The Poetics of City and Nature: Towards a New Aesthetic for Urban Design

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Abstract

This essay describes a new aesthetic of landscape and urban design, an aesthetic that encompasses both nature and culture, that embodies function, sensory perception, and symbolic meaning, and that embraces both the making of things and places and the sensing, using, and contemplating of them. This theory is based upon an understanding of nature and culture as comprising interwoven processes that exhibit a complex, underlying order that holds across vast scales of space and time. This basis in process yields a view of urban form as dynamic, as evolving over time, in predictable and unpredictable ways.

The idea of dialogue, with its embodiment of time, purpose, communication, and response, is central to this theory. The form of the city is seen as the result of complex, overlapping, and interweaving narratives that, together, comprise the context of place and the storylines that connect the place and all those who dwell within it. The issues of time and change, process and pattern, order and randomness, being and doing, and form and meaning are inherent to this theory. These issues are also central to recent theoretical currents in other fields, including art, music, and science. Although this aesthetic prompts a new appreciation for forms of the past, it also demands new forms, new modes of notation and representation, and new processes of design, construction, and cultivation.

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