Isaura, city of the thousand wells, is said to rise over a deep, subterranean lake. On all sides, wherever the inhabitants dig long vertical holes in the ground, they succeed in drawing up water, as far as the city extends, and no further. Its green border repeats the dark outline of the buried lake; an invisible landscape conditions the visible one; everything that moves in the sunlight is driven by the lapping wave enclosed beneath the rock's calcareous sky. Consequently two forms of religion exist in Isaura...

Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities

The semiology of the city, it seems to me - would be with a kind of naive attitude, like that of the reader. There would have to be many of us trying to read the cities we are in, starting, if need be, from a personal relationship. Superimposing all these readings by different types would then yield the language of the city. So I would say that it is far less important to multiply functional studies of the city than to multiply these city readings, of which, so far , unfortunately, writers alone have provided examples; they are the ones so far who have best dealt with with urban semantics. Getting a start from these readings, from this reconstruction of a language or of a code of the city, could then begin more scientific operations: finding the units, syntax, etc,. But keeping in mind throughout that one must never try to fix and rigidify the signifieds of the units discovered, because historically, these signifieds are always extremely labile, questionable, ungovernable...

Roland Barthes

A FRAMEWORK FOR A SITE ANALYSIS

The following is a framework for interpreting that which can be observed in the city and found by deliberately seeking out its literary and imagistic counter forms in such diverse sources as paintings, prose, poetry, histories, popular art forms, photographs, movies etc. It approaches the city somewhat like a text which reveals itself through reading, a process which when conscious can provide what Roland Barthes has called 'The Pleasure of the Text'.

This interpretative framework is organized into three thematic tensions or oppositions and serves as the conceptual basis for analysis:

Myth and Memory
The City and the Garden
Routes and Boundaries

These have been somewhat arbitrarily chosen as a means of penetrating the aura of particularity that each city possesses and events that may be comparatively commonplace in respect of other towns and cities. At the same time they are intended to situate these commonplace elements in relation to the exceptional and highly particular, in such a way as to illuminate the dialectical character of the historical process that yields a specific urban morphology and a truly unique urban entity, one that is to be found in only one place. Thus the framework outlined is seen as a kind of prototype for an analysis of any number of cities.

Myth and Memory

Purpose of the Study

To establish an analytical review to the historical and phenomenological roots of the city's identity as a place; first by seeking out an underlying mythic and/or collective memory structure composed of ideas, metaphors, popular images etc., which might be seen to have influenced the development of the city(s) and by comparing that idea (or those ideas) of the place(s) - perhaps complex and contradictory - with aspects of the actual built environments to see how the latter actually supports cycles of ritual and daily life, and how its built layers constitute a kind of recorded collective memory.

Specific subjects of documentation o

(a) intimations of a worthy city

- dreamed schemes and grand plans
- important or proposed development schemes
- popular images (post cards, photos, little histories, etc.
- official images and histories (stamps, brochures, etc.)
- official planning (land use, zoning height limits, etc.)

(b) city as found artifact

- significant historical fragments and layers
- areas of special identity or use
- institutions of special importance to the identity of the area, precincts, or as support to ceremonies, rituals, play, etc.
- history of major public ceremonies (formal or informal) and significant characteristics of their sites

The City and the Garden (Landscape and Cityscape)

Purpose of the Study

To examine the built evidence more particularly in relation to the overlay of competing ideals, one 'urban' and the other 'natural' on a relatively simple settlement system of 'meets and bounds'; lots and rights of way. Particular attention to be paid to the evolving interrelation of unique elements (built or natural) and more typical or commonplace built elements that might be seen to constitute the 'weave' of the 'urban fabric' (streets, blocks, parks, parcels, etc.).

Specific subjects of documentation:

(a) urban hierarchy and urban infrastructure

- geomorphology of the urban floor for the Hastings urban transect - the corridor spine on the "hogback" spine of Hastings - the manipulation of landform to allow for human activity.

- evolution of settlement system (i.e., lane, street, square, corridors, districts, and parcelization)
- significant building types and the obvious, assumed, or hidden rules that relate them directly to the settlement system (streets and parks) and determine the character of (mostly public) shaped voids and (mostly private) solid artifacts.
- urban forests; employed as a means of making manifest the settlement pattern as built space, employed as an integral aspect of street infrastructure, employed as decorative embellishment around buildings, preserved as remnants of natural ecology, emerging as renegade upwellings of a new spontaneous urban ecology.
- perceptual systems employed or employable to establish interdependence between monuments or landmarks (the unique) and otherwise typical pieces of the lane, street, square hierarchy (includes axial views and termini panoramic views, visual corridors, etc.)

(b) garden/park landscape

- manipulation of topographic features to make to make a park, yards and streets
- the conscious use of park genres (romantic, English, pragmatic, French, Asian,etc.) residential gardens for single family homes, for condominiums, for public spaces
- motifs used consciously or unconsciously therein.
- presence or absence of emergent pacific west ecology (Douglas Fir, Alder, naturalized invasives like blackberry etc).
- ompositional devices and deployment of monuments near and far as set pieces
- strength of impotence of street vistas east and west, north and south.

Routes and Boundaries

Purpose of the Study

To explore the significance of major routes and major interruptions (built or natural) in the city fabric and the subsequent importance of points of

crossing, and to determine the extent to which each route or boundary might be seen to constitute, on the one hand, a connective element identified with the city as a whole and, on the other hand, the edge or boundary of particular points of the city.

Specific subjects of documentation:

(a) routes and associated systems

- ceremonial routes and habitual routes and associated recurring elements
- support systems (transit, parking, etc.)
- regional ways (major movement infrastructure connecting regional   facilities and places to the study area)
- points of crossing
- origin/destination information for residents, for those who pass through.
- in light of the above, critical analysis of current traffic planning policy with regard to residents, with regard to those passing through.

(b) boundaries and barriers

- significant historical fragments and layers
- large-scale cuts through the fabric (arterials, rails, highways, topographic eruptions, etc.); elaboration of edges (public works such as grading, stairs, ramps, walls, etc. also natural topographic edges of significance)
- architectural, infrastructural, topographic or landscape elements that manifest the boundaries between precincts.