

Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology

Volume 21
Number 3

Article 1

9-23-2010

Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology. Vol. 21, No. 3

Kansas State University. Architecture Department

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Vol. 21, No. 3, Fall 2010 (includes "items of interest," "citations received," and essays from Ron Walkey & John Cameron).

Recommended Citation

Kansas State University. Architecture Department (2010) "Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology. Vol. 21, No. 3," *Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology*. Vol. 21: No. 3.

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Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology

Vol. 21 ▪ No. 3

ISSN 1083-9194

www.arch.ksu.edu/seamon/EAP.html

Fall ▪ 2010

This *EAP* completes our 21st year. We enclose a renewal form and appreciate prompt responses so there will be fewer reminders to send in the winter 2011 issue. If any subscribers wish to receive a digital copy only (as a PDF file), mark the appropriate line on the renewal form and we will oblige.

This issue includes essays by architect **Ron Walkey** and environmental educator **John Cameron**. Walkey describes a research voyage to the small Greek island of Gioura, currently administered by the monks of Mt. Athos and designated as a national marine park for the protection of sea mammals. Drawing on Greek myths and stories, Walkey ponders the difficult question of what the future identity of this island should be. In attempting to offer an answer, he points to what he calls a “wisdom long exiled.” His suggestions for the island’s future are in striking contrast to the typical “sustainability” principles currently espoused by planners, designers, and policy makers.

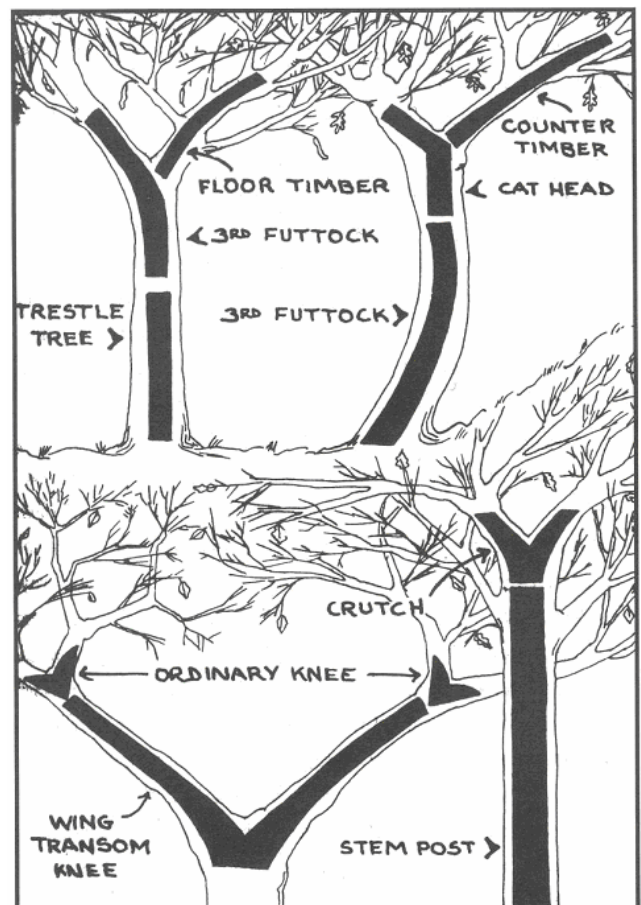
In his latest “Letter from Far South,” John Cameron looks at the *grasstree*, an unusual Australian plant that he studies through the empathetic lens of Goethean science. In familiarizing himself with one particular *grasstree* near his Tasmanian home on Bruny Island, Cameron finds himself facing a host of practical and ethical questions. His ponderings say much about the overwhelming ecological dilemmas we and the Earth face today.

New Space Syntax Journal

The Journal of Space Syntax is a recently established open-access e-journal publishing “academic papers on previously unpublished findings from cutting edge research into space, society and the design of the built environment.” The journal “draws on a wide range of scientific theories, analytic research

methods and configurational approaches to the study of space, architectural and urban form and societies, including, but not restricted to, space syntax.” The journal is published twice a year, in March and September. The first issue, now on-line, includes articles by **Bill Hillier**, **Lars Marcus**, **John Peponis**, and **Laura Vaughn** as well as an editorial by **Julienne Hanson** and a readers’ forum. www.journalofspacesyntax.org.

Below: a drawing, by Nora Logan, in William B. Logan’s *Oak: The Frame of Civilization* (NY: Norton, 2005), which details the world geography and history of the oak tree, including its uses in building construction. Illustrated are European sailing-ship oak parts. “Futtock” refers to foot oak. See p. 4.



More Donors, 2010

We are grateful to the following readers, who, since the last issue, have contributed more than the base subscription for 2010.

Janet Donohoe	Ken Evenden
Lance Howard	Doug Porteous
Christine Rhone	Charlene Spretnak
Ingrid Stefanovic	Gail Thomas
Ray Weisenburger	Justin Winkler

Items of Interest

Spirituality of Place is the theme of the 7th Savannah Symposium to be held February 17-19, 2011, in Savannah, Georgia. The organizers invite papers that “explore the role of spirituality as it relates to the development and shaping of architectural and urban forms. Paper sessions focus on the broadest context of spirituality as a significant factor in the study of the built environment globally, nationally, and locally. Of particular interest is work providing a critical evaluation of the relationship between sacred and secular spirituality in regard to the constructed world.” www.scad.edu/savannahsymposium.

The **International Association for the Study of Environment, Space, and Place (IASESP)** will sponsor the 3rd annual Geo-aesthetics Conference at Towson University, Towson, Maryland, March 11-12, 2011. The conference is co-sponsored by the Towson University Department of Philosophy and the Department of Art. The theme for the conference is “Rendezvous with the Sensuous”: “The sensuous is the common bond that all aestheticians have. It is what inspires all works of aesthetics, and it is therein that they dwell. The conference invites and seeks to bring together all aestheticians regardless of their academic discipline and regardless of whether they are or are not associated with an academic institution.” Deadline for 300-word paper abstracts is January 11, 2011. Contact: Dr. John Murungi: jmurungi@towson.edu.

The 13th annual conference of the **Society for Phenomenology and Media** will be held in Furtwangen and Freiburg, Germany, March 16-19, 2011.

Abstracts for papers and panels should be received by January 14, 2011. Send abstracts, panel proposals, and questions to the conference host: Prof. Dr. Miguel A. García Hochschule Furtwangen; garcia@hs-furtwangen.de.

The *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies (IJTS)*, published twice a year, is dedicated to work involving an “interdisciplinary approach to understanding human nature and the world around us. It attempts to synthesize many complementary disciplines, including psychology, philosophy, religious studies, art, anthropology, history, and healing. Transpersonal studies may be generally described as a multidisciplinary movement concerned with the exploration of higher consciousness, expanded self/identity, spirituality, and human potential.” www.transpersonalstudies.org/.

Citations Received

Wolfgang Behringer, 2010. *A Cultural History of Climate*. Trans. Patrick Camiller. London: Polity.

Originally published in German in 2007, this book emphasizes “the cultural reactions to climate change through the ages, showing how even minor changes in climate sometimes resulted in major social, political, and religious upheavals.”

Philip Bess, 2006. *Till We Have Built Jerusalem: Architecture, Urbanism, and the Sacred*. Washington, DC: ISI Books.

This architect considers “the physical, symbolic, and sacramental roles of good architecture and urbanism as these both reflect and promote human happiness.” Includes the chapter, “Making Sacred: The Phenomenology of Matter and Spirit in Architecture and the City.”

Joyce Davidson, 2003. *Phobic Geographies: The Phenomenology and Spatiality of Identity*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

“[P]henomenological insights continue to influence feminist theory... and have a significant and recurring role to play in this book, a significance that stems precisely from the *phenomenological understanding of embodiment and self-identity as inextricably interconnected*. This insight is crucial, I argue, to interpreting and potentially understanding the meaning and experience of agoraphobia.”

Ellen Dunham-Jones & June Williamson, 2009. *Retrofitting Suburbia: Urban Design Solutions for Redesigning Suburbs*. NY: Wiley.

These architects examine ways that “existing suburban developments can be redesigned into more urban and sustainable places.” Examples include: retrofitting regional malls, shopping centers, and office parks; adaptive reuse of big-box stores; urbanizing residential subdivisions; transforming commercial strip corridors.

Linda Finlay & Pat Molano-Fisher, 2008. “Transforming” Self and World: A Phenomenological Study of a Changing Lifeworld Following a Cochlear Implant. In *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy*, vol. 11, no. 2.

In describing and interpreting the experience of a deaf person receiving a cochlear implant (the 2nd author), this article provides a valuable demonstration of “empirical” phenomenological research.

