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Places

Title

On Places [Criticism of Place: A Symposium]

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5gw7w275>

Journal

Places, 4(1)

ISSN

0731-0455

Author

Lyndon, Donlyn

Publication Date

1987-04-01

Peer reviewed

Donlyn Lyndon

Criticism can be seen branching into several divergent paths with differing intentions and differing comparative methods. Broadly speaking, criticism may be directed toward evaluating and making us understand better a specific work, or it may be directed toward making clear the conditions under which that work was produced—presumably with an eye to reformulating those conditions. Critics may intend to change the conditions of production through alterations in the discipline if they are internal to the field or through setting the stage for political action if they are external. The agenda for change may lie in the forefront of their considerations or it may emerge from close attention to the particularities and circumstances of the work. Even given this array of choices, there remain two phases to the question of how places might be subject to critical thought: How might the actuality of specific places remain focused in our attention, and what should be the limits of the domain to which we pay attention? More abruptly stated, how can we stay close to the object, and which object(s)?

These issues remain urgent and problematic because they are questions of focus. How do we use our analytic abilities to attend to the way in which places have real consequence in people's lives? It is, of course, precisely the purpose of critical thought to take us beyond the object itself. The purpose of criticism is to reveal things in a new way. But which new ways? There are evidently in any work a great many choices to be made, each of

which could be subject to consideration, each of which could give rise to alternatives, each of which could with some ingenuity be a subject for speculation. The critic's task is to select those aspects of whatever is under consideration that are most fruitful to examine. In criticism it is convenient to look for networks of decisions, to find patterns of similarity in the characteristics of the work that may lead from one aspect to the next so that whatever is taken for specific examination can be understood to have repercussions in the consideration of the whole; the good critic is an experienced sampler. Criticism thrives on precedent, on types and established patterns that allow one to say "Oh, it's one of those" and to proceed to a comparison of the fine points of similarity or dissimilarity that ensue. Places sometimes come in types too, as any geographer can tell you or as is evidenced in the commonality of "courthouse town" or "Main Street" or "waterfront" or even "street corner." But what matters to its inhabitants are its particulars, the things that make it their own, not someone else's. The criticism of places must then go beyond type and address the diversity, intentions, and responses.

What do we mean by places? We mean both something obvious and something more esoteric. Places are where we put things, where we go, where events become actual—where they take place.

Places are space that can be imagined, that can be known. They are

the opposite of the limitless void into which we were once meant to imagine our buildings. Public places are loaded with social significance because they are lodged in the imaginations of many people and structure their interaction. Places result from the intersection of the enduring facts of the world: sun, wind, earth, water, vegetation, and our propensity to define and construct in order to control the impact of the surroundings on our lives. Places are space to which people can give the dimensions of their imaginations and which they can hold in their minds. They are, at base, segments of memory, albeit extended ones.

While it is essential to the notion of place that it have imaginable limits, they are often distinct and overlapping, defined more by location in an overall ordering scheme or by proximity to a recognizable feature than by edges. Public places are usually more like targets than rooms; hence the special potency of those few urban places that are roomlike: the great squares and piazzas of Europe, or Central Park if you will. Here, though, we are talking specifically about the complex, overlapping places of the American city—places that result from several works juxtaposed—from the initiatives of many, perhaps extended over periods of time, and with widely varying means and intentions.

The problem posed is how to make criticism come to grips with the reality of the places where we actually live, how to assess the actions

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of each of a variety of players in the development process, how to make judgments about the suitability of the collective result of multiple initiatives, and how to project alternatives that may have consequences in the further evolution of our neighborhoods and cities. What may critical thought do to enable us to make better the places we live in and guide their evolution and change and direct their stewardship? And/or how may criticism make us see and draw nourishment from more aspects of the places in question than we routinely do?

When considering criticism of place, it is not the works produced but the way in which they become a part of the larger structure and the way they enter into the lives of the people who encounter them that are the subject of concern. The internal character, integrity, and ingenuity of any given work will certainly become a part of that concern, but only insofar as those qualities are seen as important constituents of the experiences afforded by the place or are more broadly instructive regarding the assumptions and conditions that govern our thinking about places and the works that make them.

We have been invited to consider forms of criticism that examine places, “places that result from several works juxtaposed,” as opposed to criticism that locates a “single work of architecture in a chain of works.” Lurking behind this distinction—between criticism of a single work and criticism of place—is, I believe, the implication that single works are products of intentional design actions, which can be coherently related to precedent works, while places are unique and fortuitous. Such a distinction exaggerates the difference between the single work and “several works juxtaposed.” To anticipate my argument, I am going to claim that the distinction between single works and places is only a matter of degree. One reason for this continuity from single work to place is that places are also often the result of considered design actions. However, the point I wish to emphasize is the complementary one: single works also participate in the not fully determined nature of places. I want to claim, in a way that I hope to make clear, that the whole of the physical environment is characterized by quasi-autonomy, a degree of independence from precedent, from intentions, from specific patterns of use and meaning; an availability for re-use and reinterpretation. Such quasi-autonomy requires a theoretical and critical component in any study of environment. Furthermore, since aspects of this quasi-autonomy may be revealed anachronistically, the physical environment must be studied not only in its origins but also in its duration.

Critical Study of Urban Places

When, in the past, I attempted criticism of places, my interest was directed to small sectors of cities, areas small enough and yet large enough that one could be concerned with both architecture and urban structure. I found myself engaged in certain kinds of analysis and in the issue I introduced as “the quasi-autonomy of the physical environment.” The following examples clarify the issue.

Savannah, Georgia

In the 250 years since its foundation, the plan and the physical fabric of Savannah have been resilient in the face of new demands; yet much that is environmentally sound has been preserved through boom and bust. I conjecture that both the adaptability and the tenacity of this urban fabric have been aided by the unusual city plan of Savannah. Consider some of the characteristics of the plan:

The modular plan is additive, without a defined boundary. The plan is multifocal, devoid of a predetermined centrality. The additive module is internally structured by an extensive differentiation of streets. The module is also structured by a differentiation of parcels and blocks. The additive repetition of the module further increases the range of parcel, block, and street differentiation.

A consequence of these features is that the plan can be “read” in many ways, such as a system of squares