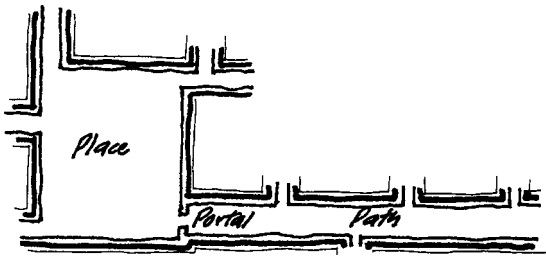


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Path–portal–place

E. White
[1999]

These are the three kinds of public space considered in this discussion. They are our primary objects of attention together with the ways we can know and appreciate a place. Paths, portals, and places make up the majority of meaningful exterior space in urban environments. The places are the plazas, courts, gardens, and parks. Portals are the gateways into the places. And paths are the boulevards, avenues, streets, walks, and alleys that connect the places and knit the city together.

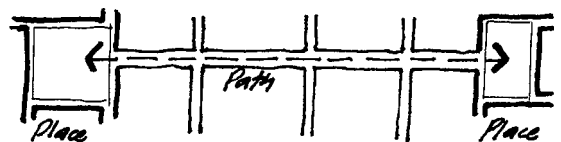


Good paths and portals are also kinds of places. Distinctions will be made here for the sake of discussion by defining paths as primarily dedicated to movement and having linear configurations. Portals are the points where paths meet places. And places are the urban rooms of the city where pedestrian life is invited, accommodated, and experienced. Places tend to be stable shapes such as squares, rectangles, circles, and ovals.

Path

Paths in urban settings are devoted to circulation. They are about moving from place to place. Pathways

involve experiences of approach, anticipation, invitation, and arrival. Movement to and from urban places is a ritual of procession, a participation in the belonging of city life, and a threshold of transformation where paths open into places. To walk a good path to a successful urban place is to savor the expectation of reaching the destination, of our first glimpse of the place as we approach, of the quickening as the gravitational pull of the place becomes stronger, of crossing the portal where not-place becomes place, and of moving into the space where we are transformed into citizens. The invitational power of good plazas, squares, courts, and gardens flows out down the paths that lead to them. In most urban environments, pedestrian pathways correspond with vehicular ones. The extent to which a path is devoted to foot versus wheel traffic is read by the proportion of ground plane devoted to sidewalk and street and by restrictions on vehicular use. Some paths with stingy walks are clearly vehicular domains. Other paths are mainly walkway, all pedestrian with little or no vehicular activity. The character of a pedestrian-vehicular path is strongly affected by the volume, speed, and type of vehicular traffic. An urban artery may be a primary vehicular movement channel carrying any and all kinds of wheeled conveyances. An alley way may be an intimate path wide enough for only single file pedestrian traffic. Between these extremes we have wide boulevards



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