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Caring About Places: Landscapes

Our surroundings nurture our imaginations. The forms they present to us, the processes they harbor, the scale and abundance of their extent, give reach to our understandings. The landscape, considered as an object of contemplation, is a splendid contrivance that has been made available to us through the cumulative efforts and passions of artists in many cultures. It is rich with suggestive possibilities because we have learned to read significance in its forms.

Landscapes, depicted, constructed, or found, embody the world we have come to know: a crisp world of measured terraces that sets the impatient hand of man against the unimaginable slowness of ecological formation; a realm of chasms, mysteries, and opening vistas that serves to evoke at once a world beyond control and the poignance of being a part of it; or a landscape of traces—tree silhouettes, whose adjustments and particularities symbolize the mutuality of genetic impulse and environmental modification; water courses that take their form from the registers of geological time yet host lives that pass nearly as quickly as the water that flowed past Heraclitus' foot; interweaving foliage that calls forth a vision of interdependence that may help to explain the promise of responsive environmental design.

Landscapes, bounded and observed, viewed from a specific vantage

point or called to mind by words, can—when imbued with the proper imagination—typify personality or even symbolize political aspiration.

Yet the landscape works on us in subtler ways as well. It enters without artifice or intent into the lives of townspeople, who develop a socialized landscape—townscapes—that becomes a part of the fabric of understandings that makes up a community, that becomes, quite literally, commonplace. The commonplace and the radically imagined are each powerful tools for introducing mental structure into our experience; as such they are used for diverse purposes by the various components of society. Commonplace and radical are not clearly aligned with left or right, good or bad; they are, rather, characteristics of our surroundings that bring things to mind, holding steady some aspects of the world, offering hopes for change in conditions that seem oppressive, being subject, like all ideas, to manipulation as well as to criticism and refinement. The artificers of landscape have long known how to use its suggestive powers to serve their ends; citizens now are learning that they too can exercise some control on the world as it seems, that they can conserve, regain, and contrive landscapes that suit their imaginations.

But the landscape or the townscape, or any other recipient of imaginative

investment, can yield its insights only if we attend to it, only if we bring to it a wish to know, a willingness to feel, and an enthusiasm for the actual. We must care to make our surroundings well, and we must care to know them well.



Donlyn Lyndon

Errata

We regret that in Volume 2 Issue 2, two illustrations were printed upside down: Georgia O'Keeffe's "New York with Moon" (Figure 2 in "Georgia O'Keeffe's *Radiator Building: Icon of Glamorous Gotham*" by Elizabeth Duvert) and Barbara Stauffacher Solomon's wonderful color drawing, "Tree Columns for First Figure" (Figure 4 in Michael Palmer's, "Figures in Space"). We apologize especially to Georgia O'Keeffe and Barbara Stauffacher Solomon for our oversight. Their illustrations were among the chief delights of the issue.