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# **An Anthropological Investigation of Urban Land Development**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of M.A. in Social Anthropology at Massey University

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**1999**



## **Acknowledgements**

Anthropological research depends on human interaction and cooperation. This thesis would not have been possible without the generous assistance of all research participants - developers, Council Officers, neighbours - who offered time and effort to the project, but, due to promised anonymity, remain nameless.

At a personal level, anthropological research can be extremely isolating and intensive. It is the support offered by family, friends, and colleagues that have made this process tolerable. Many people contributed to this thesis. In particular, I am grateful to my mother and father for their enormous support and guidance, a close group of friends for their concern, and to my supervisor.



## Abstract

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The impetus for this project came from examples of neighbours' disempowerment in the land and property development process. There is a growing academic consensus that dominant approaches to land development fail to adequately address this issue. NeoMarxist approaches focus on conflict, power, and exploitation, but effectively eliminate the role of the actual developer in exercising power. Case study approaches, on the other hand, have been concerned with conflict and disempowerment, but have focused on specific instances of neighbourhood opposition and resistance. Explanation is often confined to local and national features of the social and geographical environment. These inadequacies pointed to the need to investigate the increasingly significant role that professional, entrepreneurial developers play at the nexus of the contemporary development process.

An ethnographic methodology was used to provide a richer understanding of the land and property development process. The principal participants in the study are a set of 'entrepreneurial developers' operating in and around Palmerston North. Interviews, participant observation, and the examination of case studies are employed. This is complemented by an investigation of the Regulatory Procedure, including interviews with Council Officers, and examination of Council case studies. The research also uses interviews with neighbours, and a wide body of material published within the development industry. Planning for the study drew on Giddens' 'Theory of Structuration' (1979,1984) which stresses the *interrelationship* between the *social structures* of the development process, and the *agency* of developers. The research sought to elucidate the dominant forms of action and ideology which development agents acknowledge, and which therefore constitute the action and ideology of the development industry.

The interpretation of the empirical data uses three interrelated perspectives: The first, provides a broad, industry-level, perspective on the local development industry. It asks, 'What are the major influences which shape and structure the contemporary development industry?'; The second, examines the level of *action*. It asks 'What are the actions of most significance to developers?', and 'What forms of conduct constitute the Institutional structures of the Regulatory Procedure?'; The third focuses on *ideology*. It asks, 'What are the dominant motivations which direct and influence developers' conduct?', and 'How do developers legitimate and rationalise conduct?'.

An interesting aspect to the thesis is the extent to which developers share patterns of ideology, not only with each other, but also with a wider business community. Much of this characteristic ideology parallels findings in other ethnographic studies of capitalistic systems. The research highlights the fact that ethnography, and the notion of 'culture', provide an insightful and useful perspective of both the business world, and the study of development.

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## Introduction

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No research process is neatly schematic or follows a logical or consistent direction, however much this impression is conveyed. Anthropological research is particularly difficult to represent as an ordered pattern of controlled events. The purpose of this introduction, therefore, is to stress the *evolution* of this thesis as a process of research. The aim is to observe how the thesis developed through a series of intersecting influences, in particular: an ongoing examination and awareness of previous research and development literature; the ongoing accumulation of knowledge from various sources, and the continual redirection this provided; as well as personal evolution and changing appreciations.

## Starting Out

The impetus for this research was a personal experience. This was the shocking discovery, made on returning home after work one Monday evening, that the developer who had recently purchased some neighbouring properties, had entirely stripped this land of trees and vegetation, including a massive Californian 'big tree', over one hundred years old. The family's feelings of shock and bewilderment were quickly accompanied by incredulous anger. These feelings were reaffirmed as neighbours popped in that evening and over the following weeks.

The subsequent months witnessed a number of heated exchanges over the fence. The assertions and rationalisations offered by the developer didn't make reasonable sense to us, and our arguments of neighbourhood values and common decency were typically ridiculed. We were often in a position to discretely eavesdrop on private conversations from over the fence - these being quickly relayed to the family and to our neighbourhood friends. Our own selective adjectives must also have been overheard by the developer or his employees. This deliberate, and semi-deliberate communication did little more than entrench already polemical positions.

The family and neighbourhood were not the type of people to be regarded as passive victims. It was clear from the outset however that nothing could be done to undo the physical 'destruction' already inflicted on the neighbourhood environment. The progression of the development over the subsequent months became marked by the escalating imposition of the development, not just into 'our' environment, but also upon our general sense of wellbeing. As we sought to question these actions, and the possibilities for stemming further encroachments, we were continually confronted by the powerlessness of our situation. There was nothing we could do, and we had no way of contributing to the development decisions being made. Gradually the family and neighbourhood has settled into a sense of resignation.

It also became clear that this was not an isolated experience. Friends, colleagues, and acquaintances generally reacted with sympathetic outrage to my story, but were not entirely surprised. A number of people offered similar stories and experiences. It

appeared that 'developers' suffered a general stereotype and were widely regarded with suspicion and hostility in much the same way as politicians, car salespeople, or real estate agents. Certainly, my own initial characterisation of events has contributed to this general perception. The commonality of my story also suggested that there was something fundamental about the 'system of development' within New Zealand. At this level it appeared that my experience was symptomatic of capitalist greed, and the inevitable product of a social system of organisation (or disorganisation) that was fundamentally faulty, and privileged some (particularly developers) at the expense of others (particularly neighbours).

This intimate experience framed my particular prejudice of 'the development process', and was the catalyst of my own methodological and theoretical pursuit of land development processes. 'Power' appeared to be the central and dominant theme in urban land development processes, and thus, for the study of these processes. In one sense, it was clear that developers 'exercised power' in different ways. In another sense, I was aware of the institutionally defined power of the development process, in that developers were generally supported by the law, and by an industry of development agents with shared beliefs and ideas about constructing the built form. Urban development was also an issue of 'powerlessness', and of 'respectful resignation' (Bourdieu, 1984). To me this represented urban land development as an issue of justice and injustice. Useful research into urban development processes then, would seek not only to focus on the issue of power, and its differential distribution, but would also be informed through a sense of justice, and would seek mechanisms through which the 'injustice' of the development process could, not only be identified, but overcome or avoided.

### Preliminary Research

These experiences of the development process lead to an initial research project focused on conflict at the urban development site which has become the exploratory study for the current research. I approached this preliminary research through an analogy to the practices and experiences characterising nineteenth century European colonial expansion and as consistent with the 'logic' of capitalistic expansion. The aim here was to view these situations of urban land development as the 'process of colonisation turned in on itself', or, that "This time there are no 'new frontiers', no virginal lands for capitalist colonisation that could offset the social and political consequences of global polarisation" (Miyoshi, 1993:371). In essence, the project sought to identify the similarities and dissimilarities in the exercise of power characteristic of these 'periods of capitalistic expansion'. This approach appeared to offer much potential, in regard, particularly, to the questions of: 'What lessons could be drawn from our progressive understandings of colonial processes that might inform a basis of practical resistance, or a theory of praxis, against the excesses of the urban development process?', and; 'Could understanding of colonial processes be more usefully understood, or indeed, demystified, with reference to the physical reality of our own backyard?'.

The research task involved the location of three sites of urban development involving conflict, and focused on two 'categories of agents'; neighbours to development, and; the agents developing land. Primarily through interviews and observations, I sought to establish the dominant feelings, beliefs, ideas and ideology, as well as the actions that these individuals had taken and the reasons for these actions, or, indeed, lack of action. This empirical task was guided by the documented experiences of, and subsequent writing about, the process of nineteenth century European colonisation of New Zealand. A number of theoretical orientations were implicated in the study - World System Theories, Marxist analysis, and the functionalist anthropology characterising the colonial period. In particular I was interested to situate the research within the broadly defined academic domain of 'post-colonial writing and criticism'.

In general the project produced interesting comparisons, and was particularly useful in stressing the significance of the continual recreation of capitalist hegemonic authority within ever-expanding fields of operation, the latest of which being truly global in character (a comprehensive analysis is presented in Coles, 1997). In many respects the project pointed to the validity of Harvey's claim, that "these changes (in the contemporary global condition), when set against the basic rules of capitalistic accumulation, appear more as shifts in surface appearance rather than as signs of the emergence of some entirely new post-capitalist or even post-industrial society" (Harvey, 1989: vii).

