

The Poet and the Pastoral in the Naming of Suburbia

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It is not the literal past that rules us, save, possibly, in a biological sense. It is images of the past. These are often highly structured and selective as myths. Images and symbolic constructs of the past are imprinted, almost in the manner of genetic information, on our sensibility. Each new historical era mirrors itself in the picture and active mythology of its past or of a past borrowed from other cultures. It tests its sense of identity, of regress or new achievement, against that past. The echoes by which a society seeks to determine the reach, the logic and authority of its own voice, come from the rear. Evidently, the mechanisms at work are complex and rooted in diffuse but vital needs of continuity. A society requires antecedents. Where these are not naturally at hand, where a community is new or reassembled after a long interval of dispersal or subjection, a necessary past tense to the grammar of being is created by intellectual and emotional fiat.

In Bluebeard's Castle, George Steiner

Pastoral scenes, the simple life, rural activities, and expressed love of nature are difficult to find in modern society; however, the remembrance or spirit of these haunts us all. “. . . The ideas with which we deal in our apparently disciplined waking life are by no means as precise as we like to believe. On the contrary, their meaning (and their emotional significance for us) becomes more imprecise the more

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closely we examine them. The reason for this is that anything we have heard or experienced can become subliminal—that is to say, can pass into the unconscious.”¹

Carl Jung’s words have a very real significance for those of us who are interested in subdivision names. Most of us know that when “River Crossing” is written on a road sign, it means an individual is approaching a place where he can cross a river. However, we are also aware that when “River Crossing” is used as the name of a subdivision, it means something entirely different. We intuitively understand this difference; the question is, how did we achieve this intuitive understanding? Hall in *The Silent Language* offers us one answer. He writes that “the artist does not lead cultures and create patterns; he holds up a mirror for society to see things it might not otherwise see.”² Our understanding comes from today’s mirrorholders, the advertisers, who understand the American psyche; however, these “artists” instead of helping Americans see themselves, use their knowledge to create demands and sell products. Among the materials with which these “artists” work are the names which are painted, carved, or emblazoned across the billboards, television sets, and newspapers of our land. Naming functions have shifted from identifying and distinguishing. Their new function is to evoke our desires and, in so doing, harness themselves to the purpose of selling cars, breakfast cereals, records, and homes.

In order to understand how names become mirrors for us to understand our own needs, and through them ourselves, we need to look further at Hall’s work. He informs us that there is an informal cultural pattern of which the individual is unaware. According to Hall, three laws govern this pattern: order, selection, and congruence.³ This paper focuses primarily on the naming of suburban housing subdivisions and the pattern that emerges from that naming. Looking at the names of subdivisions, we can see Hall’s laws working to form a pattern. The pattern itself is anchored in an affective base. As Algeo pointed out in his recent article about street naming, today towns are named and streets are named *before* houses are built. Because the order of naming is reversed (previously, names were given long after people had known and used streets and towns), more conscious

¹Carl G. Jung, “Approaching the Unconscious,” *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1968), p. 27.

²Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1959), p. 127.

³*Ibid.*, p. 121.

thought can be given to the naming.⁴ No longer are names given to describe, commemorate, or show possession (the classic reasons for naming); names today are given to evoke and then appeal to our desire for a return to the peace and serenity of yesteryear.

To focus on this underlying function of names, we need only look at the second law, selection, which plays a large role in pattern formation. "The easiest way to determine when selection is being applied is to note whether there is something bound to something else by custom when any number of other items could 'logically' serve the same purpose."⁵ As we analyze the naming of subdivisions, we begin to notice that customarily archaic, rural, nostalgic, tradition-invoking (as opposed to modern, urban, contemporary) imagery is used. This practice becomes so prevalent that an individual's sense of proportion is jarred by a name which does not appear to fit the expected pattern. Finally, congruence is the other law that governs pattern making. However, congruence deals with "a pattern of patterns." Our problem is to look at the sets (subdivision names) and try to arrive at a pattern. Afterwards, we shall try to deal with the congruence of that pattern by describing its affinity with a more general semantic configuration.

The subdivision names for this study have been taken from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *New York Times*. Two levels of sampling are involved: (1) Atlanta, Philadelphia and New York represent a sampling of metropolitan areas; (2) the subdivision names taken from the Real Estate section of the Sunday edition of these major newspapers represent a selection of the names of all subdivisions in the respective areas. The sample is of course not a simple random one; therefore, conclusions cannot be generalized beyond the selected cities. Nevertheless, these conclusions are suggestive, i.e., they are based on naming systems which resemble those in other metropolitan areas. The subdivision names which appear in these samples are very representative of the subdivisions not sampled. For example, a recent edition of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* contains advertisements for "Pine Valley Farms," "Mountain View," and "Murfield," among many other similarly

⁴John Algeo, "From Classic to Classy: Changing Fashions in Street Names," *Names*, 26 (March 1978), pp. 80-95.

⁵Hall, p. 123.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 124.

named developments.⁷ These give off a semantic ring which is very similar to that we hear from those categorized in the following tables.

