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Caring for Places: Ideas that Germinate

Ideas infiltrate the mind in curious ways—sometimes by sheer strength of assertion, sometimes by reasoned argument and deliberate study. Many ideas enter our thoughts surreptitiously, carried there by the casual interpretation of repetitive experience; they filter into our minds unbidden, settling there without challenge and forming the undercurrents of our thought. These ideas are often the ones that are most difficult to separate from reflexive actions, and to consider critically.

There is a temptation to assume that cities just happen, that they are the mindless products of inexorable economic forces. But the city, too, is infused with mind. It results from an infinitude of thoughts—ambitions, fears, presumptions of public good, intimations of private gain, prejudices and perspectives—all embedded in the actions we take day by day, and often wrapped in the rhetoric of persuasion. The city takes its form from the intersection of these ideas and images, from the differences in their persuasive power, and the ubiquity of their spread—as well as the patterns of ownership, regulation and power maintained by those who bear them in mind or act within their thrall.

Various propositions about forming environments are brought together in this issue, opening insights into how images and ideas germinate urban form. Multiple views must come into play as our cities evolve: ideas that reach to the landscape, ideas that care for the lives of people in place. We must understand how to husband resources and to weave the threads of enterprise into urban and rural fabrics that enable rather than ensnare those who live there. These ideas must be shared, challenged and elaborated in form. There must be ideas that shatter deceit, as well as ideas that rally support; ideas that show negotiable paths through the accretions of the past, as well as ideas that offer vision of what might become. We must be ready to change our presuppositions, as well as find ways to act with clarity—as designers, citizens and stewards of our cities and their place in the landscape.

In the forum of these pages we present not an encompassing theory, but essays that probe differing dimensions of how we attend to the forming of place. The articles emerge from a variety of vantage points positioned in theory, practice, use and observation. They represent the jostling of ideas that form and reform our cities. We must engage both overtly held and subtly infiltrated ideas and images and seek out their influence within our own works. Most important, we must put ideas to the test by imagining their impact on the lives of those who will live in the places to which we give form, and by projecting their consequences in the local, regional and global environments.

Throughout this process, each vision of possibility should be set within an understanding of its particular place, and measured in terms that enlarge our understanding of the freedoms and responsibilities involved. The process should engender ideas that help individuals and communities become responsible stewards of the future.

— *Donlyn Lyndon*