The methodological framework of the project provided a constructive vehicle for the current research, and enabled a number of useful insights into the process of urban land development. The research revealed that certain abstract properties were applicable to both 'processes of expansion', and that, in some cases, differences could be merely identified in the manifestation of these abstract properties in local and specific situations. Particularly evident were certain similarities between the expressed ideas and ideology of European colonisers (particularly 'development agents' such as colonial New Zealand's foremost entrepreneurs, the Wakefields), and the 'developers' interviewed during this project. Not only were notions of 'wasted land', 'progress', 'efficiency', and 'individual self-preservation', common to both periods, but also the manner in which 'the colonised' (those groups imposed upon) were subject to structurally circumscribed conceptualisations, that they were always 'other' to the 'colonising developers', and that this representation served in the interests of developers' power within both historical contexts. These features appeared to me, to be symptomatic of the process and logic of the progressive expansion of capitalistic hegemony, and the social relations characterising this mode of production. An important aspect of counterhegemonic struggle therefore, is to debunk these dominant conceptualisations.

The research also pointed to the complexities of conflict situations. Conflict was not simply a matter of land rights and use, but involved conflicting processes of identity construction. For a number of the 'neighbours' involved in the study, conflict was not



only a physical imposition, but was accompanied by an emotional imposition on a sense of individual and social identity and wellbeing, developed through historical processes relating to the immediate physical environment. And, while the profit motive appeared extremely important to developers, the process of development also involved issues of identity for developers. The research also reaffirmed the powerlessness of neighbours, and suggested that this powerlessness, and thus the power of developers, had a great deal to do with the regulations and bureaucracy of the state and local government. The research was also able to identify a number of similarities between the actions of developers within situations of conflict, characteristic of both historical periods.

It became apparent from the project that this particular methodological framework was also limited in its capacity to usefully explain contemporary development processes. While ideology was crucial to the exercise of developers' power over neighbours, this power was intertwined and inseparable from the level of actions. It also became apparent however that the range of actions undertaken by developers was beyond the conceptual capacity of the colonial analogy, and related to specific features of the contemporary condition. Also, conflict with neighbours was not necessarily a dominant concern to developers, and was better understood as one of numerous considerations in the development process. The project also indicated the significance of the regulatory procedure to the study of land development processes. To pursue these directions it would be necessary to step outside this methodological framework.

The research project served to increase my awareness of the complexities and ambiguities of land development processes, and their study. The significance of land development to almost every facet of human existence became increasingly pronounced to me, as did the prominent exposure development issues receive in the media. The project also made me mindful of the enormous quantity of literature and research, spanning numerous disciplines, devoted to the study of land development. As I made the decision to pursue the study of land development further, I sought inroads into this spectrum of existing work. The following section seeks to investigate this literature with a view to identifying its contribution to the development of this thesis.

## **Existing Research and Literature**

Any novice to the subject of land and property development is necessarily subjected to a hugely diverse, eclectic, and prolific collection of literary material. Works stemming from the fields of Marxist economics, public policy implementation, urban geography, and planning and estate management are significant to land and property development. Anthropology's contribution has been largely peripheral, but nonetheless significant, focusing on the effects of development actions, particularly for 'third world' or 'traditional' cultures and communities. Few attempts have been made to categorise and catalogue this literature (exceptions are Gore and Nicholson, 1991, Healey and Barrett, 1991), and these are necessarily selective. My own approach has, to some extent, been



unavoidably random, though it also reflects my own particular experiences with the development process (focusing on issues of conflict and power), my association with anthropology, and the particularities of development processes within New Zealand. Necessity has lead me to identify three broadly defined, but dominant, structural themes: the neoclassical influence; the neoMarxist influence, and; the case study approach (in which anthropology is implicated). The following discussion seeks to present a sense of my exploration of this research, and the advantages and disadvantages of each dominant influence.

### Neoclassical influence

The most significantly widespread and prolific influence on existing and ongoing research and material focused on the process of land development has been that of neoclassical economics. Underlying this approach is the simple neoclassical model of the market, whereby demand is translated into supply with the various agencies involved in development working collectively to provide development at "the right time, in the right place, at the right price" (Lichfield and Dabin-Drabkin, 1980). This basic model of equilibrium underlies most of the available real-estate literature (Harvey, 1981, Fraser, 1984, Rose, 1985), and is the foundation of regular reportage in real-estate literature and commentary, as well as a number of property journals (i.e. the *N.Z.I.V. Property Digest*, and *Ernst and Young Sectoral Review*).

Stemming predominantly from the neoclassical tradition are works designed as introductions to property management and investment (Ring and Dasso, 1981, Christiansen, 1989:1, Nourse, 1990, Cadman and Topping, 1995, Gibson and Gray, 1996). While these works may inform a wide range of interests, their dominant intent is to present development agents with a range of basic skills and actions conducive to success in the development industry. Indeed, this is the specific aim of a number of texts (Leinberger, 1993, Soens and Brown, 1994). These works provide a useful introduction to the available strategies employed by development agents as they seek to achieve their aims. Generally however this approach is basic, formulaic, and idealised. While it offers insights into how developers *should* respond, it fails to identify how a diverse range of development agents *actually* respond to a rapidly and perpetually changing industry and social environment.

Another dominant approach characteristic of the neoclassical influence has been to dissect 'the process' into its constituent events (Miles et al, 1991, Goodchild and Munton, 1985). This approach is useful in examining the necessity of certain actions and processes within any development process. It offers a means to assess how different agents can enter and influence the development process at different stages. The conceptual failure of these approaches is that no development process tends to be the same. Indeed, within the current environment, the order in which various 'stages' are negotiated, and whether

various 'stages' require negotiation at all, is different, depending on the developer, and the particular development project. A useful application of this conceptual approach is that it provides the means to identify potential 'blockages' to development activity (Healey, 1991:223). In this capacity it is useful in formulating potential mechanisms of resistance.

In a number of instances the approaches above were combined with the insights and experiences of actual development agents (Miles et al, 1991), and, as Miles (1991:314) claims, "their perspective on development is especially valuable because they have lived the process described at a time when development has become more difficult to undertake profitably and their insights can help put the development process in human terms". The use of these examples highlights practical observations of developers' actions when faced with specific concerns. However, these tended to be oriented around single, and specific, case-studies, and are generally selected to represent the theoretical discussion, rather than providing a point from which theoretical observations can be made. Related to this approach are a number of books which effectively function as biographical accounts of 'successful' or prominent development agents, either prior to the '87 crash (Jones, 1978), or as postscripts to the development industry (Newland, 1994, Goobey, 1992). While these approaches seek to inform potential development agents of effective strategies for development success, they are specific to the environment in which they were written, and are not necessarily a useful guide to the strategies employed by developers within modified, and continually changing environments.

Neoclassical approaches have largely viewed the effects of conflict and neighbourhood opposition as impositions on the logic of supply and demand. This has been a significant conceptual failing of the neoclassical paradigm but it also appears to be implicated as the moral basis for an expanding body of work designed to inform developers of strategies in overcoming or avoiding conflict with communities or neighbours (Dear, 1992). The neoclassical influence tends to regard conflict as an unfortunate obstruction on market equilibrium, and thus something to be 'got past'. These texts are largely designed as manuals for developers', as "a pragmatic look at community relations strategies that developers can use in the real world of land use and development" (Stein, 1992:ix). The Urban Land Institute's *Working with the community: a developers guide* (1985) is the epitome of this approach, offering a variety of case studies of 'successful' approaches. These texts offer a general insight into the available strategies and options for developers; 'establishing a positive image', 'strategies for gaining support' and 'overhauling the regulatory system' are common themes. The conceptual disadvantages of these books derive, in part, from their basis in American and British case studies. It is clear that local specificities, particularly New Zealand's regulatory system, impact significantly on the strategies available to developers as they negotiate community opposition. A related approach has been those that attempt mediation by stressing the compatibility of values and ideologies among groups implicated in development conflict (Anderson, 1997, Beall, 1997). While these approaches to development and conflict rightly stress the benefits for

everybody in resolving development conflict, they fail to adequately approach the issue of differential distribution of power among groups implicated in development conflict. These approaches also recognise that conflict can be 'resolved' without reference to class struggle or exploitation, although Marxists might argue that it is precisely because of this lack of reference that conflict is overcome and that capitalist development agents are able to continue to extract capital from the construction of the built form.