Anthony Flint, 2009. *Wrestling with Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took on New York’s Master Builder and Transformed the American City*. NY: Random House.

Though best known as the author of *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), urbanist Jane Jacobs also played a major role as New York City citizen-crusader. This journalist describes Jacobs’ efforts to save her beloved Greenwich Village from three “slum-clearance” projects of New York City power broker Robert Moses: his plan to build a major traffic artery through Washington Square Park; his effort to condemn and rebuild in “Radiant-City” fashion several blocks of the West Village; and his scheme to construct the Lower Manhattan Expressway, or “Lomex,” a thoroughfare he envisioned as part of the larger federal interstate highway system to link traffic from New Jersey to Long Island via Manhattan. Luckily for New York City, all these ill-considered projects were repulsed, and Jane Jacobs played a major role. A spell-binding, superbly written set of stories illustrating “narrative non-fiction” at its best.

Robert F. Gatje, 2010. *Great Public Squares*. NY: Norton.

Superb plans (all at the same scale) and photographs of some 35 of the world’s best known squares and public spaces: 20 from Italy; five from France; four each from Britain and the U.S.; two each from Germany and the Czech Republic; one each from Greece; Spain, and Portugal. Criteria for selection included current-day use; broad admiration; and familiarity.

Herbert Gottfried & Jan Jennings, 2009. *American Vernacular: Buildings and Interiors, 1870—1960*. NY: Norton.

This well-illustrated volume covers “both overarching themes and specific building types such as cottages, bungalows, ranch houses, multifamily buildings, commercial buildings, and churches.” In considering national trends as well as specific construction plans, the authors show how buildings have evolved from basic, functional units into cohesive standard designs. Schematic drawings illustrate key design elements, while photographs document specific vernacular buildings.

Deborah Howard & Laura Moretti, 2009. *Sound and Space in Renaissance Venice: Architecture, Music, Acoustics*. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press.

This book argues that “both architects and musicians of Renaissance Venice—informed by theory, tradition, and experience—knew more about acoustics than has previously been recognized. The context of the Counter-Reformation made them acutely aware of the potential of music to inspire devotion.” The authors “explore the ways in which musical and architectural creations reveal a serious, though not always successful, attempt to exploit acoustical effects to religious ends. This book attempts to bring together the visual and aural dimensions of ecclesiastical space, focusing on the specific case of Early Modern Venice.” Includes results of a series of choral experiments in several Venetian churches in 2007.

Tim Ingold & Jo Lee Vergunst, eds., 2008. *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

The 13 chapters of this edited collection “combine discussions of embodiment, place, and materiality to address the ‘technique of the body’.” Walking is considered “in a range of regional and cultural contexts, exploring the diversity of ways of walking and the variety of meanings it can embody.”

Robert H. Kargon & Arthur P. Molella, 2008. *Invented Edens: Techno-Cities of the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

These historians focus on what they call “techno-cities”—cities planned and developed “in conjunction with large technological or industrial projects.” Chapters focus on such examples as Oak Ridge, Tennessee; Andriano Olivetti’s plans for the town of Ivrea Italy; and Venezuela’s Ciudad Guayana. The last chapter is devoted to the Walt Disney World Company’s new-urbanist Florida community, Celebration: “No small part of Disney’s genius in selling Celebration was to combine the inducements of a rose-tinted past with those of a fabricated future—a sort of reverse nostalgia. Disney advertises a new brand of futurism based on the promises of up-to-date technologies.... Whether these technological advantages

can make the urban village work for a new generation of Americans remains to be seen. But as Disney theme parks have proved beyond a doubt, a simulated past and a fantasy future make a potent blend—a blend that few consumers can resist.”

George L. Kelling & Catherine M. Coles, 1996. *Fixing Broken Windows: Restoring Order and Reducing Crime in Our Communities*. NY: Simon & Schuster.

From *Strange Places*

[A]n excessive focus on globalization might distract us from the ways in which capitalist processes and ideologies shape space intranationally. Within the United States, the spaces of everyday life, including workplaces, residential neighborhoods, shopping areas, and public spaces... are profoundly shaped by a liberal political economic regime that leaves much of the shaping of space up to economic actors, particularly developers working with cooperative municipal officials.

Space organized as a site of commonality, building as a public act, and architecture as a political craft have given way in many places to fundamentally economic approaches that carve space into what Henri Lefebvre calls “cells,” each with a narrowly designated function: production, reproduction, or consumption.

While older organizations of space that literally make room for public or common uses still survive in older cities and towns, the new spaces of the Sunbelt, the suburb, and the exurb are overwhelmingly organized into zones, each with a reduced function: as a site of production, there is the swathe of new office buildings surrounded by berms of deserted, manicured lawn; as a site of consumption, the strip-mall-lined arterial, with its Home Depots and Walmarts; as a site of reproduction and consumption, the aptly named bedroom community....

To allow economic functions to override all the other possible functions of space is to imply that the economic is more fundamental, more important, and more natural than other human ends that the places where we live might, in part, meet: needs such as sociability, efficacious citizenship (or democratic power), beauty, connection to nature, and creativity.

What political significance does this embeddedness of power and meaning in places have? Does a liberatory politics require escape from places precisely because they embody power relations and values, often in subtle ways that are difficult to identify, much less resist? What might the relationship of places, thus understood, be to a democratic politics? Must a democratic politics cross the boundaries of places, or might it grow out of a shared experience of place? Or both? What might the political significance be of the creation of places built to perform narrowly compartmentalized functions of production, reproduction, and consumption?

This book addresses these questions but does not purport to offer the last word on any of them. If anything it seeks to broaden a conversation that certain strands of current political theory have tended to narrow. A Deleuzian emphasis on nomadism and rhizomes, coupled with a fatalism regarding globalization, have tended to lead to dismissals of place-based democratic efforts as anachronistic, weak, nostalgic, or even fascistic.

But when one begins to examine actual movements by ordinary people to transform the common conditions of life in the places where they live, one sees that places remain sites of hope for a democratic politics that grants a measure of everyday efficacy to some of the least privileged citizens. Moreover, when one looks at the abstract spaces that we increasingly inhabit, one sees that, in the apparent meaninglessness, our everyday spaces embody a power dynamic that is far from democratic. We cannot escape these spaces, but we can hope to transform them.

—Alexandra Kogl, 2008, p. 2, 3.

Written by the authors of the influential March 1982 *Atlantic Monthly* article of the same title, this book argues that “liberty can only exist in an environment of reasonable order” grounded in “community-based policing and even community-based prosecution and probation.” The authors write: “Reducing crime through order maintenance... requires the exercise of good citizenship. Citizens must accept responsibility both for their own behavior and for helping to ensure the safety and security of fellow citizens. Order arises out of what Jane Jacobs has called the ‘small change’ of urban life: the day-to-day respect with which we deal with others and the concern that we exercise for their privacy, welfare, and safety. Such respect and concern does not divide rich from poor, black from white, or one ethnic group from another. Instead, it unites diverse neighborhoods against those who behave in outrageous ways, and who prey on the weak and vulnerable....”

Alexandra Kogl, 2008. *Strange Places: The Political Potentials and Perils of Everyday Spaces*. NY: Lexington Books.

This political scientist “offers a conceptual framework for thinking politically about place and space in an era in which globalization seems to be destabilizing places and transforming spaces at an unprecedented rate and scale.” The focus is “the roles that places play in supporting a democratic politics of efficacy and resistance.” The passage in the sidebar, left, is from Kogl’s book.

William Bryant Logan, 2005. *Oak: The Frame of Civilization*. NY: Norton.

This arborist examines the “history of the reciprocal relationship between humans and oak trees... For centuries these supremely adaptable, generous trees have supported humankind in nearly every facet of life. From the ink of Bach’s cantatas to the first boat to reach the New World, products of oak trees have been crucial to civilization.” See drawing, p. 1.

Setha M. Low, 2003. Embodied Space(s), *Space & Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1 (February), pp. 9-18.

This anthropologist defines “embodied space” as “the location where human experience and consciousness take on material and spatial form.” She examines difficulties in defining the body, bodily space, and cultural understandings of the body. She then traces “the evolution of approaches to embodied space, including proxemics, phenomenological understandings, spatial orientation, and linguistic dimensions.” The aim is to facilitate “ways that allow us to theorize and imagine the body as a moving, speaking, cultural space in and of itself. This evocative and theoretically powerful concept of body/space/culture marks a radical shift in anthropological thinking that previously separated these domains and resolves many of the dilemmas that plague those of us who cross the micro/macro boundaries from individual body and embodied space to macro-analysis of social and political forces.”

Robert Mugerauer, 2010. Anatomy of Life and Well-Being: A Framework for the Contributions of Phenomenology and Complexity Theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies of Health and Well-Being*, vol. 10, pp. 1-12.