TABLE 1
SUBDIVISION NAMES FROM THE *NEW YORK TIMES*

<i>Water</i>	<i>History</i>
Water's Edge at Rye	Jefferson Village III
Hidden Brook Estates	Covered Bridge II
Lakeridge	
Harmon Cove Towers	
Riverview	
Riverview Heights	
Spring Acres	
<i>Village</i>	<i>Parks</i>
The Hamlet	The Park
Deerfield Village	Kensington Park
Dutch Hollow Village	
<i>Estate/Farm</i>	<i>Animals</i>
The Estates	Fox Run
The Villas	Fawn Ridge
Black River Estates	
Country Acres	
Farmstead Estates	
Marius Estates	
Shetland Estates	
<i>Fields/Plants/Hills</i>	<i>Others</i>
Cedar Ridge	Bedford Mews
Timber Ridge	Heritage Mews
Heritage Hills of Westchester	Cameo Plaza
Scarsdale Meadows	The Gramatan
Valley View Cooperative	Grand Valley Plaza
Greenbriar II	
Salisbury Glen	
Oak Hill	
Hilltop at Randolph	
Maple Hill	
Treetops	

⁷"Real Estate Section," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* (July 6, 1980), p. 3H.

TABLE 1 (contd.)

Constitution Hill
Indian Field

TABLE 2

SUBDIVISION NAMES FROM THE *PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER*

<i>Water</i>	<i>History</i>
Delaire Landing	Yorktown Village
Old Arch Crossings	Hollandale
Pebble Creek	Yardley Commons
Coldspring Crossing	Heights of Newtown
Mirror Lake Farms	Concord Park
Sturbridge Lakes	Stover Mill Townhouses
Woodlyn Crossing	Knox Bridge
Pinetown Crossing	Sutton Terrace
<i>Hunting</i>	<i>Estate/Farm</i>
Yardley Hunt	Hampton Estates
Makefield Chase	Estates of Dublin
Country Downe	Smithfarm
Kimberton Hunt	Tareyton Estates
Deer Park	
Beaver Run	
<i>Fields/Plants/Hills</i>	<i>Other</i>
Somerton Woods	The Mews at Brookside
Signal Hill	Clusters of Berkeley
Garden Corner	Tapestry
Meshaminy Knoll	Clusters at Horsham Towne
East Ridge	
Raintree	
The Birches	
Laurel Hill	
Willow Greene North	
Tower Hill Grove	
Whitebriar	
Heather Valley at Village Shire	
Country Place at Village Shire	
Chestnut Grove	
Holland Acres	
Ivystream	

TABLE 2 (contd.)

Maple Point
 Woodlands
 Summit Ridge
 Bradford Glen
 Fair Hills
 Montgomery Glen
 Perkiomen Woods
 Country Meadows
 Green Willow Run
 Valley Glen
 Maple Valley
 Spring Mountain Summit
 The Woodlands at
 Horsham Towne
 The Meadows at
 Horsham Towne

TABLE 3

SUBDIVISION NAMES FROM THE *ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION*

<i>Water</i>	<i>Railroads</i>
Little River Crossing	Howell Station
Willow Springs	Arbor Station
River Mill	
Cross Creek Condominiums	
Rivermont	
Williamsport	
Martin's Landing	
River Plantation	
Spinnaker Cove	
Rivermist	
Lake Dow	
Brookfield West	
Cameron's Crossing	
<i>History</i>	<i>Farms/Estates</i>
Cherokee Hills	Farmington
Saddle Creek	Leisure Estates
Horseshoe Bend	Country Estates
Saddleback Ridge	
Charleston Square	
Mainstreet	

TABLE 3 (contd.)

The Fairways	<i>Hunt</i>
Chimney Springs	
Powder Mill	Summit Chase
The Columns	
The Barclay	<i>Parks</i>
Wellington Buckhead	
430 Lindbergh Condominium	Park Lanes Condominiums
<i>Fields/Plants/Hills</i>	<i>Others</i>
Cedar Cliffs	Kellogg West
Round Hill	Smokerise North
Hidden Hills	
Stoneleigh	
Peachtree Commons	
Peachtree City	
Woodfield	
Foxcroft	

These tables are used simply as a way to see relationships. Many of the groupings overlap, and some names could have appeared just as easily in another column. These groupings, or any others the reader might choose to use, will however show a pattern.

In analyzing the subdivision names we shall first consider the names which appear in the *Times*; these names will then be compared and contrasted with those appearing in the other two papers. In all cases, the wide diversity of names can be reduced to a smaller set of underlying categories or "latent" themes which account for the sense of pattern in the "manifest" listing of separate names. However, there is no one-to-one mapping of name and category. Any one subdivision name may embody a condensation of *two* underlying categories. For example, when we examine the names that refer to the category *water*, we are immediately struck by the fact that all these names are compounds of *selected* images. Examination shows that peaceful or passive water names are used: lake, cove, river, brook, spring, as opposed to ocean, sea, torrent, which would portray violence or destruction. Associated with this kind of water-imagery are the topographic images of edge, ridge, towers, view, heights, states and acres. Positive connotations of privacy, expansiveness, and elevation (towers, heights) are thus associated with tranquility. (The first word in the three dimensional Hidden Brook Estates also connotes privacy, withdrawal,

a Thoreauian retreat.) Water's Edge at Rye invites speculation about the word "Rye," which can refer to the grain or to the gypsy word for gentleman. Either way the name adheres to a natural, exotic image. Harmon, the only proper name in the group, is probably employed to denote ownership; its association with quiet waters in Cove Towers implies a safe, tranquil retreat away from the rush of civilization.

