

# UC Berkeley

## Places

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Where is today's public space,  
people ask. City Hall square?  
The shopping mall? The Internet?  
The car wash?

Where, you might better ask,  
is the public? Or even better:  
When are we (or they) the public?

Surely we need to clarify our conceptions of what constitutes public life and to make some useful distinctions, such as that between public life and community life, as Mike Brill argues in this issue.

In thinking about public spaces, we need to look more broadly for the sorts of places where people encounter real differences, exchange conceptions of value (however implicit) and generally form their notions of what it is to be one person among many, and, for that matter, to be in one place among the traces of many times.

We also need to look with more ingenuity at how the many spaces that make up a city can be shaped not only to serve, but also to enhance, the life outside our everyday living and working environments. Purpose-built, deliberately shaped public spaces remain essential elements of an urban infrastructure, central to the construction of a city's identity. Yet the qualities of the full fabric of spaces that are built within and around both public and private institutions structure the underlying discourse of a city. Streets, alleys, small gathering spots and informal places of assembly, even parking lots and sports venues enter more ubiquitously into the lives of their citizens and condition the nature of their exchange.

If the spaces we form are intended to help transform encounter into community, then they also need to sustain our attention and stay in the mind. They must be distinct enough to remember and refer to as common ground, easy enough to use and access that they are experienced by many, and have elements in them that will encourage exchange among users.

This issue presents a number of approaches to the consideration of such issues, ranging from the re-evaluation of open spaces that zoning incentives spread through New York City in the name of the public, to questions about how new forms might better be derived from the mix of ways in which people use open space.

It also brings into focus the role of private institutions in structuring the spaces that are available for common access. Public agencies have become increasingly intertwined with businesses and non-profit organizations in the creation of the spaces that we move through in our daily lives. Often the results of such collaborations are places that we now consider to be quite memorable and desirable, and which would even rank high on a scale of places where public encounter happens.

With this issue we also announce the presentation of the PlaceMark Award to the architect Hugh Hardy, of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates in New York. Hardy has for decades contributed not only to the public life of the city through a continuing series of projects, but also helped to change the understanding of what architects must do to reach out to nurture complex financial, organizational and artistic relationships that support and extend the life of a place. His work shuns dogma and instead captures the spirits of time and place, often through acknowledging and giving vigorous new life to the imaginative legacy of previous generations. He sees promise where others see restriction, proffers bravado when others are cowed, and stewards the qualities of place with a fertile imagination and a fearlessly unconventional sense of propriety. We would all do well to pay attention to his example.

As citizens or designers, we enter public life when we move beyond comfortable and defined roles. If we take public spaces to be those where we deliberately come upon others with whom we may or may not have common interests and with whom we may or may not agree, then such spaces need be readily accessible to all. They need also to present qualities that many different kinds of people will enjoy. And maybe, just maybe, they need to catch us by surprise.

Where is the public? In spirited places.

When are we (or they) the public? When we (and they) are induced to care.

—*Donlyn Lyndon*