This philosopher proposes “an anatomy of the phenomena of life,” drawing partly on “emerging contributions of hermeneutic phenomenology.” One aim is “a phenomenology of human life” in such a way that “we can appreciate simultaneously the emergence of distinctive levels of life’s ordering processes, the operative hierarchical governance and principles of intelligibility, and the complex factors bearing on health and well-being.” Beginning with organisms’ lifeworlds at a mid-level “where we recognize coherent patterns of placement and life activity,” Mugerauer moves to the “sub-personal” level of “physiological-neurological” and then to the “macro-world” of ecosystems and bioregions.

Edward Ng, ed., 2010. *Designing High-Density Cities for Social and Environmental Sustainability*. London: Earthscan.

Assuming that urbanization and high-density living are irreversible, the 22 chapters in this edited collection explore various aspects of making urban density sustainable ecologically and humanly. The first four chapters provide valuable definitions and discussions of high density and cities; following chapters deal with climatic, environmental, and human dimensions. Many useful drawings and other illustrations.

Joseph Parry, ed., 2010. *Art and Phenomenology*. NY: Routledge.

The chapters of this book “explore visual art as a mode of experiencing the world itself, showing how, in the words of Merleau-Ponty, ‘Painting does not imitate the world, but is a world

of its own’.” Topics include: Paul Klee and the body in art; color and background in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of art; self-consciousness and seventeenth-century painting; Vermeer and Heidegger; embodiment in Renaissance art; and sculpture, dance, and phenomenology.

Paulette Rothbauer, 2009. Exploring the Placelessness of Reading Among Older Teens in a Canadian Rural Municipality. *Library Quarterly*, vol.79, no. 4, pp. 465-83.

This geographer examines the role of “reading and libraries in the lives of older rural teenagers,” drawing on 27 interviews. She identifies four themes: the habitual, quotidian reading of teenagers; the shifting visibility of the public library; the internet as a default reading site; and the time constraints on reading for pleasure. In regard to the first theme, she writes: “The single most common way that printed reading materials such as books, magazines, and newspapers made it into the hands of the young people in this study was by physical proximity—they quite literally came across the materials in the course of their day.... [T]here is scant evidence in this data to show that young people are exerting any effort to find reading materials, even when they see themselves as readers. This renders a readership that is dependent on whatever the field can provide, whatever reading materials surface as these young people move through their everyday environments, thus raising important questions about how and what materials are distributed.”

Andrew Sancton, 2008. *The Limits of Boundaries: Why City-Regions Cannot be Self-Governing*. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Univ. Press.

This book by a political scientist argues against the ideas of urbanist Jane Jacobs to claim that “city-regions in western liberal democracies will not and cannot be self-governing. Self-government requires a territory delineated by official boundaries, but the multiple boundaries of city-regions, unlike the clear and undisputed boundaries of provinces and states, continue to move outward due to the constant growth and expansion of urban populations and services.” A disappointing work in that it incorporates a rather superficial explication and critique of Jacobs’ remarkable, implicitly phenomenological, understanding of the city and urban experience, including its economic and regional dimensions.

Brenda Deen Schildgen, 2008. *Heritage or Heresy: Preservation and Destruction of Religious Art and Architecture in Europe*. London: Palgrave.

“I approach this study primarily from the point of view of a medievalist with training in theology, examining how the medieval world view as represented in its symbol system of images and buildings was assaulted or destroyed in the early modern period... and then how the 19th century ‘discovered’

the period and its ‘Gothic’ past and awoke to what they considered a specifically European heritage.... From a postmodernist view of the plastic arts, the calendrical celebrations of the Middle Ages constitute a kind of living sculpture, a ‘commemorative representation’ that spoke a symbolic language about the meaning or use of a particular place. The Reformation shoved this living sculpture from the stage of history, to eventually replace its psychic benefits with the idea of citizenship of the sovereign nation.”

Eva-Maria Simms, 2008. *Children’s Lived Spaces in the Inner City: Historical and Political Aspects of the Psychology of Place*. *Humanistic Psychologist*, vol. 36, pp. 72-89.

Drawing on interviews and respondent mappings, this psychologist asked 12 African-American adults (24 to 84 years old) who spent their childhoods in Pittsburgh’s Hill District neighborhood to describe their “childhood roaming spaces.” Thematic interpretation pointed to “childhood places marked by political and cultural changes. Each generation of 10-year olds (1930s to 2000) lived in the same geographical area but experienced and lived their neighborhood places in dramatically different ways.” Simms ends with three design challenges for urban planners and designers. See sidebar, right.

Edward Steinfeld & Jonathan White, 2010. *Inclusive Housing: A Pattern Book*. NY: Norton/Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access.

Using “urban patterns of neighborhood development,” these architects argue that their pattern approach is applicable “to all kinds of housing in all types of neighborhoods.” The emphasis is a context-sensitive approach recognizing that “the house must fit on the lot; the lot must fit in the block; and the block must fit with the character of the neighborhood.”

David Stephenson, 2009. *Heavenly Vaults: From Romanesque to Gothic in European Architecture*. NY: Princeton Architectural Press.

This photographer presents the “amazing vaulted ceilings of the medieval churches, cathedrals, and basilicas of Europe” through more than 80 “kaleidoscopic photographs that reveal [the vaults’] complex geometrical structures, decorative detailing, and ornamental painting in ways they have never been seen before.”

Three challenges for urban designers

When developers or urban planners work with neighborhood communities, very rarely are the voices and needs of child citizens taken into account. Reflecting upon the childhood experiences of my inner city participants, I offer a challenge to urban planners when they redevelop urban spaces.

1. How do you design and build structures that encourage neighborly exchange and allow for child-friendly public spaces?

From the perspective of children’s lives, the safest urban neighborhoods, which allow for the greatest amount of freedom, are those that encourage neighborly exchange and have child friendly *public* spaces where children can gather... These places should be in close proximity to adult daily activity, which provides for the “eyes on the street” that Jane Jacobs called for, without turning the watching of children into explicit surveillance.

2. How do you get the community to think of their homes as extending beyond the front door and to care for the larger communal space?

Neighborliness arises when people who live in the same place identify with the space beyond their front door. Home is not just one’s house, but it can be extended to include the street, the block, or the whole quarter. Once people care for more than their own “property,” true civic life can begin because neighbors begin to care for and feel connected to the larger structures of their community. When children roam these widening circles beyond the family home, they develop the confidence that the world is theirs, and that they can know it and make a difference.... In a functioning neighborhood community, children seek out places to explore beyond the home and these places are safe when adults care for the street, the stores, the plazas, and the parks as part of their homes.

3. How do you foster neighborliness and commitment to a particular place?

In contemporary American culture, we have come to think of places as “real estate” where a particular square footage is assigned a monetary value, so that it can be bought and sold at will. In our psychological life, however, places are more than that: they are the visible, tangible matrix where the quality of our lives as children and adults is anchored and enacted. *Every childhood memory is localized*. An empty city lot is not just the rubble of a razed building, but for the people who have seen it decay it is haunted by memories of the past and a painful reminder that even bricks and mortar can perish. And when they do, a part of the community dies as well. Places are the real memory theater of our communal history.

—Eva-Maria Simms, 2008, pp. 87-88.

Nicholas Temple, 2007. *Disclosing Horizons: Architecture, Perspective and Redemptive Space*. NY: Routledge.

“This book examines the role of perspective in architecture... in relation to changing notions of order in history.... [T]he study argues that from its earliest developments perspective was understood as a *redemptive* view of order whose origins can be traced back to a deeper philosophical tradition, well before the advent of *perspectiva artificialis*. This tradition provided the foundation of what was later to emerge—as a theoretical possibility—an ideal *constructed* perspectival world. Such a world was deemed potentially perfectible in the eyes of humanity (and of God) and could therefore be distinguished from the equivocations and uncertainties of everyday circumstance.”

Christopher Tilley, 2004. *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology: I*. Oxford: Berg.

This archeologist’s work is described as an “innovative approach to understanding human experience through the tangible rocks and stone of our past.” Tilley presents “a radically new way of analyzing the significance of both ‘cultural’ and ‘natural’ stone in prehistoric European landscapes.” The aim is to “interpret human experience in a multidimensional and sensuous human way, rather than through an abstract analytical gaze.” Specific landscapes explored include megalithic standing stones (*menhirs*) of Brittany; Neolithic temples of the Maltese islands; and rock carvings and cairns in southeastern Sweden. See sidebar, right, that synthesizes Tilley’s “fundamental principles” of a phenomenological approach to landscape.

