

Richard Sennett

Process and Form, Work and Place

Julian Beinart

Image Construction in Pre-Modern Cities

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Richard Sennett began by reviewing some of Kevin Lynch's work which focused on how cities are places that human beings inhabit and who only become attached to those places that they can adapt to their own needs. He called *Good City Form* a "bracingly American" book because it emphasizes action rather than behavior; and it proposes that human beings cannot become fully human without intense, dense associations with one another. Sennett, like Lynch, believes that a human being who has not dwelt with strangers, particularly with those who are strangers because of their race, ethnicity, or social class, is an incomplete human being.

Sennett's concern in his paper was with the weak relation between people and place today. He looks not to physical uniformity for its explanation, but at capitalism. The new economy emphasizes diminished attachment and pursues instability. This has produced some real economic benefits to corporations, but for three fifths of the workers, the new economy has not been benign. He believes that this material revolution creates sociological chaos and has effected people's sense of place. In order to resist the instabilities of work, people emphasize a sense of place, and "home" becomes an icon and symbol. The New Urbanism illustrates this desire, but according to Sennett, these iconic communities sacrifice freedom for security; their forms are rigidly determined.

The longing for stability is a political as well as psychological impulse. The question is whether it is good politics. this strong ideology of places makes for weak practices of habitation. People who seek to compensate for insecurity at work are not likely to plunge into the complexities and uncertainties of modern community life.

Sennett believes that we are at a veritable crisis in the process of habitation. The trouble is that the strains of the new economy are not prompting us to make work more habitable. We are not challenging how work happens. We accept the capitalist thuds as a given and assert agency through place imagery. We have exchanged methods submission in one realm for symbolic domination in another. Little architectural experimentation has occurred in how to make factories or offices places to dwell in. Flexible capitalism has so

far aroused symbolic resistance more than direct challenge; we need to challenge it, making place which are themselves flexible and so habitable.

Julian Beinart

Image Construction in Premodern Cities

Beinart began by describing a *Time* magazine article from this year about seven places "that do something better than anyone else does." These towns included Clinton Montana which has an annual Testicle Festival, and the article concluded that "a town needs an identity, or it doesn't exist."

Beinart rejects this conclusion that a town only has an identity if it manufactures a saleable external image, because identity is inescapable: nature mandates it. He went on to discuss images of towns - one carried by its citizens and another held by outsiders. Often these two images overlap. He went on to outline how towns have been describing and promoting themselves for years, through guidebooks, pamphlets, slogans, art, and special events such as the Olympics.

He noted that Kevin Lynch proposed three components of city image: identity, structure, and meaning, but focused on identity and structure; in this colloquium 40 years later, we are focusing on identity and meaning.

The main part of the talk was about the pilgrimages and how images were constructed and transmitted to attract pilgrims. Pilgrimage travel was dangerous and expensive; covering long distances and taking two to three years. In holy cities, secondary services for pilgrims meant large local incomes. The spatial geography of pilgrimage varied by religion. For the Jews, the spiritual center was Jerusalem. For Muslims, it was Mecca. But unlike Judaism and Islam, the holy places of medieval Christianity were decentralized. This was due to the greater authority allowed to local dioceses and the wide distribution of relics.

He asked "with no newspapers or magazines, no widely circulated books or telephones, no radio or television, no photography or developed techniques for drawing cities, how did so many people, often a very long way away from holy cities, know about them?" There were three methods: oral societies, books, and campaigns and incentives. It was a small, intimate, and oral society at that time; pilgrims told their stories as they traveled through towns. Sermons were powerful vehicles of influence for the mass of illiterate listeners and pilgrimages became an increasingly popular means of the absolution of sins. Travel books include guidebooks and travelogues. And it is noteworthy that these books never contained drawn images of cities or buildings. Books of praise, promoting the attractions of a particular place also became popular. Campaigns and incentives were also

used to promote certain towns. Spain used St. James to secure economic, political and religious penetration into Spain. The church also changed the incentive system and granted indulgences to penitents visiting Rome during certain years.

He concluded by saying that though many believe that the construction and marketing of a city's image is a by-product of modern times, the research suggests that the identity of cities has always been an issue.

Discussion

Bernie Frieden asked about the connections between temporary work and historical preservation. Sennett replied that places like Seaside is not about historical preservation, but about post-modernism. What people preserve is symbolic rather than material and that places with clear and distinct identities are politically suspect to him. To him, places and spaces should be contestable, not set or controlled.

Bish Sanyal asked about the research in the books "Work as Home and Home as Work" which was a study of women managers who created an organizational structure to support their home life. Sennett said that the women he interviewed were farther down the hierarchy and they organize their homes so that they can flee them, and thought the differences had much to do with class.

Lisa Peattie talked briefly about her work in Bogota and compared it to others. Her research showed that workers were happy and content with their work while other studies show just the opposite.

Dennis Frenchman asked about the effect on cities now that we have more relics and more "Jerusalems." Beinart said he was struck with the simplicity and intimacy of premodern cities where middlemen and mediators were much less common. Cities are now promoted by professional consultants and publicists and he wasn't sure what the connection is between publicity and the quality of urban space.

Sam Bass Warner, Jr. (*real-time rapporteur*)

First both Richard and Julian agreed that architecture was very important, central to the actuality and the images of cities.

For Richard we had a causal sequence that went from the conditions of the workplace towards the making of culture. So the new flexible, networking, non-hierarchical corporation led to the "no long term" unstable kind of work which in turn produced a

culture which fostered a nostalgic architecture which ignored workplace design. Such a culture imagined work as a given, and caused workers to avoid unionization and to place their emotional lives in homes, homes designed in nostalgic fashion.

Julian, on the other hand, proceeded from culture to economics. For him the root issue was the transaction of spirituality from relics. A cultural phenomenon of Christianity. This belief allowed cities, like Santiago de Compostela to promote themselves in elaborate public relations campaigns. In the process of telling this story he stressed the importance of architecture in telling of the qualities of a town, and indeed suggested the enduring consensus of major buildings and local infrastructure in town imaging.

So the two papers worked in opposite directions. Sennett from the actualities of work to culture, Beinart from culture to the actualities of city promotion. This opposition recapitulated a Marxian exchange in which Marx wrote that a Prof. Feuerbach (sp?), a German idealist, misunderstood the way society works, because he thought that culture determined how people see the world and set their approaches to actualities. Marx attacked that idea saying that the conditions of work, especially the power relations of work determined culture, so that Feuerbach was quite backward in his understanding of the causal sequences of modern social life. And, he noted that Marx was now in the cellar for his ideas and Feuerbach was flying high.

He ended by suggesting that maybe Sennett was trying to warn us, at the outset of our seminar what we were, like Prof. Feuerbach, exploring images in a vacuum, and not considering how the actualities of economic life generated urban images.