividly where the 'Architectural,' which is primarily the background for this life, itself becomes a more quiet and restrained convention than has yet been practiced?" Then Wright makes a connection between the angular geometry of his work and the natural "background" that is unique to this work:

> We happen to be living on a prairie. The prairie has a beauty of its own. A building on the prairie should recognize the features of its quiet level and accentuate them harmoniously. It should be quiet, broad, inclusive, a welcome associate of trees and flowers not a nervous, fussy interloper, and should be "married" to the ground. Hence, broad, sheltering eaves over determined masses, gentle roofs, spreading base and outreaching walls. (Qtd. in Connors 68-69)[11]

Yet prairie architecture did not concern itself solely with single houses. In "A Home in a Prairie Town," Wright conceived of prairie homes as elements of prairie communities. The arrangement of houses "secures breadth and prospect to the community as a whole and absolute privacy both as regards each to the community and each to each" of the houses (74). The organicism of the house, realized in right relation to the landscape, is multiplied into a community. The construction of house and

community are exterior manifestations of the moral values of the dwellers inside, people like Dodsworth and Cortright.

Wright's harmonization of design and nature and his emphasis on democratic living was an expression of his antimaterialism and a point of correspondence with Lewis. In a speech entitled "The Architect," Wright "told his colleagues that in this country commerce had triumphed over art. The lust for money had reduced the American architect to the status of servant to the business community" (Twombly 45). This view is shared not only by the nameless president of Sans Souci Gardens but also by Hayden Chart, the architect in Lewis's *World So Wide*. Chart's clients have forced him to become "a fine designer of unfine houses" (110). In *Dodsworth*, the person who embodies all the values that Lewis, Wright, and Wharton are reacting against is Alec Kynance, the U.A.C. president. *Kynance*, of course, rhymes with *finance*. Dodsworth begins his search for a moral living space when "for the first time he admitted that . . . [Kynance and others like him] would give him a larger house, a yacht, but *They* would not give him work that was really his own. . . . He had no longer the dignity of a craftsman" (22).

Both Wright and Lewis found confirmation for their antimaterialism in the work of Thorstein Veblen. That Lewis was influenced by Veblen throughout his career can be seen in his notes for his last novel, tentatively entitled either *Tired Warrior* or *Lonely Warrior*. As Mark Schorer points out, Lewis never lost a sense for "that earlier radicalism in American life out of which Veblen himself had come and which was the background of Lewis's clearest attitudes" (Schorer 772). In a 1910 article that helps explain his revolutionary suburban architecture, Wright claims Veblen as one of his more profound influences: "Painfully conscious of their lack of traditions our powerful get-rich-quick citizens attempt to buy Tradition ready made and are dragged forward facing backward in attitudes most absurd to contemplate by those whom they would emulate: our most characteristic example of 'conspicuous waste'! Read Thorstein Veblen" ("Studies and Executed Buildings" [1960] 95). Veblen also earned a place in the list of influences in the index of Wright's *An Autobiography*. Suburban houses could be luxurious according to Wright (many of Wright's homes have servant rooms) but not, to use Veblen's term, in an "invidious" manner. The luxury, or the Arts and Crafts ideology of "domestic tranquillity," found in a suburb built by Dodsworth would be tamed, its energy not ex-

pended in conspicuous consumption but rather in more worthy activities. Its residents would be enlightened in a way Dodsworth had been after his revelation in Grand Central Station and in the following way expressed by Mumford:

> Some of the activities of the middle-class suburb were doubtless due to the superior education of its members and the relatively large amount of leisure that the women of the community enjoyed. The latter thus approximated, in modern terms, the conditions required for citizenship in the Greek polis: leisure, detachment from base occupations, concern for public goods. (500)

In other words, the suburb as a frontier site is an environment for leisure activities. Leisure, again, does not mean the ability and opportunity to wastefully consume, to render ephemeral both one's goods and one's time in the interests of the ego. Neither does it mean, like mere idleness, the absence of work. Leisure, as Mumford uses it here, and as Dodsworth, Wright, and Edith Wharton intended it, is "the opportunity for disinterested activity" (Craven 402). Leisure is both the time and the place for such activity. Leisure is a way of describing the time in which one has choice; it is a time of one's own. In it, one can buy things—frivolous or aesthetic—but it also describes the time in which we do nothing at all, or garden, or travel, or dream, or have our dreams analyzed. Leisure is the time of desire, and in that sense it exists both inside and outside commodity exchange systems.