Some fundamental phenomenological principles

A phenomenological perspective provides an ontological ground for the study of things, places and landscapes, a means of approach and a way of thinking through the body in its participatory relation with the world. I summarize some fundamental principles:

1. A phenomenological approach to landscape and place... is not a philosophical approach emphasizing the personal and subjective. It is an approach emphasizing the intertwining of subject and object, things and persons, mind and body, places and being-in-the-world. The rejection of any possibility of an objective approach does not mean that we pass into a realm of personal subjectivity, because meaning is grounded in the sensuous embodied relation between persons and the world, an invariant ontological ground for all feeling and all knowing taking place through persons with similar bodies.
2. Any study begins with lived experience, being there, in the world. It must necessarily be embodied, centered in a body opening out itself to the world... The exploitation of basic bodily dyads provides one entry point into the study of place and landscape. A concentric graded sense of place and landscape provides another basic way in which meaning may be explored. Both originate in the body and extend outwards.
3. Perceptual meanings of place and landscape are constituted as *gestalts*, themes against horizons, to which the human body and the external world both contribute, a lived structure of experience formed through engagement and interaction in which the body-subject and the world flow into each other and form part of each other. The body is concretely engaged in the world from a particular point of view that is always unfolding and changing in time-space....
4. This involves a dehiscence, an opening of my body to things, a reversible relationship between touching and being touched, myself and other, the effect of myself on things and those things on me.
5. In an experiential relationship with things, there is always a chiasm, an intertwining between ‘outside’ and ‘inside’, which mediate each other but never totally fuse. So my body is in contact with the world but still separate from it. My body experiences from the inside but opens itself to the outside. Since, as an embodied observer, I perceive the world through a set of frameworks which are habitual and grounded in the body, to a certain extent anonymous, these frameworks cease to be mine alone and are not therefore ‘personal’. They are, however, both objective and subjective insofar as they simultaneously stem from my own body. First-person experiences can be used to gain access to the experiences of other persons because of the incarnate and sensuous opening out of the ‘primal’ embodied subject to the world.
6. Our primordial experience is inherently animistic, disclosing a field of phenomena that are all potentially animate and expressive because our perception involves the reversibility born out of our participation in the world.
7. Direct prereflective perception is inherently *synaesthetic*, disclosing the things and elements that surround us not as inert objects but as expressive subjects of experience, born out of our multidimensional sensorial participation in the world.
8. There is a fundamental temporal dimension to the body, place and landscape carried through movement and sedimented into what places and landscapes are and how we experience them.
9. Persons do not passively receive information and knowledge about the world but always act in accordance with practical projects, values, needs, desires, and interests.... The manner in which we experience place and landscape is, however, forever unfinished, uncertain, and therefore ambiguous....
10. The aim of a phenomenological analysis is to produce a fresh understanding of place and landscape through an evocative thick linguistic redescription stemming from our carnal experience. This involves attempting to exploit to the full the tropic nature of our language in such a way as to seek the invisible in the visible, the intangible in the tangible. The mode of expression must resonate with that which it seeks to express.

—Christopher Tilley, 2004, pp. 29-30.

Claiming a Greek Island as a Precinct Sacred to the Twelve Gods

Ron Walkey

Walkey is an architect and Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. He lives on the Greek island of Tinos and in Vancouver. In regard to this essay, Walkey writes: "I've received kind and patient help with translation from Evi Staikou; and support and encouragement from my friend and colleague John Gaitanakis. This essay is dedicated to the spirit of Bud Wood." An earlier version was included in "Island_Built Event," an exhibit in Mestre, Italy, 2005, curated by Phillipos Oraopoulos and Aristidis Antonas. walkey@arch.ubc.ca. Text and photographs © 2010 Ron Walkey.

In May, 2005, I was invited by Professors Philippos Oraopoulos and Aristidis Antonas of the Department of Architecture in Volos, Greece, to participate in a research journey to *Gioura*, a steep, rocky island in Greece's Northern Sporades. The organizers asked several architects and scholars to join 30 students who had volunteered to explore Gioura's identity and sense of place.

Some two kilometers long and less than a kilometer wide, Gioura is one of the smallest of 9,835 Greek islands and islets. The island of Alonisos is its closest inhabited neighbor. For centuries, Gioura was administered by the monks of Mt. Athos, and no one lands on the island without a permit. More recently, Gioura and several nearby smaller islands have been designated a national marine park for the protection of sea mammals. The only Gioura resident is a watchman sometimes accompanied by his wife.

The aims of our Gioura visit were intentionally vague: What identity should this unique island have? Perhaps this isolated place is not yet sufficiently fixed in the public eye? Are its current uses at cross purposes? As a protected biotope, do its possibilities need clarification and grounding?

In this essay, I propose a "Gioura identity" arising from precise limits relating to place and defined by the inclusion of wisdom long exiled. I suggest that this particular Gioura identity is timely and may contribute toward confronting the impending col-

lapse of our Earth ecosystem. The text is a travel journal, interspersed with personal reflections into which various myths and stories have tiptoed.

I had just returned to Athens from the green and rain of Berlin when I found messages from Aristidis asking me to join a weekend boat excursion from Volos to Gioura. The next day I was on a bus rolling north, passing new industries spread out along Greece's National Highway. On previous trips, I had seen countless olive fields, but many were now flattened, squared, and fenced by factories. Passing close to the calm blue sea, I saw new tourist accommodations sprawling down to the shore and across the hills above—many of them villas, some straight out of an American soap opera, crying out their tasteless affluence.

In the city of Volos, I walked the narrow streets toward Aristidis' house. Many of the small courtyard dwellings that give the city its special identity are now overgrown and abandoned. Each block holds at least two construction sites of new high-rise apartments, all on *pilotis* and offering only the butt of a BMW to the urban pedestrian. Owners of the abandoned, older houses wait for the all-important demolition permit allowing entry into the current building boom.

At seven the next morning as the sun rises through the mist and frees itself from the mountain of Pelion, I am on the quay. The sun's warmth dis-



solves the memory of evening dew. It is good to be with Aristidis and Phillipos again and to join the others, mostly students, boarding a wooden boat named *Odyssey* that lies still on the mirrored morning sea. “Either fate is playing with us, or maybe the gods want to tell us something,” I think. “To what Ithaca are we bound? What have we to learn about design and identity, to learn about ourselves? And can we resist seduction along the way?”

The captain tells us a fine windless day is ahead as we move into the harbor toward the open passage at the south end of the Pagassitic Gulf. As Volos falls behind, I see to the south the remains of a mountain blasted away to serve the appetite of the cement industry.

Opposite are the ruins of the classical city of Dimitrias, once dedicated to the goddess of planting and fertility. Now that archaeological excavations have ended, pine trees grow there again. Like so many classical cities in this region, Dimitrias was probably destroyed in one of the fierce raids from the north during the fifth century BCE. From that day the city disappeared, and an illustrious civilization was extinguished. But what about the *Dodekathēo*, the 12 Gods of the Dimitrians?

“Listen to what is said...”

Why did we smash their sculptures?

Why did we throw them from their temples?

You know, they’ve never died, those gods.

Ionia, they love you still,

their souls remember you. Still.

Like in the dawn of an August morning

your mood is captured, given strength from their life.

And sometimes, low over the hills,

an ethereal and youthful form,

vague and undefined, may swiftly pass you by.

The ride is idyllic. The students, having partied late, doze at this early hour. Others light up a succession of small paper-covered offerings as part of their sacrifice to the god of lung cancer. It is a time for reverie.

Where is Gioura? How do we have permission to land there? Did the inhabitants of Dimitrias know Gioura? What was the island called then and how long did it take to get there?

“Listen to what happened...”

“We must never forgive Plato for disparaging Homer’s world of luminous, amoral fatality. We must continue to regard theology as a decadent form of reflection, one that already at its origin was headed downhill toward the modern wasteland of denatured “facts,” algorithms, and the banalities of “public opinion.”

We round the point with the village of Trikeri high on port side. We see new roads slashed in the landscape to reach new recreation developments. At the crest of the hill and usurping the view from the cluster of old island houses stands a new concrete skeleton waiting to be clad as a large villa.

I become uneasy, not from the sea but from sensing what has happened on this marvelous landscape in the 15 years since I last made this passage. All along the southern part of the Tisseo peninsula, to Platania and beyond, there is much new development: isolated, expensive, unsustainable sites where the glories of the sea and landscape can be consumed a few weeks each summer.

I wonder about poetic content in the human effort now modifying this landscape. The rationale of the older landscape—the pathways, the low stone fences enclosing goats and sheep, here and there a few cultivated terraces—they spoke of survival with a timeless elegance. But now?

As we pass the last elbow of land before we head toward the islands of Skiathos and Skopelos, we look up to witness the destruction well underway of a gigantic mountain landscape. From some 500 meters above, thousands of tons of rubble from a huge marble quarry pour down the mountainside into the innocence of the blue sea below.

