I. INTRODUCTION

This paper uses Route 66 as a case study for the examination of the transition in meaning from authentic to inauthentic through user interaction with the highway over time. Historically, the primary shift in environmental meaning in architecture has been from authentic to inauthentic expressions. Environmental meaning resides in user attribution of significance rather than in properties inherent in form itself, and can shift from authentic to inauthentic through the process of user attribution of significance.

The nature of authenticity in the built environment is explored to achieve an understanding of the transition of meaning over time. Authentic meaning is defined as a property of "genuineness" conferred on spaces as a result of human interaction with that space over time. User interaction with and appropriation of built forms are necessary in order for authenticity to be attributed. Designers cannot ensure, however, that meaning will be conferred on spaces; users may appropriate and attribute meaning to spaces which was unintended by designers. What design may perceive as "inauthentic" can in fact be made authentic by users, as in the case of Route 66.

II. AUTHENTICITY

Historical Background

Concern with authenticity in the arts originated in the mid-18th century at the onset of the picturesque. Art of the period, including architecture, was primarily concerned with the image presented by a work, and its associative meaning with historical, romanticized periods intentionally evoked by that image. The aesthetic value of buildings was measured by association to currently popular images and ideas, employed to create a specific feeling or meaning. The shift was from authentic to inauthentic expressions through the self-conscious superficial application of form. The 20th century response to these ideas was the modern movement, which strove to address the "real" expression of the built form.

Definition of Terms

Authentic is defined as genuine, real, of undisputed origin; reliable, true. The root is the archaic Greek authentos, the doer of a deed. Its etymology holds a clue to its original meaning: that which is true and traceable to its maker. The authenticity is lost to the house, with responsibility implied. In modern times, traditional has been coupled with authentic. For example, a Greek village can be seen as authentic. It is made in a traditional, genuine and unconscious manner, of local materials, and is often generally undisputed, or at least culturally traceable origin. Such forms are slow to change in homogeneous societies; built form is generated in response to climate and available materials, and exhibits continuity.

Benedikt (1987) provides a provocative list of perjorative terms for inauthentic found in critical reviews and architectural writings. Listed are artificial, contrived, forced, pseudo, illogical, unauthorized, trite, cliche, take, manipulative, doubtful, deceptive (p. 71). Lack of authenticity is associated with negativity; no positive words or qualities were found in his study.

Authenticity and Deception

Dovey (1989) uses a simple set of shutters to illustrate the transformation of form and meaning from authentic to inauthentic through deception. "Authentic" shutters open and close in order to open and close the window boundary; form and function are in balance and can be clearly understood. The object is clearly capable of fulfilling its intended use. The first shift in meaning occurs when the shutters are capable of functioning, but are not intended to do so: for example, if they occur outside a fixed window. Their role is visual and static, but still materially correct. The second shift occurs when the shutters are correctly proportioned but are fixed: they no longer can perform their implied function. Finally, when the shutters are shortened as well as fixed in place, they are no longer even capable of covering the window if they could in fact close. At which point do the shutters become inauthentic? Dovey claims that the question is ambiguous and depends on the point of view: are the shutters to be viewed as useable or formal objects?
The result of this ambiguity is that we now question all shutters and their authenticity, which were previously simple window boundaries. We must adopt a point of view. As the transformation in meaning occurs, the shutters become more symbolic than functional, and the relationship between the two is not readily understood. They are an image first, and a functional potential second. The negativity of ambiguous deception is that we are led to believe that X is the case, when Y is actually true.

What about direct deception? We rarely scorn what is truly deceptive. Awareness of the deception is critical: Disneyland is a case in point. It is an environment that clearly asks users to leave "reality" outside, in order to enjoy the "magic" inside. There is no ambiguity. But in real-world conditions, the view of objects would have to shift from functional to formal to dispel the ambiguity of a case like the shutters. Most people do not view their environment as a set of formal constructions, nor would they choose to.

Jencks (1982) claims that it is "effet" to insist on the real if a fake in fact outperforms it. An example of this would be the wood shingle: the real wood shingle is a fire hazard, but aesthetically pleasing; the synthetic shingle mimics the wood without the hazard. Users may be indifferent to notions of deception and honesty; if it looks good and performs its function it may remain unquestioned. However, if users later discover the deception, they may question the authenticity of all aspects of the environment.

