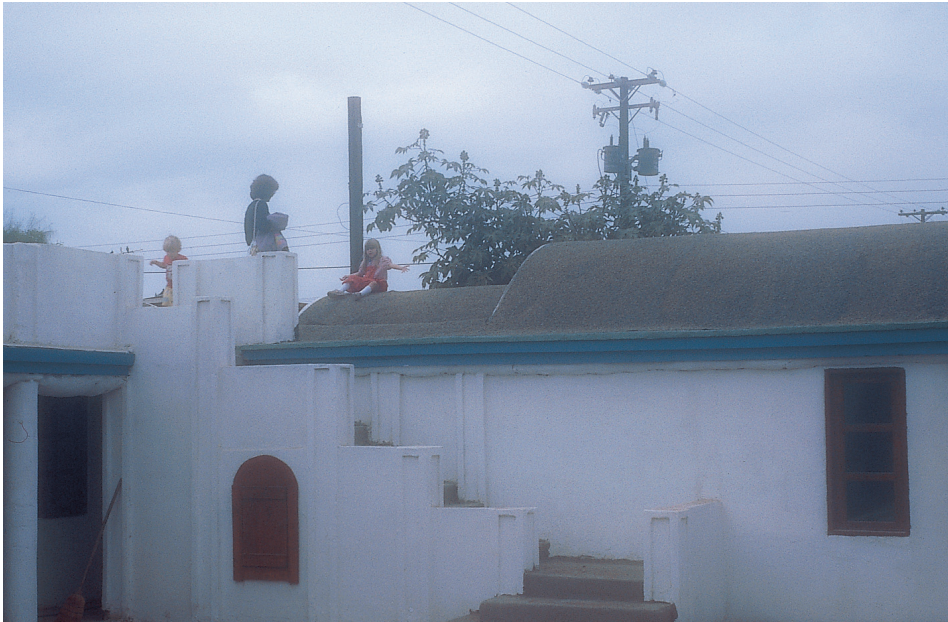




1 / THE STUFF OF LIFE



*Mexicali housing community. Almost from the day it was built in 1976, the place was natural and relaxed, entirely unlike “commercial development.” Here it is seen as photographed in 1989. Christopher Alexander.*

What you see in the photographs on this page and the next is an essential of a living world. It is unpretentious, ordinary. But it cannot be mistaken for the dead products of “development.” It has real life, unassuming, but smooth, rough and ready, relaxed. It belongs to the world. It will support emotions and the real stuff of our lives as we live them and feel them.

In chapter 9 I described a dynamic way of thinking about the development of an existing neighborhood. The dynamic process, the system of transformations, takes existing streets, lots, paths, and parks and gardens towards a new and improved, more living state.

Now we need to go further. The same kind of dynamic thinking also applies — must also be applied — to cases where new neighborhoods are being built from scratch, and to more general cases of repair, where a neighborhood is improved daily, weekly, as part of its ongoing process of growth. Indeed, dynamic use of living process by repeated application of simple trans-

formations applies, in principle, to all cases where something is being done from a new beginning. It is the only way to make a complex structure come to life in such a case, to do it gradually, over time. I include in these next examples cases where neighborhoods have been laid out from scratch in Venezuela and Colombia and Israel, and the new dynamic models which are capable of guiding such cases. The pictures of a Colombian neighborhood show examples of things happening gradually, over time, and show how the broad plan of such neighborhoods evolves slowly to create real life.

There are examples, too, which show how these ideas can have impact on the form and structure of the streets, flowers, trees, building fronts — everything, in short, which you might do to have an impact on the living character of space in the immediate world where you live. In one case — as a microcosm of such a process — I show how a group of people built a single bench overlooking San Francisco Bay (pages 352-56).



## 2 / THE ESSENTIAL REASON FOR DYNAMIC THINKING



*Mexicali housing in 1996, twenty years after construction. The place belongs to the people who live there and has become a fully natural structure.*

In most typical 20th-century developments, the developer laid out a plan, and then, over the next few years, the houses, shops, and offices were built according to this plan, filling it in. Not surprisingly, these “filled-in” developments were often rather dead when built. The reason is that the form, the plan of the community, did not emerge naturally from actual events in the ongoing life of the community and was therefore not harmonious with ordinary life as it would have happened if things were natural.

Think about the time-dependent process by which an unplanned human settlement grows naturally. Someone starts with the idea of building or living on a certain site. A few people build their houses there. In the natural order of things, perhaps an office or workshop is built there. Then a small café is built. That happens in response to people’s needs and the press of their ac-

tivities. As a result of the café and the office, and their interaction with the terrain, people start driving to that place in a certain way, parking their cars in a certain way.

Those parking places and that dirt road set up in relation to the terrain, take on a certain natural form. Then, if another person wants to build a workshop there, or an office, it goes in a certain place which is related to the existing directly aligned dirt road, to its parking, to the office, to the café and its view.

The position for the second workshop is a natural outcome of the answer “Where would I like to locate in relation to all these other things that are there already?” It is, almost certainly, a very different spot from the spot that would have been marked on an original master plan, if one existed. That is because on the master plan, someone was trying to arrange everything at the same