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Giving Purpose to Change

Places change. How they change depends a lot on us. What we think can be done in a place or with a place determines our response to it. The cumulative effects of a community's expectations, expressed in legislation or in the market, sets the destiny of most places. Whether preserved, wasted, quarried, or transfigured, places are products of our imagination and enterprise coupled with the physical conditions of a site.

What value should we give to what's already there—to the earth, vegetation, the heritage of things previously built? What should we care about the processes these all embody and the acts of nurture and attention they require? These are questions involving ethics and identity.

How should we judge what places might be? What do we (or our descendants) forego when we are complacent? How might the city that now is be transformed with purpose into a city that might be? These questions also involve ethics and identity.


Complacency is not nurture. We must recognize that places are always in evolution, discern the energies at hand and give them our best—bit by bit, sometimes by fashioning a door handle or saving a tree, sometimes by shedding the limits of conventional thought and facing fresh possibilities.

To give purpose to change it is necessary to quarry the imagination and to leverage chunks of possibility out of the layers of inchoate thought that course through society. To do this often shatters the common ground of our assumptions. But shock waves do not make places, they only create conditions for change. Places that are rewarding emerge slowly, through the persistent sculpting of possibility, attending to the grain of the surroundings, listening to the pulse of aspiration and deftly, patiently adding to the common understanding of what a place can become and what it can mean in our lives.

In this issue we encounter unsettling images of waste, confusion and transformation: the accompaniments of change. We also explore two recent competi-

tions that engaged professionals in imagining what their cities might become, illustrating prospects for change. Our authors query the directions that professional thought generally has taken and offer suggestions for refocusing our efforts.

We initiate with this issue three features that will appear regularly in our pages: "Speaking of Places," short essays that give a personal reading of specific places and their character; "Dispatches," brief accounts that highlight current issues in place-making, and "Standards," a critical review of prevailing standards and assumptions that regulate common elements of our cities. Together they will provide a continuing commentary on the ways in which thought comes alive in particular places.



Cover: The Gioia quarry.
Photo by Joel Leivick.