The role of the state tends to be neglected in works stemming from a neoclassical influence. The notable exception to this tendency has been work from public sector officials concerned with the manufacture and implementation of state policy within a rapidly changing, and increasingly 'economically preoccupied' environment. Healey (1990), Solesbury (1990), and Edwards (1990) have been instrumental in this regard. In New Zealand, a preoccupation with the Resource Management Act has focused attention on the role of local authority, community participation, and flexible state apparatus (Ministry of the Environment, 1988, Cox, 1996). A wide range of Council produced information is also available in New Zealand. Much of this literature tends to focus on development and demographic patterns, although it also provides a practical indication of particular local government policy and direction. This information is complimented by Regional and National studies from the New Zealand Department of Lands and Surveys (see bibliography for references).

#### NeoMarxist influence

A second dominant influence to the study of land development processes derives from a Marxist tradition. This dominant theoretical framework has been useful in confronting some of the conceptual concerns related to the neoclassical tradition. However, it also raises new concerns, and emphasises certain conceptual failings typical of both neoMarxist and neoclassical approaches. The neoMarxist influence has been particularly helpful in its capacity for, and orientation toward, critique. This has focused attention on the issues of conflict and power within the land development process.

NeoMarxist approaches have been useful in observing land development within the social context characteristic of the capitalistic system. Land development is regarded as one of the total activities that are subject to the capitalist mode of production. The dynamics of the urban land nexus is viewed as a total system that follows the logic of capitalist society (Ambrose and Colenutt, 1973, Scott, 1980, Ball, 1983).

A significant approach deriving from the neoMarxist influence has been to document and identify the uneven land use patterns characteristic of capitalist society (Dear, Scott, 1981, Cox, Johnson, 1982:15, Cox, 1982). A dominant feature of this critique has been the observation that capitalist development is highly concentrated and spatially uneven (Cox, 1982:232). This approach has also emphasised the cost for communities of this

specific spatial pattern (Cox, 1982). Wellman's (1983:63) study of personal networks, for example, reveals not only the limited number of residents actively involved in concern about their local environment, but also links this directly to the capitalist production of the built form.

The neoMarxist approach has often regarded conflict as endemic to the urban development process as it unfolds in capitalist societies, stressing the inherent incompatibility between the capitalist development process and the maintenance of community relations (Mollenkopf, 1984). These approaches appear related to the theoretical perspective offered by both Durkheim and Marx (in Sayer, 1995:81) that the development of an advanced division of labour necessarily corrodes community, or *gemeinschaft*, relationships. Harvey has been instrumental in the development of this body of work, observing that "most (fixed assets) were created in a past era and reflect the technology, taste, norms, production needs, and the like, of a former society. There is thus a continuous state of tension between the spatial organisation of society (which is made up of increments of assets each created in its own era) and the form of spatial organisation demanded by the new social order emerging here and now" (Harvey, 1972:1). The claim here is that there is always a fundamental contradiction between community relations established around the built form of a past era, and developers' attempts to stimulate profit from the reproduction of the built form. These approaches have been useful in focusing attention on the inherent potential for conflict resulting from the capitalistic social structure.

NeoMarxist approaches have largely observed the role of the state as a required intervention in the capitalist development process, and as necessary to overcome the fundamental contradictions and conflicts in the capitalistic development system (Mollenkopf, 1984, Smith, 1992). This premise has contributed to a tendency in neoMarxist approaches (particularly those deriving from dependency and world-system theories) to view the state in instrumentalist terms. This is to say that "the dominant economic groups are assumed to control the state and to use this control to further the economic interests of their own class" (Timberlake, 1987:55). A quantity of empirical research has informed this view. Thornley (1991) for example, has observed and documented the coherent attack on the nature and role of the planning profession as a symptom of development processes within capitalistic societies, and the simultaneous tendency for once-community based decisions, to become exclusive to the role of the state. The failing of this approach has largely been its tendency to view the reorientation of the state as inevitable, avoiding the complex processes through which relationships of power are reoriented and reproduced. A related and similarly critical approach has been to redirect the primary focus to the role of the state. Barlow (1995) has been useful here in showing the relationship between a country's dominant forms of political organisation and the nature of participation in the planning and development process.



NeoMarxists have generally taken a simplistic approach to the role of development agents. The basic tenet here, is that while land is developed by dominant actors and firms, these actions are determined through market mechanisms characteristic of the capitalist mode of production in which profit-making is the basic motivation. Two theorisations characterise and dominate neoMarxist approaches to agency. The first, Harvey's (1978) theory of 'circuits of capital', is fundamental to the neoMarxist influence and reveals the money movement among commodity productions, the development of the built environment, and investment in science and technology and social expenditure. Harvey's approach provides a way of identifying how the dynamics of the mode of production 'drive' the processes through which the built environment is produced. Harvey argues that the primary factor through which agents are bound into structural relations is through paths of capital flow, through 'resources' (Healey, Barrett, 1990:93). The second dominant approach to agency has been the notion of the real-estate class monopoly. Smith and Rowe (1981:132) have epitomised this notion: that "In the urban context the main interest group is seen as emerging from a coalition between finance capital (banks, trusts, companies, etc) and the real-estate interest (developers, construction companies, landlords, etc). This coalition acts as a 'class monopoly'...that rapes and dehumanises the City, all in a merely pecuniary interest..." (as well, see Logan and Molotch, 1987 for a comprehensive political economic account, and Hall and McIntyre Hall's recent study of Detroit's New Centre Area). Both examples reflect the neoMarxist tendency to 'mould' the role of agency so that it reflects preconceived structural conditions.

While the neoMarxist approach attempts to account for many of the concerns neglected by the neoclassical influence, it fails to resolve the dominant conceptual concern related to the neoclassical approach. This, as Stanley (1996:2) observes of Harvey, is the "attempt to make the phenomena fit the framework capped by the announcement that the framework fits the phenomena". The concern here, is that regional, local, cultural, social, and political forces are more fundamental to the study of land development processes than either the neoclassical or neoMarxist approaches acknowledge. Recently this claim has been reiterated of New Zealand's experiences, Murphy et al (1997:165) arguing that "whilst the broad contours of the Auckland experience conform to trends found elsewhere, it is argued that the 'particularity of place' has an important role in aiding our understanding of the specific character of the office development process".

### Anthropology, Community Studies, and the Case Study Approach

A third dominant influence within the existing research is to take a case-study approach to the study of development processes. This is where anthropologists, and ethnographic methodology, have had some contribution to the study of development processes. These anthropological contributions have complemented a range of other work stemming from a variety of academic disciplines and concerns. The following discussion examines, firstly, this anthropological influence, and then assumes a more general review of similar approaches.

Primarily, and until fairly recently, anthropology's contribution to the study of development processes has been confined to a focus on the impact of development processes on 'third world', or 'traditional' communities (Mathur, 1989, Mair, 1984). This tendency has been the subject of a number of criticisms from a variety of sources. An increasingly dominant concern is the "scant attention paid by anthropologists to the forms that development takes in the so-called 'developed' or 'industrialised' nations" (Abram and Waldren, 1998:i). Abram and Waldren's collection (1998) appears symptomatic of a growing body of literature within anthropology that attempts to counterbalance this predilection for the 'exotic'.

A further strongly articulated criticism of the traditional anthropological concern with the effects of development processes on communities of the 'third world' is not only that this research has been of no value to those being studied, but that it has actually been complicit with the maintenance of the hegemonic authority of development agents (Said, 1979, Escobar, 1995). The particular concern here is that this research has produced and maintained an ideology employed by development agents in establishing and maintaining their hegemonic authority. This observation and criticism has led to calls for a paradigmatic shift in the anthropology of development. A principal advocate for this change has been Escobar (1995) who claims that "...attention needs to be shifted to the institutional apparatus that is doing the 'developing'..." (Escobar, 1995:107). Not only does Escobar note that this emphasis has been almost wholly neglected by anthropologists, but that it provides greater potential in developing a framework for effective resistance than previous approaches.

