



BARGE, "FALLEN LEAF"

Figure 6.41 House by Frank Lloyd Wright, elevation. © ARS, NY and DACS, London 1997

metaphor for the city is probably the analogy most in tune with the ethos of sustainable development.

The organic model of society may, in part, have its origins in religious communities such as the Moravians in Britain and Ireland or the Shakers in America. The search for a visual identity for a green approach to urban design may learn from the experience of settlements which were: '... designed and

Figure 6.42 Gracehill, Antrim, N. Ireland



planned but were constructed to respect rather than over-ride the environment... life in the community was uncomplicated and centred on the church. It was recognized that the community had to be fed and money had to be earned, but if the environment was to supply a living for the believers, then the environment had to be respected. The Shakers believed that their settlements should reclaim poor land and improve it as part of their realization of the construction of heaven in earth' (Vale and Vale, 1991). Gracehill, Antrim, Northern Ireland, like other Moravian settlements, centres on the chapel, burial ground, school and village green. Around the green cluster the family homes arranged along neat streets organized in a grid pattern. The architecture of Gracehill follows closely the local vernacular style. The buildings are simple, single- and two-storey structures built from local materials. It is the idea of the community and the unified architecture giving form to that idea which is a powerful model for sustainable urban form (Figures 6.42–6.44).

The main principle of organic planning is the structuring of the city into communities each of which is a self-contained unit for many of the immediate necessities of life. Cooperation rather than competition is emphasized in the organic model for the city. Members of each community are interdependent within a unit of collaboration and mutual support. The healthy community is a mix of diverse individuals and groups tending towards some optimum or balance necessary for the smooth working of the community. Each member or group within the community has a particular role or function in society. In this idealized world of the organic city the community is organized in a hierarchy of units



6.43



6.44

within which are sub-units which in turn are composed of smaller distinctive sub-sub-units.

The early new towns in Britain after the Second World War followed this organic settlement model with parts structured like living cells. New towns such as Harlow by Gibberd are structured on a strict hierarchical basis. The city comprises four main districts each with its own district centre. Districts are sub-divided into neighbourhoods, each with a neighbourhood centre. The neighbourhoods further divide into distinct housing areas which in turn sub-divide into housing clusters composed of the basic unit – the home of the nuclear family (Figures 6.45–6.47). McKei (1974) devised an interesting organic model for restructuring streets and neighbourhoods in inner city areas. McKei called his process Cellular Renewal, confirming a strong association with the organic model of city planning. His suggestion was to replace comprehensive redevelopment with a more sympathetic small-scale process of rehabilitation and

regeneration. There was evidence at the time McKei was working to show that comprehensive redevelopment destroyed many vital communities in the process of renewing the physical infrastructure. Cellular Renewal depends on a survey of individual properties to determine the precise state of the physical structure and the nature of the social unit occupying that structure. Each unit or home was described as a cell. A soft cell, one ripe for immediate action, was one which was in poor condition and where the family was in great need of rehousing. A hard cell, one which could take low priority for redevelopment or rehabilitation, was seen as a property in reasonable condition and perhaps occupied by an elderly person who was unwilling to move. Such a property could be left until the occupant died or moved to sheltered accommodation. This organic concept of the neighbourhood proposed a slow renewal or rehabilitation of the properties in piecemeal fashion which did not disturb the community and which was in tune with the growth and decay of the families.

Figure 6.43 Gracehill, Antrim, N. Ireland

Figure 6.44 Gracehill, Antrim, N. Ireland