

although occasional realization of the latter can impart a brief thrill. In this sense, we should seek to preserve the near and middle past, the past with which we have real ties. The family photograph or the heap of flowers in Dallas is a strong thing.

A humane environment commemorates recent events quickly and allows people to mark out their own growth. It is more human not only for the inhabitant but for the observer as well. He will sense its warmth and find in it a symbolic way of meeting its inhabitants. But there must also be some means of removing these marks as they recede in time or lose connections with present persons. This is forgetting again. There is a pleasure in seeing receding, half-veiled space or in detecting the various layers of successive occupation as they fade into the past—and then in finding a few fragments whose origins are remote and inscrutable, whose meanings lurk beneath their shapes, like dim fish in deep water. We do not wish to preserve our childhood intact, with all its personalities, circumstances, and emotions. We want to simplify and to pattern it, to make vivid its important moments, to skip over its empty stretches, sense its mysterious beginnings, soften its painful feelings—that is, to change it into a dramatic recital.

Personal connection is most effectively made by personal imprints on the environment. New customs might connect environment symbolically to personal experience. The stages of physical growth can be imprinted on our surroundings by height marks, foot or hand prints. Portraits and photographs may be mounted to give a place a visible genealogy. We are accustomed to marking death with a stone; can we also so signify birth? We could plant a tree in a community grove, a tree that gradually merges into the forest. Memorials may refer to a family or an individual or an age group: a gang or a school grade. Stones and trees may be carried with us when we move, to make a personal link to a new landscape, just as we bring familiar furniture with us to personalize our new interiors. Old inhabitants should be encouraged to record their memories of a place. The recording could then be made available nearby, in a branch library or a street information center. As in some primitive societies, burial might at first be in some nearby and conspicuous location, later removed to a marked place in a community site and, much later, when living kin are gone, to a common unmarked grave. Our distant and crowded cemeteries are devices for sealing away the dead from the living under the fiction of eternal remembrance.

There can be temporary memorials for recent events, to be replaced later by permanent markings,

if the event remains memorable. Our cities are mute about the persons for whom we care but littered with statues to generals and statesmen now in limbo.

Though the landscape should have the imprint of human events and seem connected with living persons, the imprints and connections must eventually fade away and be forgotten, just as human memories and generations fade.

Thus I propose a plural attitude toward environmental remains, depending on the particular motive. Where it is scientific study, there would be dissection, recording, and scholarly storage; where it is education, I propose unabashed playacting and communication; where it is the enhancement of present value and a sense of the flow of time, I should encourage temporal collage, creative demolition and addition; where it is personal connection, I suggest making and retaining imprints as selective and impermanent as memory itself. To preserve effectively, we must know for what the past is being retained and for whom. The management of change and the active use of remains for present and future purpose are preferable to an inflexible reverence for a sacrosanct past. The past must be chosen and changed, made in the present. Choosing a past helps us to construct a future.

Notes

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This chapter was published in its original form as:

Lynch, K. (1972), "The Presence of the Past", *What Time is This Place?*, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass, 29–64.

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