Two entries appear under *history*; Jefferson Village III and Covered Bridge II. Jefferson, the believer in the nation of farmers is honored, and the connotation brought to mind by that name is re-enforced by the word "village." We see that the value of *tradition* is evoked here by the number III which follows the name. Covered Bridge II (in this case the II may signify an onomastic tradition) returns us to a simpler, more tranquil era, sheltered by the small communities which these bridges tie together.

This peaceful, serene image is again invoked in the village names. The Hamlet, with its denotation of a small, close-knit rural environment, where security reigned, returns us to pastoral yesterday. Reminding us of New York State's early history is Dutch Hollow Village with its shades of "Rip Van Winkle." As used here, Hollow most certainly refers to a valley or basin, and of course the rural, village imagery again predominates.

Our other village entry (Deerfield Village) calls out a symbol of the union of nature and culture: deer and forest unthreateningly surround a civilized clearing-settlement. Another union of nature and culture is to be found in The Park and Kensington Park. The associations are quite conventional: expansiveness, enjoyment, leisure, and tranquility. Kensington, of course, adds an English character which has helped sell many homes since the Revolution. Arthur Minton has documented the selling power of English trappings in his study of apartment developments. "In them (names), as even more markedly in other elements, Americans are seen turning to British life for connotations of prestige and security."⁸

In New York the word "estate" often replaces the more common word "farm" which we generally associate with workaday subsistence activities. It appears that unless "farm" is transformed into some other word, the hard work associated with it may destroy the pleasant image being created. In this new category we find convenient displace-

⁸ Arthur Minton, "Apartment House Names," *American Speech* (October, 1945), p. 165. See also Minton's "Names of Real Estate Developments: II and III in *Names* Vol. 7, 1959, pp. 233-255 and *Names* Vol. 9, 1961, pp. 8-36.

ments: The Estates, The Villas, Black River Estates, Country Acres, Farmstead Estates, Marius Estates and Shetland Farms (as opposed to, say, pig farm). Note that "farm" is used only once and then coupled with that is Shetland reminding us of the Shetland pony, a creature used not for work but leisure, particularly for pleasing children. The compound Farmstead likewise connotes domesticity rather than labor. In this context, Country Acres brings to mind sylvan settings, "L'Allegro" types dancing on the green, rather than the mundane theme of sweat, dirt, and food production.

In our animal category are the fox and the fawn. These animals remind us of hunts, sylvan glades, early morning mists, and beautiful scenery. True, the fox and deer are different. The fox is a predator and the prey of the leisure class; the deer, on the other hand, is symbolic of the prey. Coupled with Run (a term usually referring to the mass migration of animals),⁹ fox is associated with the leisure time sport of fox hunting. Fawn (the female deer), does not here suggest hunt. Coupled with ridge, the image of the fawn brings to mind a woodland setting where man and animal somehow co-exist in Debussyean harmony. The contradiction between fox and fawn is therefore resolved when both are associated with the theme of leisure.

Many of the subdivisions in all three papers are named for fields, plants, or hills. In analyzing those of the *Times*, one finds several having to do with trees and timber. The trees mentioned by name are the cedar, the oak, and the maple. These trees are well-known, associated with rural, but not wild, overgrown areas. In this sense they mediate between nature and culture. The cedar is also associated with Christmas and family drives into the country. These tree names are combined with ridge and hill, both of which connote "subdued" as opposed to dangerous elevation. In other words we can live on a hill or a ridge but not on a mountain. Timber Ridge has much the same connotation; timber is lumber that will be harvested (socialized wood, we might say); the wilderness of mountainous areas is thereby negated. Valley View also bespeaks height since if we are viewing the valley, we are above it. Here also is alliteration which makes for a pleasing sound. Lullaby-like Treetops, Constitution Hill, Heritage Hill of Westchester, all connote height, aloofness, and solitude.

Scarsdale Meadows (because of the law of selection) jars the senses. The word "scar" usually has an unpleasant connotation. However, the

⁹ All definitions in this section are taken from Funk and Wagnall's *Standard College Dictionary* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1968) Text Edition.

Scottish meaning of scar is “a bare rock standing alone on a cliff or rocky place on the side of a hill or mountain.”¹⁰ Coupled with meadows and dale and their pastoral connotations, the rural, peaceful, serene pattern is sustained. Likewise Greenbriar at first glance does not fit our selection law. The color “green” is commonly associated with the country, however, the word with which it is combined “briar” is not pleasant. But in its older southern European context, briar means a “tree heath.”¹¹ A peaceful, country, pastoral image is seen once more. Indian Fields rounds out this category, reminding us of antiquity—pre-colonial.

My last category for the *Times* contains the designation “others.” These names are somewhat different from those previously mentioned although all except one do look toward the past. Bedford Mews and Heritage Mews probably get their names from the Royal Stable in London or the British meaning of “A narrow street or alley, often with dwellings converted from stables.”¹² We can speculate that advertisers wish to emphasize the British derivation, not the equine aspect. To make the name even more impressive and tradition-laden, Bedford and Heritage, with their own historical connotations, are attached. Cameo Plaza, an antiquarian name, and Grand Valley Plaza with its rural expansiveness are listed here because the word “plaza” has a more urban connotation than the words in the other categories. The Gramatan, I have not been able to decipher.

