Cherry Trees: A street in the Slovak village of Prievoz; winter and summer.

Windows: Open to the garden on a warm summer day in Saintes, France.

One very simple adjustment is as direct and uncomplicated as opening or closing a window. Windows, it is said, offer a glimpse into the soul of a house. Surely they provide important clues to the life of those who spend time in the place. The continual adjustment of sashes, curtains, and shades provides a way to darken or lighten a room, to let in or shut out breezes, and to offer a view of outside life as well: to the street, to the garden, to a neighbor's house, or to a distant hill.

Adjustable awnings and sunshades can totally change the look of a house. Traditionally such adjustments have been made by hand, possibly involving the active participation of a family. More recently changes can be made automatically, driven by an outside source of energy. However the change is made, the boundaries of space are rhythmically altered, seen from both inside and outside the house. And if many houses are involved, a whole landscape may come alive.

Metabolism

The term "metabolism" as used here means all processes by which fuel is burned whether inside our body or in a remote power plant. The most traditional and romantic of all metabolic adaptations is the fireplace. From outside the house, a chimney is symbolic of

Automatically Adjustable Sunshades: The "M-House," Gorman, California. Designed by Michael Jantzen. (Photo supplied by Michael Jantzen.)

"home," usually treated architecturally with some care. Inside, the hearth is a time-honored center of family life. With the exception of the kitchen hearth, where cooking traditionally went on all the time, the space of the hearth changes seasonally, holding the family for winter warmth and storytelling, then releasing its hold in summer.

Only in its latest mechanical forms have we become particularly dependent on metabolism, nearly to the exclusion of other adaptive modes. We can now condition interior spaces uniformly regardless of place or climate. Despite individual preferences, identical conditions persist.

Chimney: A symbol of hearth and home in Williamsburg, Virginia.

Unlike the traditional fireplace, our modern sources of comfort can be invisible. The manufacture of energy is often remote—a power plant hundreds of miles away.[2] Once it has arrived, energy is transferred through hidden wires, pipes, or ducts to different parts of a building. Heating and cooling may go on simultaneously in different parts of a building to ensure a neutral environment. Regardless of inclination, choices about comfort may be designed out of existence.