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Remembrance and the Design of Place (Sara and John Lindsey Series in the Arts and Humanities)

Frances Downing

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We all retain memories of places. They help to identify who we are as individuals. At the same time, they tie us to networks of people, culture, and society. Even through time they reach into the past to people whose lives and experiences were as real as ours and into the future to those whose lives we can only imagine.

As a designer, Frances Downing has searched for ways to express or explain why images of place were meaningful to her design life. The reasons are interwoven and complex. Transcending personal experiences by using them to imagine other people and places, to discover something new and surprising, and to deepen thought is something designers often do subconsciously. Here, she suggests a method to regularize the memory of personal experience and translate the memories of places to the design of new places.

Through her investigation of the act of remembering Downing has discovered three different acts of "expression": naming remembered places, contemplation of their meaning, and the reasoning of meaningful categories for them. Through a combination of emotional response to a place and the reasoning that categorization requires, designers can work to understand the significance of a particular place—both its objective characteristics and its emotionally charged constructs, which are the most difficult to clarify and express.

meaning of memory of place to all of us, but especially to designers. She introduces the game of "Spatial Solitaire," by which a person can use a memorable image of past place in a limited design situation, and she includes as examples a number of the completed drawings and descriptions that resulted from designers' games.

Downing also discusses the significant forms of experiences and how they relate to architectural practice, the content of the metaphors of experience, the intentional frameworks for the transfer of meaning, and case studies and theories of imagination and innovation.

Remembrance and the Design of Place provides designers a greater understanding of their own meaningful acts of design, allowing the passage between past places and future places to be mapped carefully and debated openly.

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