It is also a way of describing space. If one is working, one must be attentive to what is really before one. A person in leisure time achieves separation, removal. In car travel, for example, one can experience the full range of leisure—from idleness to an aesthetic encounter in tranquillity of natural beauty. The car then becomes one's portable private living space, whether an individualistic, monastic sports car or mobile home complete with writing desk. The danger of automobility is that speed in travel decreases one's sense of leisure, and therefore the car itself, because it is fully realized as an object of speed, works against leisure. In occupying both the time and place of leisure, however, this tension dissipates because, ideally, leisure promotes serenity, a psychological state of acceptance. True leisure, then, enables the search for religious states of desire.

The person who helps Dodsworth to this insight is Edith Cortright, who is loosely based on that other Edith, Edith Wharton, a friend of Lewis's and someone with whom he shared sim-

ilar ideas about automobility, leisure, and art.[12] In *A Motor-Flight through France*, Wharton illustrates, more by example than by argument, how to keep this tension between speed and leisure from disintegrating into one extreme or the other. "The motor-car has restored the romance of travel," she writes, *romance* being a term very much bound up with her conception of art (1). In an essay entitled "The Great American Novel," Wharton gives vent to her irritation (by 1927 a very familiar one) with the parochial concerns of American authors and the paucity of American culture. In attacking Van Wyck Brooks and William Dean Howells, she stands with James in asserting that the proper subject for the novelist is, not an essential human nature, but the "custom, manners, culture" of "real men, unequal, unmanageable, and unlike each other . . . all bound up with the effects of climate, soil, laws, religion, wealth—and, above all, leisure. Leisure, itself the creation of wealth [and not the other way around], is incessantly engaged in transmuting wealth into beauty by secreting the surplus energy which flowers in great architecture, great painting, and great literature. . . . A colony of ants or bees will never create a Parthenon" (414). But a traditional romantic genius will, and that conception of the artist is diametrically opposed to the American Taylorized, standardized man. That figure has become a machine.

The art that is created in the time and place of leisure, according to Wharton, is a conservative art. Much of Wharton's critical work is a vehement reception against the then modern, traditionless technique of stream of consciousness. She saw this method as just an up-to-date version of the French naturalists' slice-of-life method. She thought that modern novels were impoverished because of their rejection of the past. She admired Balzac, Austen, Tolstoy, and Eliot because they treated the rooted layered workings of society and the individual workings of the mind. Leisure, Wharton would say, is the time in which one discovers one's organic link to the past and tradition. It is a time in which one hears the past speak, not the voices bubbling in one's head. Art, she wrote, cannot destroy what comes before it. It conserves the past, growing from "the accumulated leaf-mould of tradition. . . . All the past seems to show that when a whole generation misses the fecundating soil stored for it by its predecessors its first growth will be spindling and its roots meagre" ("Tendencies in Modern Fiction" 433-434).

A life of leisure requires contact with the earth, soil, the eternal elements. Wharton, in her car in northern France, maintains a contact with the earth: she notes that the "wide expanse of agricultural landscape, disciplined and cultivated to the last point of finish, shows how nature may be utilized to the utmost clod without losing its freshness and naturalness." Like Frank Lloyd Wright, she believes in using the machine to work in tandem with nature and art; she is not so antimodern as to disavow the machine, only the extremities to which it leads: the machine-man, the mechanized landscape. Wharton writes that "where agriculture mated with poetry instead of banishing it, one understands the higher beauty of land developed, humanised, brought into relation to life and history. . . . In France everything speaks of long familiar intercourse between the earth and its inhabitants" (*A Motor-Flight* 4-5). Edith Cortright, whose authority is announced in her name, teaches this principle to a slowly awakening Dodsworth: The European peasants

> love the earth and wind and rain and sun. And I've learned it from them. . . . I'm so much more elementary. Here we may have ruins and painting; but behind them we're so much closer to the eternal elements than you Americans. . . . That's the strength of Europe—not its so-called 'culture,' its galleries and neat voices and knowledges of languages, but it nearness to earth. (335)

Dodsworth is somewhat confused by this outburst for he believed that America was the land of the out of doors. It is, Edith tells him, but Americans typically exploit the land for recreational purposes, only a superficial form of leisure. True leisure comes first from a true embracing of the land.