The great benefit of these ethnographic approaches has been their concern to avoid the conceptual determinism characterising the neoclassical and neoMarxist influences. The case study approach has tended to focus on diversity, culture, and the specificity of place, and has been useful in emphasising, as Smith and Tardanico (1987:89) claim, that "far from being mere epiphenomena of capitalism's structural logic; consciousness, politics and culture are essential forces in the construction and reconstruction of society and economy".

The same point has also been the basis for a dominant criticism of the case study approach. This is the failure to adequately recognise the development site as a 'geopolitical space' (Said, 1979). The concern here, as Gottendier (1985:265) observes, is that "When spatial organisation is discussed without reference to the social system processes which produce, sustain, and reproduce it, then places are seen to magically possess these same properties as reified features of space itself". Cox and McCarthy (1982:197) have also observed that "...neighbourhood activism, as a category of behaviour, is often interpreted by geographers as a politics of turf, or as an instance of locational conflict". The general criticism of the case study approach is that it has tended

to naturalise changes, explaining them as internal manifestations of cultural logic, rather than observing potential connections to the systemic form of development processes, and particularly to the structural shifts in the global economy.

However, case study approaches have been particularly useful in focusing attention on the expressed and complex values possessed by those groups being impinged upon by development processes. Bergua and Buil's (1998:79) study of perceptions of risk in regard to the construction of dam projects on the Esera River in Spain, for example, found "a complexity of ideas, values, concepts and sentiments expressed in symbolic terms", which (they) succinctly express in the term 'culturalism'. The useful practical application of this research has been as a counterbalance to the claims made about communities impacted on by development, by development agents seeking to justify their actions.

Conflict has tended to be a central and dominant theme in works stemming from the case study approach. This has derived primarily from a large body of work concerned with neighbourhood social movements and the practice of resistance to processes of land development. The collective findings of this body of work are diverse and are dominated by the identification of the social roots of local action (Ramsay, 1996, Mayer, 1984). Mayer (1984), for example, has documented the genesis of neighbourhood groups, responding to the threat of highways and urban renewal programmes in the United States. This has led to an emphasis on the diversity and differences in resistance strategies (Bell and Newby, 1971), rather than attempts to appreciate these movements in light of wider political and economic movements, and their compatibility with other mechanisms of resistance.

The relative failure of many neighbourhood and community strategies of resistance, and the documented decline in neighbourhood resistance, has led to an emphasis on identifying the reasons for this ineffectuality and decline (Fainstein, 1987, or the neoMarxist influences of Castells, 1987, and Ambrose and Colenutt, 1973). Fainstein (1987:328), for example, has identified: narrowness of issue; part-time leadership; cross-cutting cleavages; individual geographical mobility and; limited financial resources, as crucial factors in the inability for effective neighbourhood resistance. Ambrose and Colenutt (1973:182) have been critical of the 'parochial view' of community action and research: that "concern is with the workings of [the] property system in their own area, and not the system as a whole. They may also be dedicated to conservation rather than restructuring the system and are quite likely to be open to co-option by local authorities...[They are] likely to be transitory, lasting as long as it takes to achieve, or fail to achieve, a specific aim...[and] that successful community resistance in one area will simply export the problem to some area which is 'softer' from the developers standpoint". Increasingly, this approach to research has been viewed as failing to enhance the resistance objectives that it originally sought to document and enhance.

Two dominant conclusions have emerged from this body of work which could redirect the research emphasis so that it enhances the resistance potential of such groups. The first is the need to blend the concerns of diffuse and divergent neighbourhood groups together. Here Millar and Tomaskovic-Devey (1983:8) have observed that most single issue groups “are politically weak and can win only minor concessions”, adding that “Their political weakness could be overcome if their interests blended together in an effective political way”, while Fainstein (1987:331) has stressed that “Unless housing issues can be linked organisationally and ideologically to other programs, groups concerned with ... [existing use values] will inevitably suffer the limitations associated with locally-based, single issue politics”.

The second dominant observation to emerge from this research has been the necessity for a persuasive and encompassing ideology as a basis for effective resistance to the adverse encroachments of development processes on communities (Fainstein, 1987, Castells, 1983). Increasingly, theorists stemming from this ethnographic and case study influence have looked to the Marxist tradition as a way forward. Gottdiener (1985:290), for example, has claimed that “A greater recognition of the transformational role of socio-spatial praxis requires a redirection of Marxist thinking...A language of socio-spatial liberation necessary for such a task has yet to be invented, as we are overburdened with the categories of political economy” (see also Castells, 1983:179).

Where such approaches have been let down, is in the simplicity regarding development forces, often eliminating the agency of development agents and replacing it with generic terms such as ‘economicism’ (Bergua, Buil, 1998), or, as the personalised form of ‘market rationale’ or ‘capitalist logic’. These studies also tend toward the dichotomous representation of developers’ ‘exchange values’ in opposition to the complex ‘use values’ of communities and neighbours (Ward, 1985). Research into the actual, and complex values possessed by development agents is often neglected in these studies. Escobar’s assertion above (1995:107) appears as relevant to the ethnographic study of urban development processes within the ‘developed world’ as to the study of development processes occurring in the ‘third-’ or ‘developing-world’. My own contention here, is that, because the study of development is implicitly the study of the power involved in the transformation of physical and social environments, there is an ethnographic requirement to redirect methodological focus to those agents and forces involved in the exercise of this power.

## **A Way Forward**

These existing approaches provide a significant foundation to the evolution of this research. Certainly, throughout the research process, ideas, information, and direction have been drawn from each of these dominant influences. In each case however I have identified serious reservations that, I believe, render none of these dominant influences as



adequate starting points in confronting issues of power and conflict in urban land development. Clearly, these deficiencies do not derive from a lack of methodological focus or attention, particularly in the neoMarxist tradition, and numerous case study approaches. Rather, they stem primarily from conceptual inadequacies. The extreme tendency of the structuralist approaches - neoclassical economics, and neoMarxism - has been to regard 'structure' or 'system' as so rigidly governed by formulaic relationships that the actual human subjects of these social processes can be theorised only as the 'bearers' of the structures and not as intelligent contributing forces. In attempting to avoid the determinism of these structuralist influences anthropological and case study approaches to development have tended toward particular locational explanations that can be interpreted with reference to particular individuals, or as phenomena solely created from the immediate environment in which events are seen to occur. These extreme representations of dominant conceptual paradigms emphasise the fact that processes of land development 'exist' at the abstract, structural, 'grand' level, as well as the level of individual, voluntary, human agency. Conceptual approaches that focus exclusively on one of these levels of abstraction are bound to fall short, particularly in regard to a development industry subject to constant change, and where 'what matters' is located in local, national, and, increasingly, global, domains.

It is suggested that a useful way forward is to develop an approach that takes account of both these 'levels of abstraction'. In the expansive field of land development studies, this is not an isolated proposition. Indeed, Mollenkopf (1987:332) has claimed that "The real problem is to construct theories which operate at both levels, simultaneously and which isolate the key interactions among these levels...While organisations take action which advances such changes, they do so because they are responding to structurally defined possibilities". In a similar vein, Smith and Feagin (1987:17) have observed that "Changing urban development patterns are best understood as the long term outcomes of actions taken by economic and political actors operating within a complex and changing matrix of global and national economic and political forces...It is historically-specific political-economic processes through which contemporary corporates must work rather than expressing general economic laws of capitalist development".

