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Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology

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This issue of *EAP* begins our 17th year. We thank the 73 readers who have renewed their subscriptions and include reminders for “delinquents.”

We include two feature essays this issue, the first of which, by philosopher Dylan Trigg, explores the relationship between memory and place, using the coffee-house chain Starbucks as a context for discussion. Second, psychologist Chris Aanstoos examines phenomenologically the process of designing his own “dream house” in a Georgia forest.

These two essays—one conceptual and philosophical, the other experiential and grounded in firsthand will and need—illustrate the wide range of phenomenological perspectives and methods.

Phenomenology Conferences

The annual meetings of the **Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy** (SPEP) and the **Society for Phenomenology and the Human Sciences** (SPHS) will be held 12-15 October 2006 in Philadelphia. The meetings are sponsored by Villanova University. www.spep.org. In conjunction with SPEP and HPHS, the annual meeting of the **International Association for Environmental Philosophy** (IAEP) will be held 14-16 October. Contact: scameron@lmu.edu.

IAEP Session on “Nature of Order”

During the 2005 business meeting at last year’s IAEP conference in Salt Lake City, officers proposed that IAEP (see above), in conjunction with other “environmental” groups, would co-sponsor paper sessions all day Monday, 16 October.

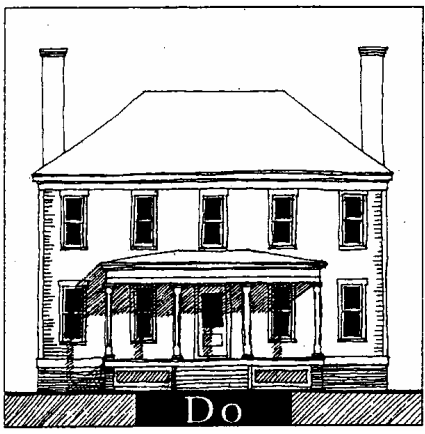
Representing *EAP*, David Seamon and Canadian graduate student Tim Quick have agreed to organize a double session on architect Christopher Alexander’s four-volume *The Nature of Order*, which we have highlighted regularly in *EAP*. Presentation topics may focus on any aspect of *Order*, whether more conceptual and philosophical or more design-oriented and related to architectural practice.

If any *EAP* readers would like to present a paper in these special sessions, please contact David Seamon as soon as possible: triad@ksu.edu.

Below: Drawings from Stephen A. Mouzon’s *Traditional Construction Patterns*, a book that identifies central elements that make good traditional architecture—“patterns,” as Mouzon calls them (see p. 4).

These drawings refer to Mouzon’s first pattern, *simplicity of massing*: “The root of nearly all traditional architectural massing is simplicity. Go back to the buildings that are the foundation of almost any style, and you will find a simple volume or an assembly of simple volumes.”

In regard to the two houses shown here, Mouzon says: “Don’t use complicated forms.... [Instead], keep massing simple. Composing a house of one or a few simple boxes saves tremendous amounts of money for more effective things like proper porch detailing, back porches, garden walls, frontage fences, [and] pergolas...that help the owners enjoy inhabiting all of their property.”



Donors, 2006

We are grateful to the following readers who have contributed more than the base subscription for 2006. As always, we could not continue without your generous support, and we thank you all!

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Items of Interest

The 25th annual **International Human Sciences conference** will be held 3-6 August 2006 at the John F. Kennedy University in Pleasant Hills, California. The conference theme is “The Multicultural Future of Qualitative Research,” though all proposal topics will be considered.

The theme description reads in part: “An inherent problem of research in the human sciences is understanding human beings with their infinite complexity and diversity in ways that can somehow yield knowledge that is to some degree generalizable without being reductionistic. This challenge of honoring diversity while also organizing around some necessary commonality is an increasingly important issue in most, if not all, societies.”

This group has continued to be interested in environmental and architectural aspects of human life, and EAP readers are encouraged to participate. Paper abstracts are due 1 March and should be

submitted to conference organizer Barbro Giorgi at bggiorgi@jfkku.edu. For the current IHS newsletter, go to: www.seattleu.edu/artsci/psychology/ihsr-05.htm.

