

anticipate experiencing there. Reputation fosters a predisposition toward appreciating ambience in particular ways. A tendency to alertness for certain place elements and qualities. A plaza might have a reputation of being dangerous at night, a hive of pick pockets, an assembly of great restaurants, being sadly deteriorated, or lovingly maintained. We tend to see what we expect to see. Symbolism and meaning are ambience components. What does the place stand for? Refer to? Bring to mind? Symbolism can be multiple and layered or singular and focused. A plaza can be about a benevolent ruler who built the space. Or it might be the logo of an age, legacy to a designer, emblem of a political ideology, and exemplar of an historic style. Whatever the place represents becomes party to ambience, just as real in fashioning feeling tone as the physical fabric.

A plaza name can be telling, definitive, evocative with regard to atmosphere and mood. Place name predisposes us to see the place in a particular way, especially if we know the story behind the name. Names of people, buildings, events, functions, ideas are frequently employed to identify urban space. What a place is called can establish a boundary within which meaning and mood are experienced. Town hero, cathedral, military victory, banking center, celebration of freedom. Each of these themes pervasively flavors all that is in and at a place.

We conclude our discussion of place with attention to hybrid place, scale of attention, and the good place.

The good place

What is a good place? What makes it good or not so good? Earlier we applied success criteria to path and portal. Now we apply definition, identity, character, beauty, habitability, significance, connectedness, and sensuality to place.

A successful place is well defined, providing a sense of arrival, of culminating experience. Its space is clearly distinct from the path spaces leading to it. We know we've arrived at a there-space. The shape and dimensions paradoxically provide enclosure, embrace, containment and release, freedom and openness. Boundary conditions are clear, well-formed, legible, making a defined urban room.

Good place has distinguishing qualities that establish a unique identity. Something that makes the site special. One of a kind. The way we differentiate a place from other places can be by its architectural elements and landscape, by activities and dominant uses, by atmosphere and mood. What is

it about the space that is noticeable, remarkable, memorable? A single compelling facade? An encircling arcade? Doorways and windows? The area might be filled with roving musicians, noisy tourists, or neighborhood children playing soccer. A space's signature can be its intense festivity, chaotic swirl, somber reverence.

Successful places have strength of character. Unmistakable personality profiles. A space may be proud or humble, flamboyant or reserved, pretentious or sincere. Place theme is clear, reinforced by architecture and surfaces, actions and events, atmosphere and mood. We inhabit the space on its terms, immersed in its energy and demeanor. The site's chemistry impresses us. It is alive, orderly, regal. Or gentle, delicate, elegant. The place has body language, complexion, facial expression, hand gesture, vocal inflection. It has attitude, posture, and clothes to match.

Great urban rooms are beautiful. They offer us the gift of their own unique elegance. A plaza can be pretty, handsome, a rich jumble of complexity, or a graceful, reassuring orderliness. An environment of agreeable tensions or serene refuge. Beautiful places are special, extraordinary. Their aesthetic quality startles us and floods over the edges of expectations. Beauty invites us to expand our being, who we are, in order to fully take it in. To stretch our senses to appreciate its intensity. An aesthetic experience satisfies, it fits and fills a void in our soul. It pleases, renews, enlivens, elevates, affirms.

A good public space is habitable. It generously accommodates life, supports its housed activities. It empowers, enables, encourages people to come and participate. Everything about the locale invites, welcomes, promotes a climate of safety, convenience, choice. Place location, scale and configuration, composition and surfaces, furniture and accessories, ornamentation and landscaping all symbiotically combine as supportive setting for human intention and action. Habitability success is measured by sustained human presence, by aliveness and vitality day and night, year round.

Great places have historical weight, gravity of significance. They played meaningful roles in the town's evolution. These sites are rich with myths, spirits, echoes of times past. When we're in these spaces, we're in their history. Their stories are as palpable as the air, and like a breeze on our face, we feel the ancient energies that are still there. Pride, reverence, gratitude, sadness, admiration are emotions that historical place can engender in us today. We resonate with old vibrations that are still very alive in the present.