A useful theoretical tool through which to synthesise the elements of 'structure' and 'agency' in social interactions characterising development processes is Giddens' 'Theory of Structuration'. At the outset it must be stressed that this discussion is not a comprehensive review or critique of Giddens' work, but is, rather, designed to present some key tenets of Giddens' approach that have come to inform the methodology of this research. The development of the structuration approach has marked a substantial shift from a static, to a dynamic perspective in social theory. Rather than distinct dualisms, Giddens proposes a 'properly synthetic duality', or, a 'sense of structuration': how action is structured in everyday contexts, and how the structural features of action are produced by the very performance of that action. Giddens develops his theoretical apparatus through a number of texts. In *'New Rules Of Sociological Method'*, Giddens states that

“By the duality of structure...I mean that social structures are both constituted ‘by’ human agency, and yet at the same time are the very ‘medium’ of this constitution” (1976:121). Later he approaches the concept of structure through a comparison of language and speech (1976:118-121): While speech is spatially and temporally situated, in that it presupposes a subject and an addressee, language is virtual and ‘outside of time’, or, that language is ‘subjectless’. Giddens uses this comparison to inform his conceptual relation between interaction and structure in social analysis: whereas interaction is constituted in and through the activities of agents, structure has a ‘virtual existence’ - it consists of ‘rules and resources’ which are implemented in interaction, and which thereby structure interaction, and, which are, in the very process, reproduced.

A reasonable inference to be made from this analogy is that if ‘structures’ have a locus of existence; it is in the heads of social actors. Indeed, in “*Central Problems Of Social Theory*” (1979) Giddens goes some way in reaffirming this claim, stating that “To regard structure involving a ‘virtual order’...implies recognising the existence of: (a) knowledge - as memory traces - of ‘how things are to be done’ (said, written) on the part of social actors; (b) social practices organised through the recursive mobilisation of that knowledge; (c) capabilities that the production of these practices presuppose”. A central tenant of Giddens’ approach is a recognition that individuals are ‘knowledgeable agents’, capable of accounting for their actions, not merely ‘cultural dupes’ or mere puppets to abstract structural forces. Giddens refers to ‘the reflexive monitoring of action’ as the ability of agents to explain, both to themselves and to others why they act as they do by giving reasons for their actions. Giddens’ also distinguishes ‘levels of consciousness’: the ‘unconscious’ (the level of motivation); ‘practical consciousness’ (rationalisation of action); and ‘discursive consciousness’ (reflexive monitoring of action). The insight of this theorisation is largely methodological, meaning that social analysis requires the study of strategic actions, conducted by knowledgeable agents. Action, or agency, is the centre of theoretical concern. This is emphasised by Giddens’ first two rules in ‘Sociological Method’: “(A1) Sociology is not concerned with a ‘pre-given’ universe of objects but with one which is constituted or produced by the active doing of subjects; (A2) The production and reproduction of society thus has to be treated as a skilled performance on the part of its members” (Giddens, 1976:160).

While the notion of ‘structuration’, or, ‘the duality of structure’ is “the centre of Giddens’ theory” (Berstein,1989), he also elaborates on the various aspects of this theory in ever increasing detail throughout his expansive body of work. In particular, Giddens’ notion of social structure is developed in terms of the ‘rules and resources’ in play in any society, the former governing normative patterns, the latter concerning the way in which material goods and power are distributed. ‘Rules’, Giddens argues, cannot be conceptualised in isolation from the ‘resources’ which facilitates the exercise of power. The central point here is that restrictions on opportunities operate differentially, affecting, unevenly, various groups of people, whose categorisation depends on certain assumptions about social structure, and “it is this differential operation which cannot be

grasped by the analysis of rules alone" (Thompson, 1984:154). In stressing the interconnection of 'rules and resources', Giddens highlights the 'enabling' characteristics of 'social structure'. In *The Constitution Of Society*, Giddens' attaches further levels of abstraction to 'Rules and Resources' (1984:19). 'Rules', Giddens' claims, always have two aspects to them. On the one hand they relate to the constitution of meaning, and, on the other, they relate to the sanctioning of modes of social conduct. Of 'Resources', Giddens draws a distinction between 'allocative' rules, referring to the resources that comprise the body of organisation through which life chances are reproduced (often associated with the power of the state, or state apparatus), and 'allocative' resources, referring to the material features of the environment and the mode of production (often characterised as the power of the capitalist mode of production). Giddens pursues this abstraction further in *Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*.

Giddens' approach to time and space in social analysis is also particularly useful in informing a study of land development processes. He has been particularly critical of the distinction between 'synchrony and diachrony' in social analysis, arguing that "social theory must acknowledge as it has not done previously, time-space intersections as essentially involved in all social existence" (1979:54). Giddens argues that any society which exists beyond face to face interaction must have means of extending itself across time and space. This proposition is then redirected at the notion of social actors as knowledgeable agents, and the conception of 'social structure' as 'rules and resources'. Giddens insists that societies or 'structures' are not simply reproduced in one time or place. He identifies three levels of temporal existence relevant to social analysis: the finite temporality of our individual lives; the temporality of face-to-face interactions; and the 'long duree' of institutional (or social structural) time (Crait, 1992:47). Giddens also employs his notion of 'time-space distancing' as he observes the distinctive features of modern industrial society. Here, Giddens observes a process of time and space 'shrinkage' between individuals and groups, by which individuals have greater access to each other, and, where our relevant pool of information, and human behaviour, is becoming steadily more global in character.

Given what appears to be a particularly constructive approach to the study of land development, it is surprising the lack of focus given to Giddens' within the existing literature. Exceptions are Healey and Barrett (1990, 1992), and Healey and Nabarro (1990). The former (1992) have, rather optimistically, sought to employ Giddens' theorising into a conceptual model through which any development process is usefully understood, employing the transformation of the Hebburn riverside in Tyneside from 1979-89 as a case study. Gar-On Yeh and Wu (1996) have sought to apply this approach to the investigation of changes in the land development processes of Chinese cities, examining the impact of the changing ownership of urban land, the land development process, and the role of the state and local government on urban development and planning. Both works stem from a background in public policy implementation and this, while insufficiently acknowledged, has clearly influenced what is considered significant

to 'the development process'. My particular concern however, is that the 'expressed knowledgeability' of development agents themselves appears relatively neglected. Instead, the research is informed primarily from the expert observations of the researchers themselves, and this, it appears to me, undermines the principal methodological insight of Giddens' notion of 'knowledgeable agency'. Both works provide limited conclusions (Wu and Gar-On Yehs' predictive conclusion on the potential of future corruption is interesting), and raise numerous questions, and this, as Healey and Barrett (1992:43) claim, points to the need for further empirical research along these lines.

A number of other studies have pursued an 'institutional analysis' approach to the development process. Leysshon et al (1990) have investigated the spatial expansion of large commercial property firms within a liberalised and expanding global marketplace. Fu-Lai Yu (1997) has sought to examine the creative and adaptive capacities of entrepreneurs, claiming that "to explain economic development in a community requires a dynamic theory which centres around some human agency" (1997:8). As well, McNamara (1990) applies a structuration approach to his investigation of the changing role of research in investment decision-making within an industry in which 'suppliers' are increasingly seeking to preempt consumer demand. Adams et al (1992) have examined the changing acquisition strategies of land purchasers within an environment characterised particularly by the decreased role of local authority in the development process, and the flexibility of state apparatus. A general criticism of these works is that the role, ideas, and actions, of 'agency' are not given sufficient emphasis in these studies, and information is assumed by the expert researchers based on their own perceptions of structural conditions. A particular concern of the former two works, and to a lesser extent, the latter two, is the failure to get past the surface appearance of financial capital flow and acquisition strategies through, and from, these agents.

My own use of Giddens' ideas diverge from those above in a number of ways. One variation is simultaneously a reflection on anthropological methodology, and my own perceptions as researcher. Certainly, I approached the 'development industry' from a position of relative ignorance (relative to those researchers identified above, and, most certainly relative to those who claim membership to such a community). Combined with ethnographic methodology, this personal position has potential to highlight areas, perceptions, and actions neglected by more 'informed' researchers. As Abram and Waldren have recently stated, "What has distinguished anthropology from other forms of investigation has been a willingness to question accepted routines and beliefs, and by doing so to make explicit, taken-for-granted relationships and procedures of power....Anthropology is a theory of practice, within which theory and practice can never be fully discrete" (1998:15). Indeed, structuration theory melds well with the



prevailing concern of anthropology's study of practical actions within an imperfect world. A particularly appropriate definition of this anthropological concern is "the interpretative study of why people do what they do in their own terms, and in the terms of their social groups, rather than in terms of objective criteria imposed by the analyst" (Chapman, Buckley, 1997).