In summary, *The Times* names exploit our association of the past with peacefulness, beauty, and rural imagery; they are to be viewed against the present, with its artificiality, urbanity, violence, and ugliness. Nature, as opposed to civilization, is the ideal. No futuristic images occur. To understand how striking this pattern is, we need only momentarily compare these subdivision names to the names of cars, the symbols of modernity and the future. Moderately priced cars include the Cougar, Wildcat, Mustang, Charger, Nova, and Galaxy. However, more expensive cars which more closely answer our needs for social status, stability and tradition (the same needs uppermost in homebuying) include the Fleetwood, Bonneville, Bentley and Eldorado. Solidity, pastness, and authenticity are behind the more expensive pitch.

Continuing our analysis of subdivision names but not re-analyzing

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1199.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 854.

recurring or redundant ones, we turn to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Here again we find a water category. The bodies of water here are also gentler ones. Landing and its “coming home” imagery and “crossing” with its “safety-best way across” connotations are first on the list. Cross the river where there are no hazards. Pebbles, one plays with—as opposed to rocks which destroy. Coldspring leads to refreshment, not shipwreck, and Mirror Lake must be by definition a tranquil one.

Because of their archaic or traditional connections, the next group of subdivision names are categorized as *historical*. Many of these include familiar place names: Yorktown, Newtown, Concord which stir memories of the past. Stover Mill, Sutton Terrace, and Knox Bridge, because of the proper names associated with them, conjure up images of the gentry, owners of rural land.

In the *Inquirer* we also find several names relating to hunting in the English upper class mode. Yardley Hunt, Makefield Chase, Country Downe, Kimberton Hunt and Deer Park define the category. Aside from Country Downe, the other names here are redundant to those in the *Times*. We know that a pattern is forming when we begin to pick up on this kind of redundancy. Downe here probably refers to the “turf-covered, undulating tracts of upland, especially in southern and southeast England.”¹³

Under *Fields/Plants and Hills* are categorized trees. In Philadelphia we find the birches, willow, chestnut, maple, not the oak or the cedar noted in New York. We speculate that these are more peculiar to Philadelphia. Laurel Hill (recalling the flower as well as Greek heroes) Whitebriar (as opposed to Greenbriar in New York), and Knoll (subdued height again) appear in this listing along with hill. In this list also appears Heather Valley at Village Shires which appeals to Scotch-English mythology as well as the country image. Here we could speculate about the number of Scots in the ethnic makeup of Philadelphia. However, the use of Shires in two names again shows the British tradition.

The other names in the Field/Plants/Hills category are very similar to those discussed, but we will not belabor this consistency except to point out that in Philadelphia as in New York the length of this category is greater than any of the others. Note also that there are many compound names, thus overlap of categories, in all three newspapers.

Proceeding to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, we see many of the

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 399.

same redundancies. The theme of safe-return and security finds expression in Williamsport and Martin's Landing. Typical Southern nomenclature is noted in River Plantation with its antebellum, *Gone With the Wind* image. In inland Atlanta, as opposed to the coastal cities of New York and Philadelphia, the reader finds reference to railroads, i.e., Howell Station and Arbor Station. Arbor again is an archetypal nature symbol, and the reference to railroads probably says something about the romantic appeal of railroads to the people of a city especially dependent on them. Saddle Creek, Horseshoe Bend, and Saddleback Ridge (which could be a descriptive name) also reminds us of earlier, romantic modes of travel. Whereas other papers referred to Indians generically, in Atlanta we find a specific reference: Cherokee Hills—a suggestion that the tribes who lived in this section were a more organic part of a simpler and less complex society than those living in New York or Philadelphia.

Charlestown Square and Columns recall an older Southern tradition; Barclay again reminds us of the British tradition. The Fairways (which at first appears not to be related) is actually reminiscent of the traditional country fairs, with the one big area or way where goods were exhibited.

Looking at the Fields/Plants/Hills category from the *Atlanta Journal*, we are struck by Cedar Cliffs. Usually an individual does not view a cliff as very pleasant or peaceful, but when it is attached to cedar in this alliterative fashion, the peril of the reality is muted. The peach-tree, native to Georgia, also contributes its name. With its archaic ending, Foxcroft presents us with both the hunt image and that of the rustic field. Chimney Springs and Smokerise are variations on the same theme. Accordingly, chimneys and smoke are transformed into symbols of domesticity rather than industrialization.

A consideration of the physical features of a metropolitan area supplies us with deeper insight into the symbolism of its names and puts us in a position to make some theoretical sense of what has so far been said. For this purpose, Atlanta will provide the examples. The theoretical model is Edward Hall's. According to Hall, man learns and experiences on three levels: the formal, informal, and technical. Formal culture is learned by observing adult models who teach us by precept and admonition; informal is learned without the learner's awareness through direct imitation of another, and technical is explicitly taught by a teacher. When an individual wishes to understand culture as communication, he must break down its messages into what Hall calls sets, isolates, and patterns. Sets (in linguistic terminol-

ogy) roughly correspond to words, isolates to sounds, and patterns to syntax.¹⁴ Thus, in order to understand a culture, we must perceive its sets and interpret their significance by understanding the patterns in which they are used. Often this process is difficult because, although we can readily perceive the formal and technical, we must consciously probe for the informal pattern which often is the key to our understanding.

To understand more fully the informal pattern behind subdivision names, we need to identify the sets, names used for subdivisions, and arrange them in some kind of pattern. If man understands his world in terms of experience and observation, then logically topography and history would be used to name subdivisions. Because one purpose of naming is to classify, it is only natural that topography, learned formally by observation, would play a major role in naming a region. To substantiate this premise, we need only think of the ways we give others directions. If we live in a rural section, we may say: come to the top of the hill, turn right and cross the river. On the other hand, city dwellers usually give directions in terms of man-made objects. Cross the bridge; turn at Seventeenth Street and Main Avenue; go past the Occidental Building. Thus, landmarks, rivers, mountains, hills, bridges, and buildings help us designate our residences.