Authenticity and Environmental Meaning

Authenticity is not a property of environmental form but of process and relationship (Dovey, p.33). Process is defined as user appropriation of space and the resultant attribution of meaning to that space. Appropriation of space means taking it for one's own use. Relationship is the temporal connection between users and space. Both process and relationship must be present in order for environmental meaning to take hold. For example, a user may frequent a bank or supermarket with which he has formed a sort of relationship. If appropriation and meaning attribution are not provided for and do not take place, greater symbolic meaning will not be conferred on such spaces. Anecdotal accounts gathered during research interviews indicate that users can rarely name a memorable bank or supermarket. It appears that users do not readily appropriate such spaces, though they have relationship with them: process is absent.

In traditional societies, the connection between space, process and relationship is more clearly defined. Places are created by those who live in the culture, and are generally smaller and homogeneous with gradual change. Environmental meaning is collectively understood, attributed and appropriated through a long process of user interaction. In postmodern cultures, these relationships are more ambiguous, since societies are heterogeneous and composed of differing groups of varied backgrounds and interests.

Postmodernism

Foucault (1984) refers to postmodernism as a "troubling and enigmatic" epoch following modernity. Modernity is described as an attitude; a break with tradition or feeling of novelty (p. 39). Great value is placed on the present and its transformation into something new; its meaning is revealed through this newness. In order to create newness, man must constantly strive to understand what the present is, in order to transform it. Productions are what have meaning, and modern man is faced with the endless task of producing or transforming himself as he goes through life. This attitude promotes self-consciousness rather than self-awareness, and complicates man's relationship to himself and his productions. Intellect is separated from spirit, and this lack of harmony has produced a profound crisis in our society.

Postmodernity is above all a regime of surfaces (Dorst, p. 104). The structure of postmodern productions into surfaces promotes further alienation in modern heterogeneous societies. Jameson defines one of the primary properties of postmodernism as dephthesness, divided into three domains: space and materiality, time and historicity, and human subjectivity. If these domains are characterized by a lack of depth, then perceptions are reduced into a two-dimensional field: the world of images. Reproduction of reality into images, easily digestible and superficially accessible is the resultant production.

Architecture and Postmodernity

Architecture is a continuing production of society; each form or style of building expresses continuity with or refers back to that which came before. This is true even when the style "rejects" what came before; the mere idea of rejection implies the existence of a preceding style against which one reacts. In the same way that designers of the picturesque used certain styles to elicit certain responses, so postmodern architects have employed architectural images in a self-conscious attempt to evoke meanings. A primary expression of this
superficiality is the postmodern obsession with the facade. Facade architecture has been used in an attempt to create group meaning and collective identity through the expression of clear and obvious symbols. It is architecture based on object-recognition rather than physical experience of space. It is a response to the speed of modern life, in which we must perceive, process and appropriate images quickly.

Architectural Language

Architecture is experienced as communication (Eco, Norberg-Schulz). This communication has been defined as the linking together of "schemata," the repetitively encountered experiences which enable a user to recognize the same potentials in other similar experiences or conditions. Schemata are expressions of collective memory; mnemonic devices or codes which help users understand and appropriate objects and experiences in the built environment. These codes, once recognized, exist regardless of fulfillment of the object's intended use. Schemata allow architectural language to be understood and appropriated.

The meaning of architectural language resides in the interaction of people with form and space over time, and not in the forms or spaces themselves. Form is simply the vehicle which conveys the meaning. For example, the arch is a load-bearing structure which has taken many forms. The pointed arch, no different in function than the ogive arch, has been used over time in Western religious architecture. User attention was drawn to the form through articulation. The interaction of users with the form over time has generated associations of religion when the form is encountered, regardless of context. These arches can be seen as codes signifying "religion." Repetition or connection through similar situations will make it more likely that users will confer a meaning on a form. The user and NOT the form is the giver of meaning.

III. ROUTE 66

Introduction

Route 66 provides an excellent example of transition in meaning over time from authentic to inauthentic and back again to authentic expressions as the result of user interaction and attribution of meaning on space. From the controlled route of the highway, automobile tourism provided access to both real and manufactured icons of the American experience. The public was already bound to the myth of this experience through penny novels, cinema and histories of the day; all that remained was to see the images first-hand. The highway provided the infrastructure for this interaction, and became synonymous with those images.