I have also made an effort to avoid the abstraction of Giddens' theorisations. Indeed, Giddens himself (1990:213) has pointed out that "while structuration theory touches at many points upon the conduct of social research, it is not a research program. As I have remarked before, it's concepts should be regarded as sensitivising devices, to be used in a selective way in thinking about research questions or interpreting findings". In essence, I have interpreted Giddens' theorisations as a starting point for empirical study. In this respect, the research process is also based on the paradigms significant to ethnomethodology. Here Zimmerman and Boden (1991:6) write: "The fundamental insight of ethnomethodology is that the primordial site of social order is found in members' use of methodological practices to produce, make sense of, and thereby render accountable, features of their local circumstances. In so doing, they constitute these circumstances as a real-world setting of practical action". In this sense, a fundamental difference is that Giddens attempts to provide a theoretical solution to a problem which ethnomethodology regards as an empirical question (Hartland, 1995:24). My own divergence from ethnomethodology is the theoretical perception that 'structure' and 'agency' exist as interdependent poles, and that empirical research is enhanced when there is an understanding of '*what to look for*' in the actions and ideology of agency.

The inclusion of the theory of structuration to this research process was symptomatic of an evolution from a previous preoccupation as to whether certain development processes were 'good' or 'bad', to a more fundamental and pragmatic concern as to how development processes occur. Rather than signifying a complete departure, this evolution was complementary to my initial concern with the theme of 'power' in land development. This point requires some explanation, and begins with the notion that social research is the study of social processes performed by knowledgeable agents. The actor is the centre of methodological concern, and theorisation must start with the observation and identification of 'strategic conduct'. In essence, this is the study of the way in which development agents perform actions so as to achieve their aims within social structure. This social research is implicitly the investigation of power, in that 'power' is the ability for an agent to achieve specific outcomes through their intervention (or lack of intervention) in the course of events. This is to say that developers are engaged in 'acts of power', but this only makes sense if that developer could have done otherwise. Only then, is what the developer does, an 'act' at all. In exercising this institutionally-defined, or socially-defined, capacity, the agent implements various kinds of 'resources'. Implicit

in the empirical research task then is to observe the manner in which development agents “...define and implement their strategies in relation to the ‘rules’ they acknowledge, the ‘resources’ they draw upon and seek to accumulate, and the ‘ideas and ideology’ they assert in determining and justifying their strategies” (Healey, Barrett, 1990:97).

This empirical task was initially confined by my own initial preoccupation with conflict, and the power differentials between developers and neighbours, that is, ‘What strategies did developers actually use to avoid, or overcome opposition from, and conflict with, neighbours?’, and, ‘What ideas and ideology did developers’ assert in legitimating and determining these actions?’.

This preoccupation proved to be only a methodological starting point, and the research evolved toward what developers’ themselves appeared to find significant, that is, ‘What actions did they regard as most significant within the contemporary development environment?’, ‘What rules and resources were implemented and accumulated?’, and ‘What ideas and ideology were most commonly expressed?’. This was also a personal evolution as I became more knowledgeable, and ‘drawn into’ the development process. This growing and changing level of personal knowledgeability continually informed the methodological direction of the project and reinforced its methodological evolution. The final product is less a comprehensive study than a work in continual process. What is presented reflects both my own preoccupations, and, the emphasis provided by research participants themselves. The following discussion seeks to provide a sense of this methodological evolution.

## **Methodology**

An anthropology of land developers hardly evokes the image of the lone anthropologist stranded on an island occupied by natives possessed by an entirely alien lifestyle and system of beliefs. This is, however, a more accurate reflection of this research process than might be assumed at face value. Certainly, the research process conducted over the past two years has been both highly intensive, and deeply reflexive. The project involved a number of contradictory influences and was often confusing. Predominantly however, the project is characterised by an evolution of ‘knowledgeability’. It started with my own limited knowledge, informed primarily through a single negative experience and evolved through an increased sensitivity to the ‘knowledgeability’ of development agents. The research experience has been one of personal evolution and cultural transformation.

As this level of understanding matured, I also became increasingly sensitive to the diverse ‘forces’, experiences, indicators, legislation, social perceptions, in essence, the ‘structural conditions’, which are widely regarded as constituting ‘the development industry’. What struck me most was the diversity of forces impacting on development, and its perpetual state of transformation. Greater sensitivity towards ‘the industry’ continually redirected the research emphasis, leading to changes in the questions posed,

and providing substance within interview situations: 'How would this change affect you?', 'Was this situation common?', 'What did you do in that situation?'. Thus, the evolution of the research proceeded from both, the 'agency perspective' of developers', and, at the general 'level' of 'the industry', informed through media reports and commentary, development publications, and the Real Estate industry. This was a complementary process, and knowledge from one 'level' often allowed greater insight into the other, and provided access to knowledge previously inaccessible.

The backbone to the research is a series of interviews with nine development agents. In each case a letter of introduction and consent form were posted, usually followed up with a telephone conversation. Development agents responded enthusiastically, and arrangements for an interview were made. Generally the interviews lasted an hour and a half. On a number of occasions the interviews were followed up with telephone conversations to clarify points made and to raise questions that became apparent after further scrutiny of transcripts. I also transcribed each interview myself, immediately following the actual event. Throughout the research process I continued to revisit both these transcripts and the taped interviews.

The interviews were designed formally, oriented around questions that I had come to consider important to the study of land development processes. However, each interview had to allow enough scope and flexibility for the developer to express what they considered important about the development process, thus opening new areas and directions of study. As the study progressed the insights and 'knowledge' expressed through this degree of informality and flexibility became incorporated into the formal structure of subsequent interviews. In this sense as well, the project was constantly evolving, and I was constantly attune to the questions of 'whether the insights presented by one developer reflected some commonality in the knowledge of other developers?', and, 'to what degree did instances of strategic conduct reflected personal whims and opinion, or, a more common reflection on a specific structural condition?'.

The selection of research participants also reflected the evolution of the research process. Initially this was fairly arbitrary. The first two participants were identified by the location of housing developments recently constructed and on sale. Investigations revealed the developers involved and interviews were arranged and conducted. The first of these 'developers' was best described as a speculative 'builder/developer'. The second participant operated on a much larger scale, owning large quantities of land on speculation, constructing large multiplex housing estates, and attracting commercial clients as a facilitator of their development requirements. The third participant was located as a result of the development of commercial facilities for a multinational company within the City. The development had been reasonably well publicised and had involved some controversy. I was able to interview the manager of this facility, who was ultimately responsible for the establishment, development, and ongoing operation of the company. These three interviews produced discrepancies in terms of both ideology and action. For

example, the first two participants were clearly more concerned with maintaining a long term reputation within the development industry and with Council Officers, while the third participant was oriented primarily at a single development. In addition, the latter two participants possessed far greater resources than the first participant, and this appeared to gain them much greater flexibility and control in their strategic conduct. However, there were also similarities in the conduct of this diverse group of 'development agents', particularly in their 'basic' knowledge of the industry, and as they sought to legitimate their development actions. It was clear that 'the development industry' was made up of a diverse range of agents of various orientations.

This insight, among others, redirected the research process to more specific criteria in the selection of research participants. The process of selection became oriented toward those 'development agents' more akin to the second participant. Thus, the research focus turned to those development agents who could be seen as 'successful developers' - those of greater resources, and undertaking larger and more widespread projects. These developers were identified as 'developers' in the phone book, and all had offices and staff in town. Generally they operated as both speculative agents, purchasing blocks of land, and sites within town, as well as attracting commercial clients. From my own observations and research, and as was reflected in a range of development literature, an increase in this 'type' of development agent appeared symptomatic of trends within the development industry. For this reason, as well as my own perception that these were simply more interesting participants, they became the primary focus of this research. Five further participants were selected in this manner. However, these development agents were also distinct from each other. For example, two of these developers had secured themselves in specific niche markets, focusing their attention on the development of these particular facilities around the country. Among other things this reaffirmed, again, the fact that 'the development industry' is not a coherent body of agents responding uniformly to structural signals, but is made up of a diversity of independent agents responding to 'social structures', and to each other, in a range of ways.

