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Representations and Realities

Photographs, drawings, writing and other representations can modify what we see and how we understand it. This is especially apparent with respect to places at the architectural and urban scale. Most are themselves not easy to grasp, to categorize, or to visualize. They comprise many, often contrasting, artifacts and spaces, and they are constantly being changed over time. Each person brings his or her own memory, fantasy, and prior experience which influence how and what they see. And because many people satisfy and have satisfied a wide variety of purposes over time, places can validly be seen through thousands of eyes, probably through no pair in the same way. Lawrence Durrell's magical essay about Montevideo, for example, transports us into a world of materials, light, and sensuous experience. With a Piranesi drawing in hand, one can catch a glimpse of the Boston City Hall as a fantasy of municipal power and intrigue. And because of Cézanne's paintings of Mt. Sainte-Victoire, in its presence one can experience the drama that shaped modern conceptions of space and form.

Just as representations mediate perceptions and understandings of reality so they also mediate designs and their imagined reality. It is through representations, and only through them, that the design and its imagined reality can be considered. Therefore the comparison between the experience of a representation and the experience of a real place is a luxury that design does not permit.

Representations are all that can be experienced of the future! They are its only reality.

In this issue we present articles that address these and related questions. Stilgoe describes the richness of hidden human definitions of landscapes but shows how such definitions are distorted by the "prism" of prior experience or by the "pipe dreams" of our and others' own imaginings. Plummer's photos and rich verbal descriptions build on what specifically is there, whereas Myer, through juxtaposition of images, selectively directs our attention and our thought to what may not be, at least at the outset. Darden, through his poetry and extraordinary drawings, helps us to enter worlds we shall never experience directly, but that will influence how we experience the ordinary world.

Chastain and Chow open our eyes through drawings that opened their eyes to an unfamiliar way of life. Domeyko, by focusing on certain issues and principles that he finds in Córdoba, heightens our understanding of how drawings of existing places can form a bridge to design. Habraken describes principles of design extracted from such observations in order to guarantee that the design controls reflect the richness and pluralism of real places through time. Bosselmann describes a physical modeling technique with extraordinary capacity to engage the public in discussion of future possible realities.

Just as representations modify, influence and even change the experience of places real and imagined, so also places mediate the experience of life.



William L. Porter