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Form and Territory

Forms trace our presence across the landscape in many ways: paths of travel, areas of clearing and cultivation, channels of irrigation, delineations of property, patterns of commerce and dwelling. The density and complexity of those traces generally reflect the economic and technical means available at the time of their creation. The single-minded directness of a rail line or highway slicing through the landscape speaks not only of speed and mechanical strength, but of the accumulation of political and economic power necessary to trump all other claims. The fine-grain adjustments of traditional neighborhoods record the incremental investment and close attention of local inhabitants exercised over time.

This issue opens by describing the process by which the historic village of Colletta di Castelbianco was restored. This small place, encompassed by its larger landscape, sets us to thinking immediately of the relations between form and territory: relations which are seldom so direct, but which underlie all settlement activities. The various forms which current development bring are often very different; nevertheless, we must learn to make them serve human purposes. We next explore how capitalized processes have a tendency to bring their own ordering/marketing tools to a site, rather than finding them within it. In a pair of articles, Trevor Boddy examines how the originally Hong Kong-inspired towers of Vancouver are finding their way around the world as an important new urban housing model — with varying success. Such forms posit a wholly different figure in the landscape, as do the range of subtler, more varied forms of residential space whose assembly is explicated in an article on “Residential Densities” by John Ellis. Whatever the form, Robert Fishman’s carefully documented review of American public housing reminds us that there must be adequate economic and social support to make any form of building sustainable.

The territory we now inhabit, has itself been fundamentally modified by successive generations of settlement, as evidenced in a Portfolio of aerial views assembled by geographer Barry Haack. That those forces are no longer operating in organic symbiosis, as they often did in the naturally adjusting landscapes of the past, is shown provocatively in a review of *The Delta Primer*; an unusual publishing venture that combines a book with a deck of playing cards. Examining the context of one of the world’s most noted monuments, Amita Sinha and Terence Harkness propose a plan for bringing together traces of past and present in a comprehensive park along the Agra riverbank. Paul Bray responds to our earlier issue on “Parks” (Vol. 15, No. 3) with a call for a more inclusive understanding of the structure and development of parks.

Finally, two Dispatches report on recent events that examined two faces of our present prospects. The readjustment of patterns of development over large territories based on the idea of a “transect” is the purpose of the Congress for the New Urbanism’s SmartCode Seminars. Ways to reach out widely for subtly nuanced and inventive processes are discussed in the Study of Place.

As Giancarlo De Carlo implies, we could do better at building if we had time to reflect, and wit to absorb (not just pass on), the multiple factors that can enter into the making of places... if we had the time (read, “demanded the time”) to build with an eye to the landscape and its people as a creative resource, to be cared for and nurtured, not just wasted in the name of profit, power and dictates of the moment. — *Donlyn Lyndon*