Will such aggressive destruction of nature someday end? We all know that it is not much longer before the Earth’s major support systems pass beyond the point of repair. Atmospheric poisons, climate change, ocean-current redirections, desertification—I don’t need to tell myself more. Demeter, goddess of fertility, together with the other 11 gods, must be furious. I watch for them from the corner of my eye.

At a bay where my wife and I once swam naked and made sand castles with an exceptional three-year-old, I see a large cluster of tourist bungalows—units for passive, summertime consumption. They march up the hill, ignoring the ruins of an an-

cient defensive wall raised from gigantic fitted stones. Years ago I climbed beside that wall in wonder as cicadas ground away at my ears.

What can the myths tell us about Demeter's response to ignorance, greed, and destruction? What penalty is paid?

“Listen to what happened...”

Near to this place, only removed in time, Erysichthon, king of the Pelasgi in Thesally is so rich and powerful that he wants to add a great banqueting hall to his palace in which to entertain and impress his friends. His carpenters tell him that there are no long timbers available in his kingdom to construct such a huge roof. They tell him that only in the “Ieron Alsos,” the forest sacred to the Goddess Demeter, might such trees be found.

One day he enters into that grove leading 20 slaves each carrying a sharpened axe, for he is bent on harvesting all the tall poplar logs his new project demands. But the Goddess Demeter herself appears and, transforming herself into an old lady, stands in his way to remind the king that the forest is a sacred precinct where nothing should be touched by human beings. Angry and impatient, he sweeps her aside and threatens to kill her if she is not quiet. Enraged, the goddess draws herself up into her majestic form. With her feet deep into the earth, her head blocking out the sky, she screams down at him, “Build your dining room, dog, for you will need to eat there! You will need to eat there forever!”

The axes fall, the deed is done, the trees are felled, stripped, and assembled into a magnificent roof over a glittering banquet hall where now the first feast is prepared. Demeter sees all, then sends down the demon of hunger to enfold itself around and within the body of Erysichthon. Enthroned, the king sits with his retinue and begins to eat. Then he calls for his 20 cooks and 12 wine slaves to bring him more. This they do. But he calls them again, for his appetite appears insatiable.

Soon, all the animals he owns are slaughtered and eaten—the mules, even the cats. His fields are stripped of their harvest, even those that stand unripe. His father Triopas, son of Poseidon, makes excuses at court for the king, claiming an unexpected but necessary absence. It is not many days before the starving man must sell his own daughter to raise funds to buy food, yet he remains famished at the tables laden with such plenty. Finally there is nothing left to bring him to eat. Nothing. Then he begins to pull away at the wasted and feverish flesh of his own body, consuming himself... handful by handful.

From the deck I look out at the unchecked “development” and wonder what role the forbidden now plays in our lives. Perhaps we should not be making this trip—that this Gioura should remain prohibited to us. Is being an elite ever defensible? Are we, too, going there to “consume” the place? Maybe this odyssey is an illicit affair?

Since that daring theft by Prometheus, human beings have been doing pretty much what they want when they want. With the help of technology's short-term efficiency, we have drawn stored wealth from the ground so fast that any sense of limit is blurred in the fog of progress. Progress is freedom, right? Progress is unbounded, right?

Yet why do we need to see limits as chains? Our daily survival, social discourse, and customs—all are shaped by what we've chosen to refuse. We are differentiated by imposed boundaries or, if we are lucky, by boundaries we ourselves set. Our responsibility here is to recognize internally set limits. Abstinence seems central but requires courage and experience with consequence. With it comes an opening into mystery and an awakening of poetic imagination. Maybe we should not land on Gioura and remain wiser by our abstention?

The bowsprit noses out into a brisk wind rising along the eastern side of Alonisos. I see roads cutting down across the natural slopes to reach new development. More olive trees have been cleared for white villas. Little abstinence is visible there.

Gioura and the small surrounding pelagos are now part of Greece's only marine park, home to the few remaining seals in the eastern Mediterranean. I ask about these sea animals and learn that protection programs have so far been ineffective. Only 65 left! With water pollution, depleted fish stocks, and more and more pleasure boaters, these creatures' demise is imminent. What monument will be raised to their absence? But wait, a few people are trying, and that's good news, isn't it? There is a park, after all.

Also, they say the cave of the fabled Cyclops is on this island.

“Oh, oh,” I think.

“Listen to what happened...”

They say that the cave high up on the western face of Gioura was once the lair of the Cyclops Polyphemus. Here Odysseus and his crew found themselves prisoners,

being devoured two by two. Crafty Odysseus offers wine to the monster and blinds him when he falls into the swoon of sleep. This gives Odysseus the opportunity to instruct his shipmates that, by covering themselves with the skins of the devoured sheep that lay around the floor of the cave, they could escape. Of course, as Polyphemus was one of Poseidon's sons, the rage of that god against Odysseus was multiplied, a situation that further prolonged the wandering of that old warrior.

But “they” are wrong, for the cave of Polyphemus is far from Gioura. It’s near Sicily. The cave on Gioura was the home of another, older Cyclops—one of three Cyclopes, all children, and, like the Goddess Demeter, of parents Kronos and Gaea. These Cyclopes gave to Hades his helmet of invisibility and forged Zeus’ dreaded thunderbolts.

Either it was Arges, Steropes, or Broontes in the Gioura cave. One of them was killed, not by Odysseus but by Apollo in his anger over the death of his son Asclepius by the hand of Zeus. Asclepius had annoyed Hades because he had learned how to use Medea’s blood to bring the dead back to life. Acting in defense of the order in the world that is life and death, Zeus killed Asclepius with a thunderbolt forged by the Cyclopes. Apollo was seized with a violent rage and, taking up his arrows, killed the Cyclops, But it is not told which one.

Two thunderbolt-making Cyclopes must still remain!



As we approach the southern cliffs of Gioura, the captain slows the engines. We cautiously approach the island’s forbidding limestone cliffs dusted with low, thorny, green bushes and milk-holding cacti turning red in the May heat. These cliffs are steep, perhaps reaching 200 meters before

leveling off out of sight far above. We see a small, enticing path zigzagging its way back and forth up a slope and disappearing over the crest. The path touches the water without a wharf or landing. Our boat glides slowly forward as the cliffs rise up high enough to shut out the wind. The captain is worried—How to land us? “Won’t we change our mind?” he hints.

But we’ve come too far, and abstinence doesn’t seem to be on the program. Turning the boat, the captain orders a heavy anchor dropped. Some 200 meters of chain rattle over the cleat until he is confident the anchor has reached bottom. The stern lines are made fast, and we walk the swaying plank, helped ashore by two crew members.

What seductions and delusions await us, for Demeter can’t be happy? Can we keep our minds clear? Need we bring blindfolds? I know there are no sacred cows on this island, but perhaps the goats roaming free belong to the Sun, replacements for the cows slaughtered by Odysseus’s starving crew?

We move quickly up the path, all 40 of us. Some of the women reach down to pick oregano just days from flowering. Under the oven of a sun, we reach a level area and walk toward a cluster of walls and buildings that were originally a monastery and small church and now provide the residence for the island’s guardian. The complex is surrounded by a wire fence to keep the goats from eating the riot of wildflowers and green within. It’s clear the goats have destroyed the bio-diversity of this landscape.

With simple, elegant moves, the guardian and his wife have made this place beautiful. Gathering off-roof water in the winter rain is a cistern large enough to serve the couple and their mule. Photovoltaic cells provide power to receive news on a small television. He has made alterations and additions to the courtyard, including a pergola to support grape vines throwing deep, welcome courtyard shade. His home is a finely detailed place—a testament to immediacy, intelligence, and limited means.

We ask him about the monastery and he leads some of us into the small church.

“Listen to what happened...”

It is said that, years ago, there were 40 resident monks living here. On the holy day celebrating the namesake of the church, the monks crowded inside under the gaze of

the Pantocrator. They began the ancient chant for the evening's 'unsleeping' liturgy. Suddenly out of the clear evening sky, a ferocious thunderbolt struck the building. The electricity passing through the church dome incinerated everyone except one monk who, a moment before the strike, had stepped outside to tend an animal. As evidence for the story, the guardian points to a long fissure traversing the dome.



Did the 39 monks deserve such a fate? Was this the work of the surviving Cyclopes, done with the bidding of Zeus who still remains angry at the replacement of the *Dodekatheo* by the monotheism of Christianity? Gioura is a dangerous place. We've been warned.

Over the next hour, we wander about this spectacular place, then walk out to a cliff from which we can see the cave of the Cyclops. A small tree crouches windblown at its mouth, and tailings from a recent archaeological dig tumble down the hill. Later, we gather in the courtyard shade and talk.

