

Paper

Craftsmanship and Ordinary Landscape: Crafting Normality, Cultivating Morality

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Ordinary, everyday landscapes are crucibles of cultural meaning and environmental experience, for they indicate our primary interest in the unconscious processes of daily life, as well as the continuous creation and alterations all around us. Craftsmanship is a shared spirit often found in “the beauty that we see in the vernacular landscape . . . [it] is the image of our common humanity: hard work, stubborn hope, and mutual forbearance striving to be loved.”¹ This paper presents the significance of the ordinary landscape in accounting for common humanity—our diminished value of craftsmanship in landscape architecture.

First, the ordinary landscape exhibits different cultural “tastes” as a clue to culture. All ordinary landscapes represent a corollary of tastes and cultural styles, not only famous historic buildings or gardens, but houses, roads, cities, and farms. Craftsmanship helps in understanding the roots of our collective taste and style in a particular region or tradition. Second, an ordinary landscape shows cultural unity and equality of place that have been frequently overlooked by academics or approached with aesthetic or moral prejudice. All ordinary landscapes reflect physical and material culture in unified ways as a corollary of historic changes and leaps, accessed and built by people and thus illuminating habits of the past, displaying collective passion as well as the mechanics of communication. “There is no such thing as a culturally uninteresting landscape.”² No matter how ordinary or common, craftsmanship can never be morally insignificant. Third, “ordinary landscape is also understood as the context of latent selfhood.”³ To defend its own brand of craftsmanship in the ordinary landscape, the self arises not from the mind of any one person but rather from a universal mind in the context of the self and responsibility.⁴

Characteristics of ordinary landscapes can guide understanding of craftsmanship as representative of our common humanity, as our relationship with a beloved landscape, and as our contribution to the crafting of good places.

Attachment

Honoring and preserving a place deeply involves the history of family and a legacy for future generations. The sense and character of a home harbor many affective associations that sustain and integrate people as a group. Home refers to house, land, village, city, district, country, or indeed, the world⁵ and is often identified with the self. Home gradually becomes a symbol of stability, and our attachment to the land affects our manners, codes of conduct, and morality.⁶

Accessibility

This characteristic is essential to survival in a spatial system. What brings and holds us together in our landscape and community is not the sharing of space but the sharing of the routines and the identity achieved by the short private road that everyone uses in daily life. “The archetypal road is one which not only serves the daily needs of the small community but helps preserve its ethical values” because it calls for a rite that “makes virtuous behavior possible and it preserves the territorial integrity of the village.”⁷

Spirituality

This aspect is concerned with political, social, and aesthetic and moral ideals of community, which “enables us to debate such matters as good and evil, justice and injustice, and how to act to achieve a good life”⁸ Ordinary landscapes tend to display a variety of spiritual transformations, such as “symbols, inscriptions, images, monuments, not as works of art but to remind people of their civic privileges and duties, and tactics to exclude the outsider”⁹

Familiarity

This quality makes us feel at home wherever it exists. The familiarity of any landscape is inseparable from the lived geography of the beholder’s childhood and from the social and psychological experience of home.¹⁰ It is the inhabited landscape, not deliberately created, but it “merely evolves in the course of our trying to live on harmonious terms with the natural world surrounding us”¹¹ and “tells us about a way of life that was simpler and more intimate.”¹² The family garden, for one example, is the focal point of family life: It is where many small lives—vegetable, animals, and humans—create an autonomous community with its own customs.¹³

Symbolism

Culture is a richly symbolic system of life and community, and so is landscape. Ordinary features that are visible, tangible, and therefore experiential can be powerful symbols, because their associations with ordinary life make richer and further narratives and descriptions possible. Such ordinary features as a garden, square, or park, along with the presence of trees can sustain and enhance the meaning of place because they can multiply the power of symbols.

The Presence of Other Life

Any landscape has social meanings: It should attract and support many lives. Just as the primary content of home is not the material landscape but people, place acquires its spirit primarily because of the presence of human and other beings. A sense of beauty in any ordinary environment comes from a sense of other lives, including insects, squirrels, birds, trees, cats and dogs, and many other familiar animals and their activities. It is a sense of membership that comes from engaging with many and diverse lives gathered and interconnected in a place.

Work-and-Live

All ordinary landscape is a part of a community or town in terms of work and life. It is about access to ways of a socially and existentially healthy life. In the traditional houses of agricultural villages, working and living are combined in their social role and achieve a healthy balance between public and private activities. Jackson¹⁴ emphasizes the social meaning of the work-live house by describing it as a metaphor of “the extension of the hand.” The author goes on to say, “It is the hand we raise to indicate our presence; it is the hand that protects and holds what is its own; the house or hand creates its own small world; it is the visible expression of our identity and our intentions. It is the hand which reaches out to establish and confirm relationships. Without it, we are never complete social beings.”

Localities

This characteristic is not something precisely definable in its own right, but only as distinguishable from the others or identifiable within its surroundings each time we are refreshed and elated by being there. “One way of defining such localities would be to say that they are cherished because they are embedded in the everyday world around us and easily accessible, but at the same time are distinct from that world”¹⁵ Like the quality of art, locality is a unified unique quality of a place, acquired only through the experience of a small and significant event, or by a visit, or by being there. Just as we recognize a historical object or locale and celebrate its setting, locality is the appreciation—recognition and celebration—of something that stems from the past, something that is up to us to protect, restore, recreate, and enhance.¹⁶

Sense of Time

The experience of landscape “presupposes a major reordering of time as well as space.”¹⁷ Every activity generates a spatiotemporal structure, which is apparent in body movement and in language. Moving toward a destination from an origin creates a path, and repetitive occurrences and rhythmic sequences exist in both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of such traditional elements as steps, streets, walls, trees, columns, and many other components. A sense of time is an important notion in the vernacular landscape with respect to our desire to recover the past, memory, life, and history—the evidence of past events. Locality is a characteristic of time and space; familiarity is a characteristic of the past.

Concluding remarks

We now live in a time of materialistic abundance and technological advancement that constantly propels the literal production and reproduction of new icons, images, codes, and styles. Material products may use some symbols for the purpose of self-referential expression and may not be representative—and are therefore meaningless. Reflection on materiality continually requires new interpretations of what constitutes the quality of ordinariness in our living landscape. Therefore, the ideas and practical implications of craftsmanship have never been of greater importance to create a resilient place for human normality and for commonsense morality resistant to the external force to change.

References

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 - ⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.
 - ¹⁰ Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 181-215.
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 - ¹² *Ibid.*, 43.
 - ¹³ Jackson, *A Sense of Place, A sense of Time* (New haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 124.
 - ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.
 - ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.
 - ¹⁶ David Lowenthal, “Age and Artifact: Dilemmas of Appreciation,” in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, ed. D.W. Meinig (Oxford University Press, 1979), 109.
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