The final participant was a locally based development Consultancy agent specialising in various aspects of strategic action conducive to successful development. This was indicative of a significant trend reflected in industry information. A number of the developers interviewed throughout this research indicated their own employment of these agents. It was suggested that the involvement of these 'development agents' would offer useful and pertinent insights into the strategic actions conducive to the contemporary development industry: 'What skills, knowledge, ability did these agents possess that other developer's didn't?'; 'What justified their existence within the industry?'; 'How were they able to be employed?'.



Date	Developer's Alias	Summary of Participant	Nature of Research Exercise
Sept '97	Allen	Builder/Developer: Small-scale, Speculatory, Residential properties.	Interview
Sept '97	Neighbour 1		Interview
Sept '97	Neighbour 2		Interview
Sept '97	Neighbour 3		Interview
Sept '97	Booth	Developer: Large-scale, Commercial properties, Residential villages.	Interview
May '98	Carter	Manager, facilitating Transnational development in local area, Case study one.	Interview
May '98	Page	Council Officer.	Interview
May '98	Duncan	Developer: Large-scale, Specialising in niche market, Major residential development, Case study three	Interview
June '98	Edwards	Builder/Developer: Large-scale, Commercial properties, Residential properties	Interview
June '98	Farrow	Developer: Large-scale, Commercial properties, Residential properties.	Interview
June '98	Neighbours' 4,5,6		Interviews
July '98	Gunn	Developer: Large-scale, specialising in niche market.	Interview
July '98			Examination of Council files
Aug '98	Quin	Council Officer	Interview
Aug '98			Council/Developer luncheon
Aug '98	Read	Council Officer	Interview
Aug '98	Horne	Developer: Large-scale, Commercial properties, Residential properties.	Interview
Aug '98	Scott	Council Officer	Interview
Aug '98	Ireland	Consultant.	Interview
Sept '98/ Oct '98			Phone and letter correspondence clarifying original responses

**Table 1: Research Participants**

It quickly became apparent that interviews were greatly enhanced if some awareness of these developers' actions could be accrued prior to the actual interview. Here the research process significantly widened to include a further range of sources and methodological techniques. Often this involved the increased awareness of media reports, and the inspection of past newspaper articles. This information-collecting process also involved informal conversations with a wide range of individuals, and, as is discussed shortly, more thorough processes of investigation. This background information proved particularly useful in providing some necessary degree of specificity and substance to interviews. Background information also proved particularly befitting to the 'interview strategy' developed at the beginning of the project.

This 'interview strategy' involved a system of questioning, designed to identify instances of strategic conduct, and then to unfold 'layers of meaning', or, the various degrees of knowledgeability, possessed by development agents. The initiation of the system of questioning was marked by the identification of an *event*, or an *instance of interaction*. This could be deliberately raised in conversation, either hypothetically (particularly as I came to appreciate 'common situations' for developers), or by reference to something I had learnt about the developer from preliminary investigations. My initial preoccupations tended towards interactions of conflict involving neighbours, and then Council Officers. As research progressed, this definition widened to include a range of interactions in which power could be seen to be exercised by developers. The description of an instance of interaction led to the second strand of investigation, which was to question the *actions* the developer had taken in these circumstances. This could be complemented by questioning the range of options available to the developer. Often, particularly as the research progressed, these levels of questioning had been previously investigated through other means - in a number of interviews I prompted developers about their actions from the information and perceptions I had gathered from alternative sources. Essentially, these levels of questioning were precursory to subsequent levels of investigation.

The third level of questioning sought to expose expressed reasoning, for example, 'Why did you take that action?', and, 'Why did you choose that action from those options?'. The answers to these questions became subject to further levels of investigation. The intention here was to expose deeper levels of ideological reasoning. However, this posed a dilemma of how deeply one could delve into the knowledgeability of developers without appearing stupid or ridiculous. Continuing to ask 'why?' when answers are provided can appear odd to say the least. Often this interview strategy required some effort - adding inflections in my voice, exaggerating interest in my body language - these were important aspects in maintaining the reasonable flow of conversation. The implementation of this system of questioning was, by necessity, very informal and flexible. It was employed in situations where it was both appropriate and possible, and generally in an effort to enhance the flow of conversation rather than stultify it. Also, the interview strategy

required reasonable flexibility. Indeed, sometimes the type of response that I expected from the fourth or fifth level of questioning would result from the third level of questioning, or vice versa.

The desire to explore the strategic conduct of developers required a range of methodological directions. From my previous research I had already observed first-hand, the fact that different individuals and groups held very different perceptions of the same event. It also became clear in early interviews that developers would simply not divulge information, or mention events that I knew to have occurred. Certainly, they explained events, and their own actions, in the best light possible. For this reason it was important to investigate the 'strategic conduct' of developers from other angles. This information came from a wide range of sources, such as casual conversations with acquaintances and friends, newspaper articles, Council files, and property development texts from various genres, each of which could be employed in interview situations. In a number of cases, conversations or interviews with neighbours raised useful points and events that could also be questioned in interview situations.

A dominant finding to emerge from interviews and conversations with neighbours was the significance of the regulatory procedure in enabling developers to achieve their aims, particularly in the face of opposition from neighbours. This was constantly reaffirmed as I interviewed development agents. I came to conceptualise the council enforced regulatory procedure as the battleground upon which development conflicts were fought and won. This influence led me in three further methodological directions. The first was to examine what constituted the 'structural-', or 'institutional-environment' of the regulatory procedure: the Resource Management Act 1991; its amendments and proposed changes; the District Plan; and other Council information designed for development agents. Certainly this was a useful basis on which questions could be posed to developers about their conduct within the regulatory procedure. In essence however, it was an insufficient assessment of the constitution of the regulatory procedure, failing to acknowledge the actual implementation of regulations. In addition, this assessment was often confusing, exposing the flexibility and ambiguity of legislation. Here it was necessary to turn to those agents, Council Officers, empowered to enforce the regulatory procedure.

The main strategy employed in regard to Council was a series of four semi-formal interviews with Council Officers, which were complimented by preceding and subsequent conversations with a wider range of Council Officers. This process was useful in assessing and identifying the basis on which development decisions were made within the regulatory procedure, and in questioning not only what actions developers took, but what actions developers should take in regard to achieving their aims within the regulatory procedure. The first of these interviews was conducted early in the research.

process. The rest were conducted at later dates, and after I had investigated a number of case study files maintained by the regulatory division of the City Council. These case studies provided a concrete foundation on which to compare events within the regulatory procedure, and thus to question the basis of decision-making.

The involvement of Council Officers to the research process directed me to additional sources of information. The first of these were case study files in which all correspondence, plans, consent applications, and information relevant to a particular development project is collated by Council Officers, and is available to the public. These were enormous files and I spent 4 weeks established in a Council Office reviewing five case studies, three of which were particularly useful in informing the research. These files were a written testament of developers' strategic conduct within the institutional environment of the regulatory procedure. It was also useful that each case study focused on a developer involved in my research because I was able to employ this aspect of their strategic conduct into the system of interview questioning outlined above. In addition these case studies provided a useful basis on which to assess decision-making criteria within the regulatory procedure: 'How were decisions made?', 'What were the beliefs and ideas supporting these decisions and decision-making criteria?', 'How were developers most likely to achieve their aims within the regulatory procedure?', 'What 'resources' were most effective within the regulatory procedure?', 'How were these accumulated?', and, 'How were they employed to maximum effect?'.

Another research opportunity that came about through the involvement of Council Officers was an invitation to a Council/developer luncheon. This was a Council initiative designed to "improve communications between all sectors of the development community". It provided an excellent opportunity to interact with a range of development agents and to talk informally about related issues. It was also an opportunity to observe, firsthand, interactions between development agents, related professionals, and Council Officers. It was particularly insightful as dominant ideologies were expressed and as developers' articulated their particular concerns to Council Officers.