One person expresses surprise at finding such a beautiful place—not at all like what she had been led to believe by her research. Another person says that here is the essence of Greek unspoiled nature. Some of the younger architects suggest to the guardian that they return with clay tiles to replace asbestos sheets on his roof and thereby improve water quality and make the place more “authentic.” I'm impressed, but I fear we are lost.

Like so many before us, we are charmed by the spring beauty of Greece—its light and extravagance. It is easy to see ourselves here in this garden of Eden, leaving life's complexities behind. Most of

us are architects, and our first impulse is to repair, improve, and extend. Aristidis and Phillipos had emphasized that we should not betray “the suspension of our ideas”—not choose an island identity through design. Perhaps they knew the danger that lay in the power of the island's seduction? Perhaps they were proposing impotence? Perhaps they wanted to see if abstinence might play a role?

It was so easy to think how the clarity of the logical mind could transform this place into “a Center for Ecological Study and Sustainable Recreation,” which was described as follows.

“Listen to what could happen...”

With extensive governmental support assured, the groups hoping to protect Gioura as a research park have been able to implement their ideas. Although the Mediterranean seals have been lost, refuges for other endangered species have been built on the island, together with a research clinic testing feeding patterns.

Anchored in the sea off the south end of the island, four permanent buoys accommodate ecological tourists in canoes, sailboats, and cruise vessels arriving daily. A high-tech funicular has been installed to bring visitors up to the meadow to see experiments in hydroponic agriculture that supports the island's small but growing research community.

Recently, some hostels have been built at sheltered locations on the island. Made from biodegradable materials, these constructions have minimal impact on the landscape. All waste is intricately recycled, then removed from the island. Power is generated by wind turbines and photo voltaics. Because of its environmentally aggressive policies, Gioura is becoming much better known, nationally and internationally.

But this vision of what Gioura might become assumes an island identity that is active and aggressive. The “battle” is joined. But is this mindset nothing more than Promethean progress in a different guise? Where is abstinence and reflection? Where is humility in the face of Demeter's demands? Is active resistance the only alternative to passive ignorance?

I leave the group, find a shaded wall, and sink to the warm earth overrun with poppies. A cat appears, stretches her neck for a rub, and saunters off. Seduced by beauty, I can't help thinking that, at any moment, “an ethereal form, vague and undefined,

might swiftly pass me by.” Of course, there is also the chance that Zeus might discharge another lightning bolt into the midst of these beautiful young people unknowingly involved in this illicit affair.

What could be done on Gioura to make amends? To be clear but humble, to accept uncertainty yet look for allies? Is there not a time and place to allow for dreaming, for welcoming back the stories that might help us shape our lives in a more ethical way?

Is it time for the legacy of Prometheus to give way to his brother’s? Maybe Epimetheus was not “blundering and slow-witted”? Maybe, as his name suggests, he was the one who looked back and learned from the results of action—the one who refrained from folly that angered the Gods. His death, unlike his brother’s, is nowhere reported as a bloody, blazing glory. Maybe right up unto death, he lived in harmony with himself?

How would one foster a place for reflection? Such an effort would need to be free to the imagination and without dogma. In this sense, we need only allow the wealth of stories that are part of Greece’s history to have free domain. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow are equal in what they can teach us. Most reflective and religious practices work toward a meditative state where time is set free. But we need to give such mental space a recognizable identity. It needs to be placed.

You don’t have to be a poet like Cavafy to feel the spirit of the past living in the present over this island. For centuries, the Greeks have taken in the story of their Hellenic heritage. This presence is a gift to the Western world beyond politics or time. Greece is now emerging from the monoculture of the last 70 years, back into the light of cultural diversity, its ancient destiny. Surely it is time to allow the ancient imagination to reappear as well—to weave metaphors around the painful choices that must be made and to help us moderns understand the humility of doubt, the courage of inaction, the wisdom of restraint, and the beauty of abstention.

Could it be that right here on Gioura we could make a first step to call on these ancient Greek allies by abstaining collectively from the environmental destruction our illogical and poetically thin culture seems so addicted to?

As the poppies wink, I scribble down some laws for Gioura—*Nine Steps To Claim the Greek Island of Gioura as a Precinct Sacred to the Twelve Gods*:

1. Remove the island of Gioura and the three small islands of Prasso from the jurisdiction and control of Mt. Athos, the Greek Orthodox Church, and the national state of Greece.
2. Administer these islands as an International Trust in the European Parliament; this act would give the islands permanent identity as a sacred site dedicated to the *Dodekatheo*, the 12 Gods; the precinct would continue to operate within the rules of the surrounding Marine Park.
3. Relocate all Gioura goats to other islands within the marine Park.
4. Abandon all human residence on Gioura; no guards, no visitors, just walk away. Forever.
5. Remove all watercraft facilities, including berthing aids.
6. Forbid human access to Gioura; enforce by imposing severe penalties for trespass.
7. Initiate GPS global monitoring of the islands.
8. On the most western island of Prasso, promote an enclosure in honor of Demeter, allowing visitors to carry in one stone no heavier than five kilograms to be placed in the enclosure wall.
9. Allow no temple honoring Demeter to be built on Prasso before the year 2115.

I’m the last person left in the enclosure. With the day ending, the others descend the switchback path. Catching up, I look down on our boat as it sways suspended above the deep blue water, still ablaze with the last of the slanting sunlight.

I wonder if Demeter would be pleased to be honored on this island? Or is it too late for Zeus and the two remaining Cyclopes? Or are they still waiting, making ready one last lightning bolt?

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Fifth Letter from Far South

A Question of Action: The Grasstree Story

John Cameron

This essay is one of a series of “occasional letters” that retired environmental educator John Cameron will be writing from his home on Bruny Island, just off the southeastern coast of Tasmania, the island state to the south of mainland Australia. For earlier letters, see EAP, winter and fall 2008, spring 2009, and winter 2010. Jcameronvking@optusnet.com.au. © 2010 John Cameron.

During the four years Vicki and I have lived full-time at Blackstone, the implications of responsibility for 55 acres of land have steadily become apparent. In tandem with our deepening love for the place and its inhabitants, our removing sheep (that had grazed on the property before our ownership) and planting trees for wildlife habitat have meant learning the language and skills of practical land management.

When we purchased the land where the historical site of a “sod hut” is located, we also became custodians of an area of great intercultural significance. I have had to undertake broad physical interventions while trying to remain receptive to more subtle, smaller-scale signals from the more-than-human world. I’ve often felt woefully unprepared for the task.

I’m not alone in this dilemma. Our near neighbor Pete Hay, who is partly responsible for our being here [1], writes that “throughout the Australian bush, other people, motivated by a deep biophilia and armed with nothing more tangible than love, are undertaking bush stewardship roles for which they are pitifully inadequate”[2]. He argues that “deep empathetic identification with our home range is necessary,” but he also points out that this is not sufficient for custodianship. We also need practical scientific and land management skills but, in his experience, those skills can pull us in direc-



tions different from the stirrings of love of place, and quickly expose our personal shortcomings.

Goethe’s way of science offers one possibility because it brings together different modes of knowing the natural world: direct observation, imaginative understanding, intuitive insight, and action in the service of the phenomenon under investigation. In the 12 years I have been studying, teaching, and practicing Goethean science, I’ve been attracted to its function as *bildung*, the schooling of intuitive faculties in the practitioner, which enables greater sensitivity and more holistic awareness of the natural world. Scholars frequently refer to its effect as expanded perception and cognition. As Arthur Zajonc observes, “Goethe saw the possibility of developing new cognitive faculties whose emergence would bring the perception of novel and hitherto unseen coherences within nature” [3].

While I have occasionally had glimpses of what might be described as “hitherto unseen coherences” in the natural world here, I have no sense that I am developing new cognitive faculties. Nonetheless, it is enough to keep me pursuing my Goethean studies when I can, and to wonder what their practical consequences for daily life on Blackstone might be. Do they enable integration of practical science, love, and intuition? Or do I, as Pete Hay does, feel myself pulled in different directions?

I ponder these questions as the result of my latest cycle of Goethean scientific studies involving the grasstrees scattered through the open woodland around our house. Visitors often comment on the strong presence these plants have, and we feel especially blessed having them so close to our home. For some time, I have wanted to investigate them more deeply through the combination of traditional and Goethean scientific methods that I've been applying to the local rocks [4].

Xanthorrhoea australis, the grasstree, is a distinctive feature of Australian temperate zone woodlands. It has a palm-like woody trunk several meters tall topped by thousands of radial needle-like leaves nearly as tall as the tree. Every few years, a grasstree sends a "scape," a long flowering stalk, upward for another two or three meters.