Applying our hypothesis to subdivisions in metropolitan Atlanta, we find that the greatest number of subdivisions do indeed have topographical references. Putting these topographical sets into patterns, the reader can group them according to water references and field and plant references. Little River Crossing, Willow Springs, River Mill, Rivermont, Williamsport, Martin's Landing, River Plantation, Spinnaker Cove, Rivermist, and Lake Dow—all refer to water. Cedar Cliffs, Brookfield West, Woodfield, Foxcroft, Smoketree, and Peachtree City refer to fields and plants. In analyzing the make-up of these names, we find that most of them are compounds which give us double information about the actual topography of the northern suburbs. For example, Cedar Cliffs, Rivermont, Woodfield, and Willow Springs inform us about both the terrain and the vegetation of the region. Here, Hall's ideas on formal learning hold; man's experience and observation do influence the naming of his residences. However, although the Chattahoochee and its tributaries run through the area of these subdivisions, it does not run through all of the subdivisions having water in their names. Thus, we can surmise that the Chatta-

¹⁴Hall, pp. 69-97.

hoochee is not technically a locator; rather, it is a symbol of man's nostalgic view of the river and its environs.

Enough has been said to show that a definite semantic pattern is emerging. All the names appeal to the idea of rural life's being simpler, more tranquil, more stable, less threatening than urban life. In fact, the past itself appears more secure, safer, happier, less competitive. In short, two implicit contrasts run through the total sets of names. These are nature/culture and past/present, the first term in each dichotomy being the positive one. The past is the more natural, the more authentic; the present, the more artificial. At an even deeper level of thematic contrast are to be found the themes of passivity, tranquility, leisure, safety, whose association with nature and pastness is to be contrasted with the deep metaphors of urban civilization: activity, stimulation, production, and danger.

To check on this rather subjective analysis of subdivision names and to test our conclusion by appealing to an independent technique and independent data, we used Charles Osgood's Semantic Differential. Osgood's technique is used in the following way: Subjects are asked to respond to a set of concepts along with a long list of paired adjectival opposites which describe the concepts. This list usually includes pairs such as "awful-nice," "empty-full," "square-round," "dull-shiny," "fine-coarse," and "hot-cold." The basic idea is to compel the respondent to use these dependent scales metaphorically in relation to the concepts. For example, the respondent may be asked to rate the concept "city" using false-true, deep-shallow, or hard-soft. When anyone is forced into such an evaluation, the affective rather than the descriptive features of the adjective will determine his response.¹⁵

By analyzing a particular set of responses, we are able to identify the underlying elements which make a recognizable pattern. Over and over, the procedure reveals the same three basic dimensions, regardless of the subjects asked to participate in it or of their backgrounds. The evaluative, the potency, and the activity factors appear to be the universal bases of semantic differentiation.

This technique provides an excellent way to check our subjective analysis of subdivision names because it allows the test of a basic assumption: subdivision names are appealing to an individual's desire for tranquility and passivity. If this proposition is true, then (1) the "evaluative" element for "rural words" should be higher than that

¹⁵Charles Osgood, "An Atlas of Affective Meanings," *Cross-Cultural Universals of Affective Meaning* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1975), pp. 191-270.

for “urban words” and (2) “rural words” should be lower than “urban words” on the potency and, especially, the activity dimensions.

The data we use were collected by Osgood and his associates in connection with their study *Cross-Cultural Universals of Affective Meaning*. An Atlas of Affective Meaning was prepared for 650 common words used among twenty-two language groups. The group we will be concerned with consists of speakers of American English. From this group of semantic differential responses, Osgood prepared evaluation, potency, and activity scores for each of 617 words (i.e., concepts). The scores are standardized so as to discount the tendency for extreme positive or negative responses to be equally distributed among the three factors.¹⁶

The scales which define evaluation, potency, and activity factor scores are displayed in Table 4.

From the list of 617 words, three groups were selected for study: (1) seventeen words with unambiguous reference to nature and rural life; (2) fourteen words referring to themes which appear in our subjective interpretation: i.e., the past, tranquility, domesticity, and related concepts, and (3) eighteen concepts typically related to urban as opposed to rural life. Taken singly many of the words chosen may not seem to be good indicators of the themes that our analysis shows underlie the imagery of subdivision names. Taken together, however, the words comprise a fairly good index of this imagery.

These three groups of words and their mean evaluation, potency and activity scores are listed in Tables 5 through 7.

TABLE 4
SCALES USED IN ATLAS OF AFFECTIVE MEANING

Evaluation
Nice-Awful
Good-Bad
Sweet-Sour
Helpful-Unhelpful
Potency
Powerful-Powerless
Big-Little
Strong-Weak
Deep-Shallow

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 241–254.

TABLE 4 (contd.)