Highway Development

Route 66 was the brainchild of an Oklahoma businessman named Cyrus Avery. In the 1920s Oklahoma was a wild land of Indian territories and oil fields, with little interstate commerce. Roads were primitive dirt or sand tracks, with occasional plank paving, and travel was unpredictable. When the federal government decided that a system of national highways was necessary, Avery lobbied for a road that would run through his state. He was the first to realize that, along with interstate commerce, people in cars would generate a new industry: tourism. In 1926 Avery's route was adopted and numbered sixty-six.

The Route 66 Association was formed in 1927 to solicit funds for construction and to market the highway. The marketing concept born at its first meeting was to shape the way America viewed the highway: "The Main Street of America." It was a brilliant stroke of advertising; in one phrase, the road was sold as a place, belonging to every American; a continuum of the Main Street in every community. Media events such as a 3,400-mile food race were staged to encourage Americans to appropriate the highway through a combination of personal and secondary experience. During the Depression, Route 66 was the road to a new and better life, away from the dustbowl of Oklahoma. It also provided jobs in those desperate times. The highway was an image of national hope.

Travelers spent what little money they had on necessities along the highway, creating a new industry: roadside services. Typically these included gas, food and minimal shelter in tourist courts and campgrounds. The tourist court was an early form of motel: a small number of sleeping cabins, near one another, with adjacent space for a car. Outdoor fireplaces were provided for cooking and became communal spaces. People ate and shared stories of the road with one another; the world was brought to the doorstep of those in isolated rural communities. Process and relationship were present and enabled users to appropriate the highway. It really was America's Main Street. Roadside businesses were built by their proprietors and naturally reflected the culture and community of the region. Inexpensive local materials gave a regional vernacular look to the buildings. Local arts and crafts were offered for sale, further enhancing the connection between community and place.
In the 1940s, as the highway became more traveled, businesses were forced to compete for the tourist dollar. Fake gimmicks were employed to create attractions to stop motorists. These often took the form of copies of local vernacular architecture, such as concrete tips with front doors and picket fences, a clearly ambiguous expression. In Albuquerque, New Mexico, the Cliff Dwellings Trading Post was named to suggest the “cliff dwellings” that served as its backdrop. These structures were in reality a movie set built for a film: the deception was ambiguous. As cars traveled faster, signs and billboards hawked staged events in a successful attempt to solicit tourist business.

The new technology of the late 40s, particularly the air conditioner, further deteriorated the Main Street quality of Route 66. Instead of sharing experiences, people now slept in segregated, artificially-cooled rooms. The new public spaces were swimming pools, more impersonal as they reflected less local character. By 1947, the highway itself was beginning to crumble under the strain of heavy traffic, and repair was economically infeasible. A system of high-speed Interstate Freeways was built to replace the old four-lane highways. Roadside development along these freeways has been generic in character.

Route 66 became a myth expressing travel through America’s open spaces with its quirky businesses, local vernacular architecture and self-consciously marketed personality. Its myth, so powerfully appropriated by the American public, persists to this day. Fragments of original development along the old highway are now preserved as “authentic” Route 66 architecture, marking the transition in meaning form the original unselfconscious built forms, frequently copies of copies, to user-attributed authenticity which is the result of process and relationship. These fragments have been infused with sufficient meaning, through collective memory and agreement, as to evoke the whole, regardless of adjacent development. Resultant images, such as the swimming pool and neon sign, have become codes signifying the roadside travel experience. The meanings have been so powerfully attributed that they have become a part of American mythology.

IV. CONCLUSION

As we move with greater ease and speed from place to place, Avery’s image of the highway as the “Main Street of America” remains relevant: highways link us together as a nation and in practice our collective Main Street. What might constitute an “authentic” expression in built form in our postmodern environment? Design of places that encourage user interaction and meaning attribution, whether from the car or on foot, is critical. Exploration of local myths, expressions of community history, sensitive responses to site conditions, interpretations of vernacular form and innovative use of local materials are some possible tactics. Route 66 architecture, through direct and often whimsical communication between roadside built form and travelers, fulfilled these criteria.

REFERENCES