In *Dodsworth*, Cortright shows Dodsworth the Italian equivalent of the American utopic suburb: the suburban Italian villa and garden. One of Wharton's great expressions of the link between culture and soil is her scholarly guidebook *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (with illustrations by Maxfield Parrish, whom Lewis and Dodsworth admired). In her introduction, she explains that American gardens are imitative; their planners have not seized upon the principles of garden architecture. One of these principles states that the villa "must be adapted to the landscape around it." "Adapted" means neither an elimination of boundaries nor a sharp distinction. It means "a subtle transition from the fixed and formal lines of art to the shifting and irregular lines of nature." For example, "the ilex or laurel walks beyond [a representative house] were clipped into shape to effect

a transition between the straight lines of masonry and the untrimmed growth of the woodland to which they led, and that each step away from architecture was a nearer approach to nature" (7, 12). Judith Fryer, in her study of Wharton, points out that in *Italian Villas and Their Gardens*, "landscapes become outdoor rooms" (344). The private space infiltrates what used to be taken for public only because it was outside. In the same vein, Wright speaks of his re-creation of the concept of the wall: "My sense of 'wall' was no longer the side of a box. . . . It was . . . to bring the outside world into the house and let the inside of the house go outside" (*The Natural House* 33). Both Wright and Wharton break down the barrier between public and private in order to increase the space in which art may be created. And Lewis, by making public the most private desires of Dodsworth, Kennicott, and others, achieves the same end.

When Wright left Chicago in 1910 for Italy, he wrote from Florence that

> no really Italian building seems ill at ease in Italy. All are happily content with what ornament and color they carry, as naturally as the rocks and trees and garden slopes which are one with them. . . . The secret of this ineffable charm would be sought in vain in the rarified air of scholasticism or pedantic fine art. It lies close to the earth . . . like a handful of the moist sweet earth itself.
>
> ("Studies and Executed Buildings" [1992] 104)

Wright's enemy is scholasticism and Wharton's is modernism, but their ideal is the same. Wright, Cortright, and Dodsworth all sought to realize this principle of adaptation and integration in new suburban building. At the end of the novel, Dodsworth and Cortright are ready to build America anew by developing homes that are like the ones Wright built, like the ones Carol Kennicott saw in Evanston and Wilmette before she was stifled by Gopher Prairie. Lewis, in choosing Prairie-style architecture, reveals both his debt to Wharton and his beginnings as an artist in the century's second decade when the Arts and Crafts movement flourished. A direct line can be traced backwards from his sympathy with Wrightian architecture to his time in Carmel, where he was personally influenced by people like Jack London, George Sterling, and Mary Austin, and by ideas such as simplicity, the integrity of the natural landscape and the built environment, and Native American religiosity.[13] Lewis wanted the synthesis of machine and nature so ably embodied in Wright's work, and

his desire ran counter to the prevailing American culture. The Prairie aesthetic survived with Wright, but the 1916 Armory Show in New York City had stymied the Arts and Crafts movement. "On their return to their Main Streets in the Gopher Prairies of the American mid-west, the Babbitts of the post-war years shook off the out of date styles of the Arts and Crafts movement and the Prairie School, only to embrace the Tudor and Colonial period houses" (Lambourne 162).

Thus the social reform through landscape, architecture, and the idea of leisure that Lewis proposes in *Dodsworth* fails. We discover the Dodsworths living in a Florentine villa in *World So Wide*. Automobility remains very much a destructive force. Hayden Chart's wife, Caprice, is killed in the first chapter in a car accident, thus releasing Chart to search for meaning in Dodsworthian fashion. Caprice and Fran, though, are not the villains; Fran merely labels Sans Souci Gardens as bad taste. Alec Kynance, however, sees America, the home of the automobile, as alive, and Europe, home of Art, as dead. He mistakes leisure for "loafing" and, after Dodsworth has signed over his company to him, asserts there is "more art in a good shiny spark-plug than in all the fast Venus de Mylos they ever turned out. . . . My God, man what do you think is the purpose of life? Loafing?" (25-26). Creation takes a back seat to production, and for production to be of value, time must be expended as quickly as possible, and place is of no consequence.

