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Place Debate: Piazza d'Italia

Editor's Introduction

There is no single reality to the way in which place enters into the lives of people. We intend, therefore, to publish a series of Place Debates. In each we plan to present divergent views regarding a single place, to foster controversy, and to consider various ways in which people encounter place.

With this first set of articles on the Piazza d'Italia we explore several (but by no means all) of the dimensions of judgment that an evocative place can bring forth. What characterizes each of our authors is an intent to learn. Each seeks to make experience of the Piazza and the process of making it become a part of our understanding about what to do (or not to do) in the creation of public places.

Piazza d'Italia is both an actual place and a media event. From its first appearance in the Progressive Architecture Awards program (where Donald Appleyard, who conceived this Place Debate, first recognized its provocative potential), the design has spawned controversy. Significantly, much of the discussion of the project in the professional press has been conducted by people who have not visited the actual place (one of our authors has not). Generally these critics judge the actions taken by the designer, since they



can only imagine the consequences. This leads to questions and observations that are rather different from those that are and might be prompted by a visit to the place itself. Of course, visitors—both strangers and habitués—bring with them a variety of predispositions and these too affect their experience and judgment.

Then there are the designers and the questions they posed to *themselves*. We have included articles in this set that are forthrightly anecdotal. The interplay of personalities is as vital to the making of public places as it is to the design of private domains, and it would be a disservice to obscure that dynamic.

This collection of articles is meant to stimulate reflection and further debate. We welcome your comments on the issues they raise and suggestions regarding places for subsequent debates.

Illustrations are of The Piazza d'Italia except where noted.

| Photograph by Alan Karchmer