

## Liminal Places and Borderlands



In Victor Turner's theory of social drama <sup>11</sup>, the state of liminality refers to an in-between phase when individuals or societies experience transition. Liminality can refer to the phase of adolescence when one is transitioning between childhood and adulthood. It may occur for an entire society, when it is experiencing changes in character or leadership. But liminality can also refer to specific *places*: borders, frontiers, airports, interstate highways, hotels; places that people pass through while going from one domain to another. The familiar feeling of suspended reality while one awaits a flight at the airport - suddenly being aware one's life from the outside - can be thought of as a consequence of the liminal state. What is significant about the concept of liminal places is that they are places "where the ordinary norms of everyday life may be suspended" <sup>11</sup>. Since no one resides in liminal places for long, they may show signs of being untended to or simply may be drab in appearance. A no-man's land can awaken generally dormant, or unconscious parts of the personality. It is, therefore, not a surprise that much crime has been reported within uninhabited apartment corridors, alleyways, and other transitional places where people feel they are outside the bounds of normal social life and behavior. Jane Jacobs <sup>8</sup> notes that in places that are dominated by a large single-use facility - a large general hospital, university campus, railroad track - a border is created that is inhospitable and often isolated. If a place is *just* a transition, and there is no incentive or desire for people to inhabit it, that place can easily become a place that gives rise to crime and other urban problems. On the other hand, a transitional place that is clearly tended to, and shows evidence of inhabitation can unconsciously enforce productive social existence.

On the walking path between Lake Anne and Reston Town Center, I pass by a cluster of rather homogenous townhouses and a large empty parking lot. The transition between Lake Anne and Reston Town Center is signified by an un-friendly "No Trespassing" sign and a vast space reserved not for bodies but for cars.





In the in-between path between Lake Anne  
& Reston Town Center, enter a world for cars.  
Straight lines and an undesirable transition  
for the body from one community hub to the next.



"New Dominion is a  
giant wall that cuts the  
Town Center in half...  
Everything on one side  
is not Town Center-ish."  
(Bob Simon 6/21/11)

June 29/2011

My initial impulses about doing a project on Reston were apprehensive. The only thing I knew about the place was from the newly-built Town Center, with its ample array of high-end shopping and restaurants.

When I am in Town Center, I immediately feel anxious. Tall buildings with flat sides busy overhead and create the shaft of space common in areas with many high-rises; New York, Chicago...

But unlike these cities - with their complexity, emergent culture-clash, the diversity of sounds & faces, these Town Center "roads" are sterile, virginal, entirely flat box-like. These buildings are new, and arrived before the existence of an urban core.

Unlike the organic growth and development of other American urban centers, this one is constructed all but skeleton, was placed in the shape of void look like without the essential create a city:

complex cultural context  
 fine, idiosyncratic social character  
 the set of businesses & public services  
 emergent from people's actual needs