Activity
 Fast-Slow
 Alive-Dead
 Noisy-Quiet
 Young-Old

TABLE 5
 EVALUATION, POTENCY, AND ACTIVITY SCORES
 FOR "RURAL" WORDS

	E.	P.	A.
Animal	0.4	-0.3	1.3
Contemplation	-0.5	-0.6	-0.5
Country	0.0	0.5	0.4
Field	0.4	0.3	-0.6
Flower	0.4	-2.1	-.02
Forest	1.0	1.6	-0.8
Grass	0.7	-1.3	-0.1
Green	0.1	-0.3	-1.1
Horse	0.7	1.1	1.7
Lake	0.5	0.9	-0.5
Mountains	0.3	1.7	-2.2
River	0.1	1.2	0.3
Rural Housing	0.4	-0.1	-1.1
Soil	0.8	1.7	-1.8
Tree	0.5	0.9	-0.8
Valleys	0.2	0.2	-1.1
Village	0.3	-2.0	-0.5
	$\bar{x} = .371$	$\bar{x} = .200$	$\bar{x} = -.447$

TABLE 6
 EVALUATION, POTENCY, AND ACTIVITY
 FOR "INTERPRETATIVE" WORDS

	E.	P.	A.
Bridge	0.7	0.6	-0.1
House	0.9	0.4	-0.6
Land	0.9	1.4	-1.0
Leisure	0.6	-0.7	-0.6
Memory	0.5	0.7	-0.4
The Present	0.3	0.4	1.6

TABLE 6 (contd.)

The Past	-0.0	-0.1	-1.0
Privacy	0.9	-0.2	-0.6
Sea	0.5	2.2	0.4
Smoke	2.3	-0.7	-1.6
Solitude	-0.9	-0.7	-1.6
Tradition	0.1	0.2	-0.7
Train	0.9	1.5	1.7
Water	0.7	1.4	0.5
	$\bar{x} = .600$	$\bar{x} = .457$	$\bar{x} = -.286$

TABLE 7
EVALUATION, POTENCY, AND ACTIVITY SCORES
FOR "URBAN" WORDS

	E.	P.	A.
Being Aggressive	0.1	1.2	1.6
Air Pollution	-3.4	1.7	0.8
Automation	-0.0	0.6	1.7
Automobile	1.0	1.3	1.8
Bus	0.4	0.5	0.2
City	-0.2	0.6	1.8
Civilization	0.7	1.6	0.6
Competition	0.1	0.9	0.8
Crime	-2.8	0.5	0.1
Development	0.6	0.9	1.2
Factory Worker	0.2	0.4	0.9
Labor Unions	0.3	1.2	0.9
Newspapers	0.7	0.9	0.3
Noise	-1.5	0.4	1.0
Policeman	0.2	0.2	1.2
Progress	0.8	1.2	1.2
Street	0.3	-0.4	0.3
Urban Housing	0.5	-0.2	0.5
	$\bar{x} = -.111$	$\bar{x} = .750$	$\bar{x} = .939$

In order to make general comparisons, the mean evaluation, potency, and activity scores for the three sets of words were calculated.¹⁷ For convenience, these have been placed in a separate table.

¹⁷In this research my concern has been to minimize Type 2 error (rejecting a true hypothesis) rather than Type 1 error (accepting a false hypothesis). In other words, I deem it more costly to

TABLE 8
MEAN EVALUATION, POTENCY, AND ACTIVITY SCORES
FOR THREE SETS OF CONCEPTS

	E.	P.	A.
Urban	-.11	.75	.94
Interpretative	.60	.46	-.29
Rural	.37	.20	-.45

The mean scores set down in this table are consistent with our own interpretations. As we move down from urban through interpretative to rural words, the *evaluation* scores increase from a negative $-.11$ to positive scores of $.60$ and $.37$ in the interpretative and rural. Urban words are also more *potent* than words associated with the other two groups of concepts ($.75$ as opposed to $.46$ and $.20$). Finally, the urban *activity* score of $.94$ is to be contrasted with the non-urban passivity scores of $-.29$ and $-.45$.

In short, words associated with the urban environment are bad, powerful and active; words associated with the non-urban and natural environment, with their emphasis on nature, past and tranquility, are good, strong (not powerful), and passive.

The Osgood findings constitute one test of the "construct validity" of our interpretation. In other words, the concepts derived from an analysis of subdivision names correspond to the scores Osgood derived by an objective analysis of words that are similar to the names in our sample.

Less objective proof of the construct validity of our interpretation can be found in other disciplines. For example, Barthes in *Elements of Semiology* points out that Saussure's distinction between speech and language can be applied to any type of signifier. Language, says Saussure, is a "social institution and a system of values. . . . Moreover, this social product is autonomous, like a game with its own rules, for it can be handled only after a period of learning."¹⁸ Speech, on the other hand, is individual; "it is made in the first place of the combination thanks to which the speaking subject can use the code of

overlook a truth than to fail to recognize an error. For this reason, pairwise t-tests have not been computed. However, I am prepared to defend the argument that the results I have obtained are too consistent to be the result of sampling error. Every difference of means is in the direction of my earlier interpretative analysis. This is true whether I make my comparisons among the rows or the columns of Table 8.

¹⁸Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, Trans. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 14.

the language with a view to expressing his personal thought.”¹⁹ Barthes then emphasizes that “there is no language without speech, and no speech outside language.”²⁰ The semiologist uses this distinction to analyze codes within our society. When this approach is applied to subdivision names, each individual name parallels “speech,” the relationship between the names—their pattern, their social quality, the rules they exhibit—is their language. One individual name, speech tells us little, but all the names together reveal the language of tranquility, nostalgia, and historicity.

