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Places

Title

Caring About Places

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9v609155>

Journal

Places, 12(3)

ISSN

0731-0455

Author

Lyndon, Donlyn

Publication Date

1999-04-01

Peer reviewed

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Places:
invite attention,
direct attention,
reward attention,
require attention.

At their best, they
sustain attention.

Places, that is to say, are constructed on the ground and in our minds through the act of paying attention. They result from the investment of human energy, from thought-filled acts of construction and perception.

The places that we make must receive ample attention, from the moment they are started to the moments when they are inhabited and remembered. Places are repositories of thought: careful, imaginative thought that draws significance from evolving patterns; bold, penetrating thought that fosters the discovery of new relationships and possibilities; memory-laced associations that are meticulously traced through form; even imaginative leaps that thrust their singularity into an evolving fabric of conditions.

There are, certainly, ceaseless changes in how we consider things, in how we take account of our surroundings. Those changes come from continuous invention in the ways that we make things, the pressures of the economy, the patterns of thought in which we are immersed and the demands that are made on our attention.

There are also things that don't appreciably change: the dimensions of people and the sweep of their bodily movements, the nature of the climate and the movements of the sun, the basic geographic condition of the places in which we build. When attended to, these elements can instill continuity — an aspect of community — in the ways in which we build places. So, too, can the nature of the structures that are already built in a place.

Tom Chastain, guest editor of this issue, and his selected authors show how careful attention to reading the life and forms of a locale can vest a sense of commonality and fit in the practices of a place — in the ways we build, use and care for our private and common surroundings.

The articles range from astute, introspective essays regarding the ways in which we think about design, and go about forming places, to descriptions of the specific ways in which the particulars of a place have provided the springboard for suitable invention. They explore how critically considered cultural and physical conditions have informed practice.

Recently, it has become fashionable, among some, to suppose that the fabric of our mental connections is now so thoroughly embedded in cyber-messages that the heavily invested construction of physical artifacts cannot keep pace, cannot tell it like it is. We think not; the piecing together of our world takes place all the time, on and off line. Architecture, the thoughtful making of places, remains the most direct, ubiquitous and readily accessible way of making bonds with the world and of sharing thoughts and ambitions about how we may live. Places that are invested with the attentiveness urged in the following articles can help us through the day — day after day, year after year — and often they are passed, intact or remembered, through generations. Places deserve our attention.

— *Donlyn Lyndon*