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Caring About Places: Time

A fence along a yard, a row of trees along a meadow, the raised platform of a curb, a stage or the pedestal of a sculpture are significant visible indications of boundary and intent. A piece of land, a public square, a porch, may initially be noted by us or defined for us by such physical boundaries. But to become places they must have more than shape.

Traces of magical or compelling places, however briefly encountered, have marked our memories and set our expectations for relationships that we try to find or to construct in our lives.

Sir John Summerson, in *Heavenly Mansions* described the worlds we, as children, might have staked out under tables or pianos, using fabric walls. Being nearer child size, these shelters separated us from adults and comforted us as we explored imaginary terrain. But these spaces were often shared, claimed equally by our parents' feet. Such places were subject to constant reclamation—not only by the fabric walls, but also by our memories of former encampments and our expectations of future ones.

If we remain diligent, as adults, we may wish for opportunities to create

such spaces. Yet if our constitutions are not radical enough or stalwart enough daily to dismantle the walls constructed about us, or to refigure the public spaces next to them, we may long for other methods to establish temporary dwellings, or to understand and analyze the places around us. Time becomes one of the boundaries we wish to see. To understand the claims and uses existing now, we seek to set them across time in memory and imagination. Time takes place.

In the places that we call historic, such as Rome, where we are stimulated by all the visible fragments of its stages, it is easy to imagine various different times. One fragment of a capital can stimulate a reconstruction of temples and baths juxtaposed alongside the masses of cars, buses and markets that make up current public place existence.

In other places, other times may not have these visible fragments. Nevertheless, we must be capable of imagining what might have happened that we don't see, events which have enriched the fabrication and the memory of place.

A theatrical stage gives us a temporary setting for actions with

significances that reach beyond the moment. Public and private places can carry many meanings stemming from similar temporary uses. Events that enter the public memory are as important to place making as are heroic physical fragments.

Time, moments of order, the fall of words walling our passage, might last ten minutes or prompt a lifetime of spatial wondering. Our memory responds to shape, overlaying a room or garden or a square with another experience, adding memory of a place existing only in time to that of our own backyard. Places can exist simultaneously in both physical and mental ways, ensuring that the visual order we see is considerably enlivened and expanded by the places still in our heads. Places take time.

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