Onomastics, the study of names, cannot explain this “language.” Its objective is limited to taxonomy. Stewart, for example, has listed nine classes of place names.²¹ Names can be used to describe, Roaring River, for example. Another place name class shows possession. If Cameron owned land that was used for crossing a river or creek, that land is designated Cameron’s Crossing. Incidents give places their names. Someone becomes angry in a particular valley, and Mad Valley designates the spot. Commemorative names perpetuate heroes. Note the number of Washingtons in the country. Resembling closest our findings is that class Stewart calls euphemistic names. For example, Eric the Red, an early would-be developer, named Greenland in order to attract settlers. Manufactured names, those made from two or more words, shift naming, a name shifted from one generic to another (White River, White Mountain), folk names and mistake names conclude the nine classes. Although Stewart’s nine classes are mirrored in some of our findings, they do not explain them.

More interesting and supportive of our analysis is that of Mary R. Miller. Miller’s theory of placenaming with its classes of Age of the Red Man, Age of Nostalgia, Romantic Age, and Age of Public Indifference provide some hints that she found a pattern similar to ours. For example, her age of nostalgia refers to English settlers’ naming land for their native England. The Age of Public Indifference came about because of the government’s attempt to standardize naming practices. Indifference and frustration can be seen when people name a town Acorn because there are acorns on the ground and another Index because that is the first word appearing on a particular page in a

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²¹ George R. Stewart, “A Classification of Place Names,” *Names: Journal of the American Name Society*, Vol. 5 (1967), pp. 1–13. Stewart further elaborates his classification system in his book *Names on the Land* (New York: Random House, 1945).

book.²² Miller does say that disinterest in public-naming has not dampened interest in private naming. "Naming of homes continued unabated. . . . In this century fancy seems to dictate."²⁴ Miller finds many names in the Northern Neck of Virginia similar to the ones in this study. "(Many) places these days are named for trees, views, points, and coves, and some names seek to recreate or preserve the names of the past."²⁴

Note that the interest in private naming came about because of people's revolting against the standardizing principles laid down by modern, urban bureaucracies. Miller concludes her discussion with a very telling statement: "In all of this there is solid evidence that human values determine not only the participants in the naming process itself, but also the kinds of names that are given. The naming process continues, yet the delightful names created in the private domain today no longer seek to immortalize self, recall the English countryside, or commemorate a neighbor, but to remove one's self to a castle of fantasy and tranquility."²⁵

When developers have their subdivisions named, advertisers, the "artists" who are more sensitive than others to this informal pattern or organization, use it to sell houses. As Millwald found in her study on "Universals in Place Name Generics," "generics used in any given area at any point in time will depend rather heavily upon the culture of that area,"²⁶ I would argue that modern communication media has created a kind of universal American culture, and in naming our communities, advertisers appeal to our universal, romantic desires for a less complicated, more genuine lifestyle that is tranquil and serene.

Small town rural life is the model residential preference in modern society—even in the cities. People are yearning for something simple, predictable, wholesome. Studs Terkel has perhaps captured that yearning in his comparison of today's lifestyles with those of the thirties.

Despite deprivation, there was predictability. You could make long-term plans. If you were willing to work your ass off you could look

²²Mary R. Miller, "Place Names of the Northern Neck of Virginia: A Proposal for a Theory of Place-Naming," *Names: Journal of the American Name Society*, Vol. 24 (1976), p. 23.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁶Celia M. Millwald, "Universals in Place-Name Generics," *Indiana Names*, 3 (Spring, 1972), p. 52.

forward to reward ten years hence. Even during the Depression, *there was more continuity in the way of life.*²⁷ (Emphasis added)

Fred Davis in his book *Yearning for Yesterday* also finds Americans searching for predictability and lost simplicity. "The ability to feel nostalgia for events in our past has less (although clearly something) to do with how recent or distant these events are than with the way they contrast—or, more accurately, the way we *make* them contrast with the events, moods, and dispositions of our present surroundings."²⁸

Thus, Americans (most of whom live in urban areas) when faced with rising crime, more people, decreased services, and other "evils" of modernity reconstruct the past; included in this reconstructing is an escape, a rural haven, removed from the competitiveness which is a part of everyday modern existence.

Observers might ask why people, many of whom have lived long periods in or were actually born in the city, would be so touched by the natural imagery which appears in subdivision names. James Beattie, an eighteenth century essayist, gives us a clue in his discussion of why people are often homesick for mountain environments:

For precipices, rocks and torrents are durable things; and, being more striking to the fancy than any natural appearances in the plains take faster hold of the memory. . . .²⁹

Another, perhaps more compelling reason for Americans, could be that offered by Fred Davis in his definition of "collective nostalgia," "that condition in which the symbolic objects are of a highly public, widely shared, and familiar character, those symbolic resources from the past that under proper conditions can trigger . . . nostalgic feelings in millions of persons at the same time."²³⁰ Davis points out that the California Disneyland and Florida Disney World both appeal to this collective nostalgia. In speaking about the millions of visitors to these Disney attractions, he writes:

They are led back sentimentally to the *smalltown atmosphere of America at the turn of the century*. That few of us are old enough to have experienced those days at first hand is of little account. So successful

²⁷Studs Terkel, *Hard Times* (New York: Avon Books, 1970), p. 129.

²⁸Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: The Free Press, 1979), pp. 11–12.

²⁹James Beattie, Quoted in Christopher Salesen, *The Land-landscape of Memory: A Study of Wordsworth's Poetry* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 41–42.