To the non-scientist, these trees seem to be ancient, harking back to a primeval time before there were trees with leaves and branches. Indeed, the grasstree is old for its size—a visiting plant ecologist who specializes in *Xanthorrhoea* estimated that a three-meter-high plant near our house was roughly 500 years old. They are unlike any other plant in our woodland; their closest relative in appearance is a tree fern or small palm. The sharp, long, rhombic leaves give the plant great sensitivity to the wind. The slightest breeze sets them waving like antennae attuned to faint currents in the air.

Xanthorrhoea means "yellow-flowing," referring to its viscous resin, although our species, *X. australis*, has a dark blood-red resin visible on its trunk. It belongs to the older branch of flowering plants, the monocotyledons, and is one of the few monocots to have a woody trunk and treelike form. It grows in a helical pattern and, although its leaves are typically a meter long, the endpoint of each leaf marks the surface of a sphere perfectly. The plant is highly responsive to fire, burns easily, and is first to regenerate after a bushfire—a shock of green filaments springs from the charred trunk. It usually needs to be burned to produce a flowering stalk, but several of our plants have flowered in recent years

without a fire. Unlike most trees, it doesn't renew its surface after fire, so its trunk is a manuscript on which hundreds of years of fire history are written.

The grasstree was highly valued by Aboriginal people, who had many uses for it. The scape, being light and durable, makes an ideal fishing spear. The resin is an invaluable adhesive once used in spear making and repairing implements and containers. When soaked in water, the flowers produce a sweet drink. Because the flowers on the north side of the scape open each morning before those on the south, the grasstree can be used as a compass. For generations, *Xanthorrhoea* plants were referred to colloquially as "blackboys," presumably because of their human scale, blackened trunks, and leaves like long hair. This label is highly offensive to Aboriginal



people and has been largely discontinued. Occasionally, a visitor will say to us with a strange smile, "Oh, we're not allowed to call them blackboys any more, are we?" This thinly disguised racism sits uncomfortably with our knowledge of the history of the "sod hut" and past genocidal treatment of the Bruny Island Nuenone people [5].

On my trips to a small cove [6] near our house, I noticed a striking *Xanthorrhoea* tree just off the path. This grasstree was part of a cluster of six that created an enclosed space at the top of a rocky shelf tumbling down to the sea. The trunk texture immediately caught my eye. Successive, intense fires had left bulbous red blisters of resin erupting from the charcoaled skin. Whitish-grey patches of apparently dead wood showed through in places. Above the burnt areas, the helical growth pattern broke the trunk into small diamond-shaped sections that gave the appearance of snakeskin.

I embarked on the four stages of Goethean science outlined by Isis Brook [7]. In the first stage of close observation, I saw there were tiny blisters of resin scattered throughout the lower trunk, in between lumps of charcoal and tendrils of dried growth curling away from the bare patches of dead wood. It was as though the intensity of the fire had unraveled the fibers that previously had knit the

trunk together. It was a striking contrast with the vigor of the spiky leaves sticking straight up in the air for a meter in all directions. The dead leaves cascaded down over the trunk to the ground [drawing, right].

Returning after several weeks' absence, I was struck by the ruby light of the resin gleaming from blackened recesses. With open wounds, scars and blistered scabs, this tree was clearly a survivor. As I wrote this recognition in my notebook, I struggled with how to refer to the grasstree—was it “she” or “it”? There were problems with each pronoun. “She” was more suitable for the degree of intimacy and care I was beginning to feel for the plant, but the designation seemed anthropomorphic. I didn't want to reduce or sentimentalize the *Xanthorrhoea* into a woman with long hair since it was so ancient and clearly non-human. On the other hand, for such a strong presence, “it” seemed too objectifying and distancing. Despite my “scientist” reservations, I decided to use “she” when referring to this particular plant because the designation felt more in keeping with my experience.

Brook describes the second stage of the Goethean process as perceiving the time-life of the phenomenon. I realized I could not imagine the lifespan of the grasstree in isolation from two major features nearby—a dead casuarina tree (*Allocasuarina verticillata*) and the crumbling rock shelf that fell away immediately beyond the tree. The casuarinas, the hardiest of large Australian trees, also have long needle-like leaves, but they are soft and pendant, unlike the *Xanthorrhoea* spikes.

This grasstree's time-life was a tale of three characters, stretching back 300 years or more and probably projecting several centuries into the future. The casuarina tree sheltered the young *Xanthorrhoea*, giving protection from the worst of the storms that erode the cliff, which originally was no doubt many meters seaward. At some point probably not that long ago, a devastating fire had swept through the area, blackening the vegetation. The grasstree survived, sending out new shoots, but the casuarina, its roots exposed from the cliff erosion, did not.

During a storm, this tree fell over the grasstree, pinning one of her two main branches. The *Xanthorrhoea* had accommodated this setback and loss of shelter, growing one limb out horizontally and dividing off another vertical branch to establish her current situation. In the future, gravity and the increasingly exposed position will take their toll as the shoreline retreats farther inland and weakens her roots. She will eventually succumb. The only remaining mark of her presence will be a small resistant cone that is the tree's hard core.

It took 15 drawings for me to record the tree's imagined life and demise. It was salutary to note Vicki's and my arrival in the ninth drawing and likely departure in the tenth. At first I saw our presence here as having no impact on the *Xanthorrhoea*'s life story, but then I noticed a small casuarina tree in its plastic tree guard just to the south of the fallen casuarina. Long before I had paid any attention to this particular grasstree, I had planted several dozen young casuarinas along the shoreline to slow the rate of coastal erosion and create protection for subsequent eucalypt plantings. Growth in these exposed conditions has been slow, but if all goes well, this young tree will serve as shelter for the grasstree in her old age, even as she carries the remains of the old casuarina lying across her branch.

The third stage of Goethean science is the most complex because it requires one to “allow the thing to express itself through the observer” [8]. The form of this expression is often called “the gesture,” and one means of discovery is drawing quick sketches repeatedly for many days until something essential about the phenomenon reveals itself, either on the page or from the physical act of repetitive drawing. I found this process of drawing the *Xanthorrhoea* invigorating. The slender leaves leapt off the page with vitality, while drawing the falling “hair” of the dead leaves required long flowing motions of the wrist. In turn, the intricacy of the different textures of the trunk needed short broken jotting movements [drawing, next page].

Arriving at the gesture involves shifting the locus of perception within the observer. In the first



stage, one uses the eyes and visual memory directly; in the second stage, the “screen” of visual imagination behind the eyes. Brook describes the third stage as “heartfelt getting to know,” which implies a response to the phenomenon that is deeper within one’s body and emotions.

At this point, I took up Brook’s suggestion that poetry can be helpful in the third stage of Goethean science. I wrote:

Surging from your crown in splendor
Your leaves constantly pulsing
Alive to the slightest of breezes
Vigor erupts from your charred core
Burnt down to the bones
Blistered and bleeding and scarred
Stories of fire written on your body

So alien with rhombic reptilian scales
Yet so human with your hair hanging down
To the ground in intimate space
Life springing from your wounds
Earth and fire becoming air

While I was writing this description, the words of a Bruce Chapman song came to mind: “The suddenly compact universe/Of skin and breath and hair.” To take in the whole of the *Xanthorrhoea* plant, I’d been sitting back three or four meters. From that distance, I was aware of the expanse of shoreline behind the grasstree, the wind ruffling the surface of the Channel waters, and Mount Wellington rising 4000 feet on the far horizon. Now I was drawn to sit much closer, into the enclosure of the fallen leaves, and the universe did indeed become suddenly compact. There was an odd juxtaposition between the intimacy of the space created by the “hair” hanging to the ground, the breath of the breeze, and the harshness of the snake-like “skin” seared black.

From within the fibrous cave beneath the grasstree, I could imagine the movement of the plant drawing nutrients from the earth upward, meeting fire and producing such delicate elongated leaves



that seemed to be merging with the air. This motion seemed to bring me closer to a sense of what the *gesture* of the grasstree might be.

For the next four months, we had unusually hot dry winds and virtually no rain in the height of summer. I was occupied with watering the thousands of young native trees we had planted in previous years. When I was finally able to return to the *Xanthorrhoea*, I was shocked at what I saw. Some of her top green leaves had turned yellow and a few had died. The ends of the leaves were crisped from the heat. Although *Xanthorrhoea australis* is regarded as a drought-tolerant species, this plant was clearly suffering. I was faced with the possibility that she might perish or, at the very least, that her hundreds of years of future life would be curtailed, especially in view of predictions that climate change will likely bring increasingly hotter and drier summers to eastern Australia.