It is unclear what happens to the Dodsworths between *Dodsworth* and *World So Wide*; we get only hints such as the following exchange between Chart and the now much older Edith Cortright: Chart asserts that "a man can read poetry without getting kicked out of the Athletic Club," to which Cortright responds, "I doubt that! I've been in Zenith!" (89-90). The distance Cortright has come can be measured by comparing that light-hearted though somewhat bitter outburst with her sympathetic and idealistic proclamation in *Dodsworth* just after Dodsworth has asked her if she could see herself living in Zenith: "Sam! About your suburbs. Something could be done—not just Italian villas and Swiss chalets—for a town with a tradition of Vermont Yankees and Virginians in buckskin. Why shouldn't one help to create an authentic and unique American domestic architecture?" (338). For Lewis, the forces represented by Kynance were too powerful. As Dodsworth says in Lewis's later novel, "Well, we tried to go back and live in the States, in

Zenith, but we're kind of spoiled for it. Everybody is so damn busy making money that you can't find anybody to talk with" (46). For Lewis, America represented the machined garden. Bodies had successfully been Taylorized. "Fordization" had set in.[14] Desire was dead. To some extent, Lewis was a victim of his own satire. Being so successful at parodying America, he could not place *World So Wide* there. That is, Dodsworth returns to Italy not because of the failure of an ideal but because of the rhetorical dictates of satire, Lewis's art. Frank Lloyd Wright, on the other hand, continued to successfully unite the enlightened businessman with the building of an authentic domestic architecture. However unattainable by Lewis, it nonetheless remained above satire, just as Lewis's own work did. It may have driven him from the place of its inception, but he never allowed it to silence himself. His work, and Wright's, serve as evidence for a genuinely American conception of leisure, a time and a place purged of financial violence and redeemed through art.

Notes

Many thanks to Ann Douglas, who in 1982, taught me the importance of *Dodsworth*, and to Jim Hutchisson for encouraging me to rework old material. A draft of this paper was presented for Jim's Sinclair Lewis panel at the American Literature Association, Baltimore, 1995.

[1] Because the car developed fairly evenly and simultaneously across cultural and national boundaries, James Flink and other historians of transportation contend that the transportive need is definitive of the human:

> From utilitarian advantages of economy and efficiency of horseless cities and the breaking down of rural isolation to enhancing individualism and mobility, every motive for adoption of the automobile that I found in the circulating media in the United States can be found as well in the French media. . . . One must agree with Joseph Interrante and begin 'with the premise that our consumption of cars satisfies a real need for transportation—a need as basic as food, clothing, and shelter . . . people bought automobiles because they met old transportation needs better than existing alternatives and offered new possibilities for movement."
>
> (28-29)

The latter is true but it doesn't prove the former. Because transportation is not a basic human need, but still universal and in some way untouched by cultural determinism, one looks for other categories than need and thinks of desire. Thus,

Sachs's book *For the Love of the Automobile* stands as an important companion to Flink's seminal work.

[2] There is some disagreement about the benefit and debits of automobility on the environment. Though there is no argument about the car as a primary source of major pollutants, someone as socially and environmentally aware as Flink argues that the car has actually helped preserve the national parks system (see 171-182).

[3] Sachs says, "the transportation-industrial complex—exporter, creator of jobs, engine of prosperity—is judged untouchable for the sake of the national economy" (210).

[4] See Flink, chapter 13, for the internationalization of the American automotive industry. Successful in England, but less so in France, and completely shut out by Mussolini in Italy, "both Ford and GM [in the 1920s] had become multinational enterprises. By 1928 Ford was assembling cars in twenty-one countries, GM in sixteen" (251).

[5] Speaking of Lewis's acuity, although *Dodsworth* was written in 1927-1928 (Schorer, in a standard Lewis biography, implies that he was taking notes for the novel as early as 1925), Lewis predicted in August 1928 the crash of October 1929 (see Shorer 507). None of the historical forces that brought about the crash, or even the retrenchment of the automobile industry, is overtly registered in *Dodsworth*, and yet with hindsight, one can't help but see Dodsworth, by retiring from his automobile company, as an active nay-sayer to this disastrous conflation of money and desire.

[6] Larzer Ziff briefly mentions a connection between Lewis and Carol and Wright, but he misreads her dream: "she seems never to have heard of the Prairie style, and the beautiful Gopher Prairie of her fantasy is Georgian." Ziff does not elaborate on whether "Georgian" represents the corruption of Main Street—an already available template for Carol, whose imagination can't define precisely what makes the Chicago suburban architecture new (183). It is also possible that inarticulate (because untrained) Carol used the word "cottage" as a synonym for "bungalow"; if so, she would then be referring to the typical Stickley Arts and Crafts domestic structure (see Wilson 214-220).