## **Critical reflections**

A interesting reflection on the evolution of the research progress was my changing attitude towards developers, and, what I felt to be their perception of me. My general perception of, and attitude towards, 'developers' continued to evolve throughout the project. The image of the 'evil developer' very quickly dissolved into a much more complicated social animal. Feelings of outrage and prejudice towards developers were rapidly replaced with respect and a certain degree of admiration. This evolution was greatly enhanced by the general willingness of the developers involved in this study to contribute to the project. Interviews were not simple 'praise sessions'. Often, questioning was quite pointed and mildly confrontational, particularly as my confidence grew, and as

I was able to compare answers with alternative evidence. Regardless of this, developers would almost always wish me luck and offer further assistance if necessary. At one point I considered my own potential career in the development industry. Some have characterised this as 'ethnographic seduction', while others have put it down to the natural result of increased knowledge.

I was also aware of how developers tended to regard me. As each interview progressed I was constantly aware of the state of ignorance that had informed aspects of previous interviews. Questions such as 'whether developer's regard me with some skepticism?', and, 'to what extent did their impression of me influence the answers they provided and the directions they pursued in interview situations?' were constantly at play. In this regard it was interesting that, while I allowed a reasonable degree of scope for developers to express themselves, and probed numerous aspects of development, including issues related to finance, the conversation and response never ventured too far beyond the realm of anthropology, and from my own level of understanding or comprehension.

Any research in which issues of power are brought to the fore is subject to certain methodological problems. Research on land development, in which secrecy is part of competitive advantage, and where controversy and conflict often surround issues and actions, simply exacerbates these methodological problems. Healey and Nabarro have also raised these issues, observing that "empirical research on the industry raises challenging problems of research method and data sources. It involves arenas where many powerful actors operate, where secretive strategies are part of the battle for competitive success, where data are scarce and produced in ways which are often difficult to penetrate, and where publicly available documentation and public talk is often a deliberate distortion for the purposes of competitive strategy" (Healey, Nabarro, 1990:13). To a reasonable extent these concerns were overcome, in part through the fact that I was often reasonably well informed prior to the interview and was able to 'remind' developers of certain actions, and, in part, because confidentiality was stressed throughout the interview procedure. On a number of occasions developers would stress the confidentiality of what they had said.

Another significant concern symptomatic of this sort of research approach is the unavoidable difficulty in making generalisations based on limited and specific information, without distorting the specificity of developers actions and ideology. Healey (1991:219/220) has also acknowledged the difficulties of this concern: "(to) preserve the capacity to penetrate the detail of agency relationships in the negotiation of development projects, while at the same time offering ways of generalising about the behaviour of actors and the significance of events in the development process under different conditions".



A constant concern throughout the project was to test the generality of the actions and ideology of developers'. The process of questioning previous findings in subsequent interviews offered some means to make reasonable interpretations as to what forces, or series of circumstances, lead to particular actions. The depth of interviews, and the range of participants involved, provides integrity to the generalisations made throughout the thesis.

Another concern is that the strategic conduct of developers exists within a constantly changing and diverse array of structuring forces. This recognition poses numerous questions concerning time and space that are beyond the scope of this research. Such questions include 'the extent does the strategic conduct of developers reflect aspects of the current condition?', 'the extent as to which actions are 'leftover' from past eras?', 'the extent to which actions are preemptive of future demand or conditions?', and, 'the question as to whether strategic actions will actually achieve the desired outcomes they are designed to achieve?'

In another sense the research involved a constant state of tension, one dimension being an increased awareness and empathy with developers, the other being various reaffirmations of my own original prejudices, particularly as I talked to neighbours and with acquaintances. Constantly, the sense of 'being a traitor' pervaded the investigation, both to developers, and to the ever diminishing, but nonetheless present, sense of justice that initiated the research emphasis on land development. Thus, in methodological terms, where I might have got 'deeper in' I felt constantly 'pulled back' by these supposedly contradictory personal forces.

The processes of analysing research 'results' and then producing a completed thesis was extremely difficult and drawn out. Transcripts were constantly revisited, previous perceptions questioned, new questions were posed, old questions were revisited in a different light, both to myself, and to developers as I followed up on interviews. It became gradually clearer that a great deal of control is required in severing oneself from the research process long enough to present some findings or conclusions to what is essentially designed as an indefinite process. The analysis of an eclectic mix of literature - particularly concerned with development processes (as identified above), a number of related ethnographic studies, and a variety of theoretical influences enabled a number of useful comparisons to be made throughout the subsequent discussions.

## Overview of the Thesis

The focus of this research has been oriented toward the identification of '*levels of analysis*' rather than a comprehensive analysis of 'the development process'. The body of the thesis comprises three parts: The first (Chapter One) is the most general, focusing

on the '*grand*', '*structural*' level of the development industry; The second (Chapters two and three) focus on the level of *action*, or '*strategic conduct*'. The third (Chapters four and five) focus on the level of *ideas and ideology*.

## Part I

Chapter one provides an overview of the 'environment' in which this research was conducted, and in which developers perform their actions. The chapter also describes my evolving comprehension of what comprises 'the development industry', informed by my own analysis of industry information, commentary, and media, and through the direction provided from interviews with development agents. The purpose of the Chapter is to present the major structural changes characterising the contemporary development environment, that is, 'What shifts have there been in this environment which may make past experience a less than reliable guide to the future?', and, 'What are the main issues and uncertainties which will shape the way the industry works in the immediate future?'.

## Part II

The second part of the thesis focuses on the level of developer's strategic conduct within this diverse and eclectic environment. Various peculiarities characterise the discussion at this level of analysis, primarily the distinction between the strategic conduct characteristic of the social institution of the Council enforced regulatory procedure, and, the strategic conduct characteristic of the social structures that can be principally described as 'the development marketplace'. This division is symptomatic of the inherent interconnection between actions, and the environment in which they are performed, between 'rules and resources'. This level of analysis requires two chapters.

Chapter two is an assessment of developers' strategic conduct within 'the development marketplace'. Emerging from this chapter is the dominant theme 'Risk', and this is employed to add comprehension to the discussion. The chapter addresses a number of questions fundamental to the research project: 'What are the main variables through which developers' organise their strategic conduct?'; 'What actions are developers able to take in regard to these variables?', and; 'What 'rules and resources' are important to developers' as they perform these actions?'.

Chapter three recognises the Council-enforced regulatory procedure as a 'rule-governed environment' distinct from that of 'the development marketplace'. Dominant themes to emerge from the chapter are: the significance of 'the law' as a mechanism employed by developers to achieve their aims, particularly in the face of civil opposition, and; the degree to which the rules of the law are subject to manipulation in the interests of developers' power. This is, as Weber (1970:12) observed, a condition symptomatic of the regulation of modern society. The purpose of the chapter is to assess developers' strategic conduct within this increasingly complex rule-governed environment: 'What is

'the law', and how can it be represented, both to developers', and 'objectively' ?'; 'What resources are effective within the regulatory procedure ?'; 'How are these resources effectively employed by developers to achieve specific outcomes ?', and; 'What 'rules' characterise developers' strategic conduct, and how are these rules employed ?'. The chapter also presents the opportunity to focus on the strategic conduct of developers in regard to the neighbours of developments: 'What strategies are characteristic of developers' conduct toward neighbours ?'; 'What rules and resources are significant in this exercise ?', and; 'How are these rules and resources employed ?'.

### Part III

Part III shifts attention to the level of dominant ideas and ideology, contained in two chapters.

Chapter four is essentially concerned with the level of motivation. In some respects this chapter makes explicit the underlying and directional features of the previous chapters, although it raises questions about what influence these motivations have for the strategic conduct of developers. The chapter considers dominant expressions of motivation from interview situations, and how these motivations become manifest in: (a) direct statements, and; (b) practical decision-making criteria and taken-for-granted assumptions?.

Chapter five examines the expressed ideology of developers' from another angle. Here ideology is regarded as "meaning mobilised in the service of power" (Thompson, 1984, 1990). The purpose of the chapter is to examine the means through which the expression of dominant ideas become mechanisms for the realisation of developers objectives.

### Conclusion

The intention of the conclusion is to present some synthesis on the findings and discussions presented throughout the thesis, although this is difficult given the design and nature of the research process and thesis structure. In many respects, the conclusion is best represented as a personal disentanglement from the research process because it is here that I return briefly to more fundamental issues precipitating this thesis. Particularly I am concerned with the position of this thesis within the academic domain of anthropology, and, with the issue of public participation in the development process. The thesis provides some basis from which to make reasonable generalisations about both of these matters.