³⁰Davis, pp. 122–123.

have Disney and the other mythmakers of the mass media been in celebrating and memorializing this 'age of innocence' in the American imagination that, even though we may not have lived then, we feel—because of the movies we have seen, the stories we have read, the radio serials we've listened to—as if we had.³¹ (Emphasis added)

Our discussion began with the notion that advertisers are the “artists” of our day, the people who understand us and mirror our feelings. Subdivision names and the pattern they create suggest what literary men (Americans, Emerson and Thoreau for example) and sociologists (Fischer and Baroja)³² have known: man views the country as the place of beauty, contentment, goodness, peace, and serenity. The city, on the other hand, is a place of ugliness, ambition, badness, violence, and turmoil. This view appears to be held indiscriminately by those who have lived and experienced rural life and by those who have never lived in a rural area. For example, the 1973 Gallup Opinion Index found that in a representative sample selected in 1972 thirteen percent preferred the city; thirty-one percent preferred the suburbs; thirty-two percent favored small towns, and twenty-three percent preferred farms.³³ The 1969 Harris survey found that two-thirds of big-city residents desired to live elsewhere by 1979.³⁴

Not only does the preference for rural as opposed to urban living show up when Americans are asked where they prefer to live, it is also seen in evaluations of actual communities. In the 1974 Gallup Opinion Index, residents were asked whether or not they were satisfied with the quality of life in their community. Generally, most Americans were satisfied; however, consistently, the proportion that was satisfied decreased with the size of the community.³⁵

Despite people's preference for rural areas and dissatisfaction with urban areas, Claude S. Fischer reports in *The Urban Experience* that “men and women have moved and continue to move overwhelmingly toward urban and especially large urban areas. Throughout recorded history and in all societies, migration has almost always been from

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

³² See, for example, Claude S. Fischer, *The Urban Experience* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1976), and J. C. Baroja, “The City and the Country: Reflections on Some Ancient Commonplaces,” in *An Urban World*, ed. by C. Tilly (Boston: Little Brown, 1974), pp. 473–485.

³³ Gallup Opinion Index, 1973, No. 94, p. 31 as quoted in Fischer, p. 21.

³⁴ Harris Opinion Poll, 1970 as quoted in Fischer, p. 21.

³⁵ Gallup Opinion Index, 1974, No. 110, p. 12 as quoted in Fischer, p. 23.

countryside to city.”³⁶ However, *values* are not always changed by actual experiences; urban residents as well as rural residents affirm the superiority of country to city as a place of residence.

Thus advertisers appeal to our informal, unconscious belief that traditional values are better than modern ones. Notice no violence, no noise, no disagreeable or work-a-day images appear in subdivision names; they all paint sylvan, romantic, idealized, tranquil pictures.

We all understand that language is man's way of remembering his past, of carving out his environment, of helping him think, classify, and conceptualize. His vocabulary designates that which he values and wishes to preserve. From a child's earliest experience, he is affected by the power of language. Grown-ups react to sounds; their reactions impress him; he repeats the sounds; learns new sounds, and eventually becomes a fluent speaker.

After a while adults take language for granted; however, advertisers and sellers, the modern “artists,” do not. In their work, they use what Edward Sapir calls the “referential symbols” that point to concrete persons, places, and things, but they also use what he calls “condensation symbols” which appeal to our unconscious. Sapir in an article in the *International Encyclopedia of Social Science* points out that these two symbols, while they can be found separately, are often found together. For example, “verbal slogans, while ostensibly referential, easily take on the character of emotionalized rituals and become highly important to both individual and society as substitute forms of emotional expression.”³⁷ Thus, corresponding to the explicit, spoken language used to name subdivisions, there is an implicit, silent language which appeals not only to the topography and environment of subdivisions but also to cherished values, images, and notions of the past. Interestingly enough, Elizabeth Bowen sees the writer doing the same thing in her work.

A very great part of the writing of our period has served as a carrier—yes, and promoter too of . . . nostalgia. Would such writing succeed—which is to say, be acceptable—if there were not a call for it? I suppose, no. One of the dangerous powers of the writer is that he feeds, or plays up to, desires he knows to exist. He knows of their existence for the good reason that they are probably active in himself. In contacting the

³⁶Fischer, p. 23.

³⁷Edward Sapir, “Symbolism,” *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, reprinted in *Selected Writings of Edward Sapir* ed. by David G. Mandelbaum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), p. 566.

same desires in his readers he does something to break down his isolation. If, by so doing, he also may make his living, who is to blame him?³⁸

Bowen's description could apply to the advertisers who use names as the writer uses words. They also are sensitive to society's values; they have understood society's longing, and in their names perhaps they have achieved what Hall calls congruence, "what all writers are trying to achieve in terms of their own style, and what everyone wants to find as he moves through life. On the highest level the human reaction to congruence is one of awe or ecstasy. Complete congruence is rare. One might say it exists when an individual makes full use of all the potentials of a pattern."³⁹ Advertisers, using names, have achieved a near perfect congruence. In so doing, they have reaffirmed what Robert Southey said in *The Doctor*, "Names, Reader, are serious things."⁴⁰

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³⁸Elizabeth Bowen, "The Cult of Nostalgia," *The Listener* (August 9, 1951), p. 224.

³⁹Hall, p. 124.

⁴⁰Robert Southey, *The Doctor* (London, 1837-47), Chapter CXXXIX as quoted in H. L. Mencken, *The American Language* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 593.