[7] Did Lewis know Wright? Wright's name does not appear in Schorer or in any other work about or by Lewis that I know of to date. Glen A. Love reports that "the Lewis biographies (and a letter from Mark Schorer in response to my inquiry) indicate no direct evidence of Lewis's knowing Frank Lloyd Wright" (490). I have found an intriguing connection between Lewis and Wright that runs through the person of Arthur Davidson Fiske. In an October 1929 letter to his friend Mary Austin, Fiske writes, in that terribly hardboiled, flippant tone often characteristic of the 1920s: "I get the strangest and most conflicting accounts from your part of the world. You write that you are a Naturist. Someone else writes me that Hal [that is, Lewis] is likely to get shot at any moment by one or another of his drunken friends. Hal writes me that life is very serious and that he is writing a novel" (probably *Ann Vickers*). Then, he writes, "My friend Frank Lloyd Wright is quoted in the papers today as saying:—'Any competent architect can design a building that will resist the attacks of natural forces, including earthquakes; but to design a building that will resist the march of modern progress in quotation marks is asking too much.' This

he said as his superb masterpiece in Chicago [the Midway Gardens] was being torn down" (Fiske Collection, Huntington Library). Used with permission.

[8] The textual history of this essay is notoriously difficult; it went through many drafts and has never been edited and presented in an authoritative scholarly fashion. Another published version of this essay renders the same passage as: "William Morris pleaded well for simplicity as the basis of all the art" (Wright, "Art and Craft: [1992] 64).

[9] In an unmarked piece of manuscript material—apparently a fragment of a letter—in the Wright files at Northwestern University, Wright says, in recalling the Hull House speech and the events surrounding it,

> Another voluble member of that group incipient in the arts and crafts movement, as by name, Oscar Lovell Triggs. You may remember him as the man who said in the public prints that Rockefeller was a greater fellow than Shakespeare? Yet he didn't last long at the University of Chicago. To make a long story shorter, between the erudite Professors Zeublin and Griggs, I got badly set down [during the initial meetings to organize an arts and crafts league]. But Jane Addams, bless her, and Julia Lathrop were not content. They postponed organization and asked me to bring in a paper. . . . Reading from that paper I declared in no uncertain terms that the machine *was* an Artist's tool if and when in creative artist's hands.

[10] See Wright, *The Natural House*: "First thing in building the new house, get rid of the attic, therefore the dormer. Get rid of the useless false heights below it. Next, get rid of the unwholesome basement, yes absolutely—in any house built on the prairie. Instead of lean brick chimneys bristling everywhere to hint a Judgment, I could see necessity for one only" (32).

[11] Judith Fryer discusses the issue of gendered spaces raised by such images of buildings marrying the land (5-51).

[12] The correspondence between Edith Cortright and Edith Wharton, as far as I know, has not been acknowledged. I draw this correspondence based simply on the congruence of names, the Ediths' shared love for and knowledge of Italy and its villas, the real life friendship between Wharton and Lewis, and finally an interesting appearance of a Henry James-like character, Endicott Everett Atkins, "'dean of the American literary colony" in Paris; he "was reputed to resemble Henry James" (*Dodsworth* 125). See also the moment in Berlin when Professor Braut lectures Sam and Fran about the differences between America and Europe; he mentions "your author Mrs. Edith Wharton" who, because of her sensibilities and education, is a real European (233). Lewis seems to be dramatizing his preference for Wharton over James, and he stages it as the differences in cultural understanding and taste between Fran and Sam.

[13] I can almost hear Lewis surprising us by satire by adding a final concept to this list—drunkenness. In fact, in the histories of the Carmel colony in which Lewis participated, the focus has been on the conflict of personalities (and very often the apparent intractability of Austin, who is too-often characterized in near-sexist terms) and the supposed unproductive life of bohemianism. Yet, this experience had a lasting impression on Lewis; to give but one ex-

ample: Austin and Lewis remained good friends and an important correspondence between them, including letters discussing the meanings of *Main Street*, survives at the Huntington Library.

[14] "Straw bosses and company 'spotters'—another new element in the work force—enforced rule and regulations that forbade leaning against the machine, sitting, squatting, talking, whistling, or smoking on the job. Workers learned to communicate clandestinely without moving their lips in the 'Ford whisper' and wore frozen expressions known as 'Fordization of the face'" (Flink 119).

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