I also felt dismay. “Oh, no, not again, not here,” I thought. A year and a half ago, we had been perplexed when three of the healthier *Xanthorrhoea* plants just below our water tank had died within weeks. We took samples to a scientist in a government laboratory in Hobart. A fortnight later he gave us the bad news that our plants had been infected with *Phytophthora cinnamomi*.

Phytophthora, from the Greek meaning “plant destroyer,” belongs to a family of organisms including those that caused the Irish potato blight and are currently ravaging oaks and chestnut trees in North America. It is an ancient life form similar to fungi but belongs to a different kingdom, more akin to algae. Like plants, its cell walls are made of cellulose, whereas fungi have walls of chitin, the substance that makes up the outer skeletons of insects and crabs. *Phytophthora cinnamomi* spreads most rapidly through human disturbance of the soil, such as excavation and road building, and is killing native vegetation in various parts of southern Australia. It requires moist soil to be active, but its damage occurs in dry periods when plants are drought-stressed; they can’t absorb enough water through their damaged roots. There is no effective way to control *Phytophthora cinnamomi* and grasstrees are particularly vulnerable [9].

Vicki and I felt dismayed at the prospect that something we had inadvertently done had caused the death of some of our beloved grasstrees, and anxiously looked back at any activities that might have disturbed the soil. Two visiting friends with botanical training were able to trace the likely cause to excavation by the previous owners to install a water tank. The friends pointed out that now *Phytophthora* was in the soil, further deaths downslope from the tank were likely to occur. Although we were spared the guilt of having caused the death of these plants, we now had the responsibility of averting further damage by diverting water flows and minimizing activity and disturbance in the area. It was yet another reminder of how fragile the native vegetation on our land was. We vowed not to bring in any “foreign” soil and to keep disturbances to a minimum.

The fourth stage of Goethean science is sometimes described as “being one with the object” and involves practical action or being of service to the phenomenon under study. After sitting on the parched ground in front of the grasstree asking how I could help, I noticed my water bottle alongside my sketchbook, charcoal, and notebook. The least I could do was to share my water with the plant whose leaves were curling further in the drought. The water didn’t penetrate the soil unless I poured very slowly, paying closer attention to where it was seeping onto the roots. On my next visits, I brought a bucket of water, and I’ve felt very tenderly toward the grasstree as I’ve made my offering.

In her commentary on the fourth stage, Brook observes that “the moral implication of being empowered to act by having an intimate knowledge of another being is often experienced as an awesome responsibility” [10]. As I contemplate what action flows from my closer connection with the *Xanthorrhoea* plant, I am painfully aware of the damage that has been done by previous human actions. It now seems likely that this tree was so badly affected by the drought because it, too, has been infected by *Phytophthora*. Because it is some distance across a small gully from our water tank and not downstream, it must have been infected by some other previous human disturbance. A study of threatened species on Bruny Island six years ago identified

sporadic outbreaks of *Phytophthora* in our local area; thus, its presence on our land might date back further than I had originally realized [11].

As a result of these Goethean studies to date, I am left with greater sensitivity to this particular grasstree and the species in general. Late last year, we took a hike farther south on Bruny Island and encountered a dense grove of grasstrees beneath a forest canopy. There were hundreds of *Xanthorrhoea* taller than ourselves, and our little band of walkers fell into silence as we entered. It felt like hallowed ground. As the months go by, we see a few more *Xanthorrhoea* starting to die, with no discernible pattern. Clearly, there is more happening in the soil than I can make sense of at the moment. I feel the “awesome responsibility” that Brook describes but as yet have no clear reading from the fourth stage of my studies on how to discharge that duty. I can only continue to hold open the question of how I might be of service to these remarkable plants and seek to do no further harm.

In my feelings of inadequacy about how to act, I think of Peter Hay, who laments that “concerning the embattled coastal woodland over which I hold a steward’s charge, I really haven’t a clue” [12]. The problem is that, without some form of active management involving physical invention and fire, his woodland will suffer inevitable ecological decline. He suffers, however, from a “knowledge deficit” that runs the gamut from plant identification to practical skills. As a poet and philosopher, he has—and I can vouch for this—a “deep empathetic identification” with his beloved bushland. Unfortunately, that is more of an obstacle than an aid in his ability to take any concerted physical action.

As Hay observes, we are not alone with this problem, and there are no simple prescriptions. How to proceed? Can Goethean science point the way into the unknown? Arthur Zajonc observes that “If we would create the capacities for understanding our future, we must dwell precisely in the tensions, paradoxes and annoying anomalies of our time.... On nearly every front, we are called to reimagine the world we inhabit” [13]. A similar theme is highlighted by John Shotter: “To many, there are only two categories of difficulty facing us in the world: problems which can eventually be solved and mys-

teries which cannot. But what Goethe and the late Wittgenstein show us is that there is a third category: mysteries that we can enter into and begin to find our ‘way around’ inside of” [14].

What does this mean in practice? If I am to dwell in the contradictions and tensions of our current predicament, I must be patient and perseverant, resisting the urge to view stewardship of the land either as a problem to be solved managerially or as a fathomless conundrum that is beyond me, an occasion to relinquish accountability. If I enter into the mystery of a responsibility for which I am inadequate, holding intuition, knowledge and love that might well be incompatible with each other, how can I find my way around?

One instrument for this journey that is both interior and exterior is suggested by Zajonc’s phrase “to reimagine the world we inhabit.” I referred in my second letter to “imagination of the real,” the ability to imaginatively enter what presents itself, whether it is the external form of a plant or the question of what action to take. Another guide is what Shotter calls “witness thinking,” which I understand to be the capacity to think *with* the grass-tree, the heron, or the shore’s rock formations, rather than thinking *about* them from the outside. When I attempted to do this with the rocks, I intuited the injunction to be more receptive, to allow myself to be worked upon by the elements. Now with the grasstree, as I dwell in the paradox of her alien-ness and human qualities, it seems that I’m being called upon to be active as well as receptive, even though every human action so far seems to have been detrimental to the *Xanthorrhoea*.

“Witness thinking” leads to “witness action”—the capability to be actively receptive and receptively active. I have experienced how heightened sensitivity can bring greater awareness of suffering and reluctance to act, but these qualities must be tempered. The toughness and alien-ness of the grasstree did not allow me to turn sensitization into sentimentality or anthropomorphism. The Goetheans, I take it, are telling me that it is all right to feel uncertain, not up to the job, pulled in different directions. These feelings indeed should be embraced as part of the way forward (along with the obvious

step of educating oneself as much as possible scientifically, technically, and practically).

Ultimately the mystery may not be so much about what’s happening to the grasstrees or even the complexity of my response to them. The relationship itself is the enigma. I sense that there is some kind of liminal space between the grasstree and me in which a different kind of knowing is possible in the same way Vicki knew that the heron had summoned us here to this island for a reason. Similarly, when I sat beside the “sod hut,” I knew we should bid to buy Blackstone. This knowing goes beyond the shortcomings of personality, beyond the prescriptions of land management, and seems to originate in the relationship with the more-than-human world pointed to by Goethean science. Difficult though this may seem as a way to move forward, I do know that on no account should I, or Pete Hay, or any of the ill-equipped land stewards out there, give up. There is too much at stake.

Notes

1. As described in “First Letter from Far South,” Pete Hay and a heron originally brought us to Blackstone Bay.
2. P. Hay (2002), “The Red Steer at Rat Bay,” *Vandiemonian Essays* (Hobart, Tasmania: Walleah Press), p. 145.
3. A. Zajonc (1998), “Light and Cognition,” in D. Seamon & A. Zajonc, eds., *Goethe’s Way of Science* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), p. 312.
4. See “Second Letter from Far South.”
5. See “Third Letter from Far South” for that history.
6. As described in “Second Letter from Far South.”
7. I. Brook (1998), “Goethean Science as a Way to Read Landscape,” *Landscape Research* 23 (1).
8. Brook, p. 56; also see my 1998 article, “Place, Goethe and Phenomenology: A Theoretic Journey,” *Janus Head* 8 (1) [special issue on Goethean science].
9. Wikipedia article on *Phytophthora*, accessed 15/2/09. I’m struck by the features shared by *Phytophthora* and *Xanthorrhoea*: they are both ancient and more primitive transitional life forms (between fungi and algae for *Phytophthora*; between grass and trees for *Xanthorrhoea*). They have coexisted in Australia for millions of years; perhaps the advent of human activity has tipped the balance in favor of *Phytophthora*.
10. Brook, p. 57.
11. T. Cochran (2003), *Threatened Species, Bruny Island and You* (Hobart, Tasmania: Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment), p. 144.
12. Hay, p. 140.
13. Zajonc, p. 313.
14. J. Shotter (1998), “Goethe and the Refiguring of Intellectual Inquiry,” *Janus Head* 8 (1), p. 15.