The 24th annual symposium of the **Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center** will focus on “Paul Ricoeur and Phenomenology” and be held 17-18 March at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. Keynote speakers include Mory Joy, David Pel-lauer, Lenore Langsdorf, and Peter Kemp. Contact: Dan Martino, Director, Simon Silverman Phenomenology Center, at: martino@duq.edu.

The conference, “**Senses of Place: Exploring Concepts and Expressions of Place through Different Senses and Lenses,**” will be held in Hobart, Tasmania, 6-8 April 2006 and is co-sponsored by the University of Hobart’s Place Research Network. www.utas.edu.au/placenet/senses.

The conference **Writing on the Land: John Burroughs and His Legacy**, will be held 11-15 June 2006 at the State University of New York at Oneonta. The focus is on nature writers who, like Catskill regionalist John Burroughs, are linked closely to a particular landscape or place. Topics of interest include: regional novelists, literary environmentalists, and sense of place in literature. Abstracts are due by March 30. Contact Prof. Daniel Payne at: paynedg@oneonta.edu.

The **Nature Institute** will sponsor programs and seminars on Goethean science this spring and summer, including a full-time immersion course, 2 April-June 16. www.natureinstitute.org.

News from Readers

Sean M. Conrey is currently a Ph.D candidate in rhetoric and composition at Purdue University. He is working on a dissertation entitled “Coming to Terms with Place: A Phenomenological Technique of Rhetorical Placemaking.” This work demonstrates how “coming to terms” with the places in which we live is a crucial aspect of settling into place. Conrey seeks to derive a rhetorical technique for helping this “coming to terms” happen. conreys@purdue.edu.

Writer and artist **Christine Rhone** sends the following from London: “The House of Commons was the setting for the recent presentation of a prestigious Green Apple Environment Award to *Earthdome*, a residential development in the London suburb of Norbury and the first to have geothermal hot water and heating. Earthdome is a set of four apartments in two new semi-detached houses, located in a street of similar houses designed in the 1930s.

“The street has a comfortable feeling about it, relaxed and leafy. Earthdome is different from the other houses in the street, but it does not jar. A casual passerby might not even notice anything special about it. Yes, here the windows are bigger than in the other houses, but not so much that they call attention to themselves. Here the decorative tiles on the façade are almost the same, only slightly rearranged to accord with the proportions of the Golden Section of sacred geometry. Here the rendering of the exterior looks rather similar, but it is mixed with volcanic ash and minerals, and for more than practical reasons. The volcanic elements symbolize the father covering and protecting the mother and home.

“Earthdome features geothermal heating, which is the most energy efficient, environmentally clean and cost-effective. Heat is moved from 40 feet below the Earth’s surface into the building through a system of pipes and pumps.

“All hot water is heated geothermally. Bathtubs are encased in resins blended with quartz crystal. Sinks and toilets are covered with a subtle silver glaze, enhancing the properties of water. All skirting and most angles are rounded. Cornices help modulate the sound properties of spaces. Staircases spiral up and down in a series of recyclable units. French doors open wide for easy changes of air.

“Floors are covered with porcelain tiles containing quartz. Rugs soften under footsteps rather than dust-clinging carpets. Electrical wiring is shielded. Much of the lighting has on-off sensors for energy efficiency. The whole electrical field around beds can be completely switched off for sounder sleep. And up in the topmost bedrooms, blue floor lighting suggests a mood of peace, while the skylights give views of the horizon and the clouds.

“A homecoming is a return from chaos to cosmos, a recognition and an embrace of the center of a universe. Here home is imagined as the metaphorical product of the fertilizing male volcano and the fruitful female earth. The center of a home is the hearth, as circle of fire or point of flame. A significant shift in orientation occurs in Earthdome, since the notional hearth, as central source of ambient warmth and cooking heat, is in the crust of the Earth itself.

“Sometimes it takes only a small shift to reorient one’s whole relationship to home and through home to the universe. From the outside, to the casual passerby on the street, Earthdome looks good, but it does not shout, “Hey, look at me, I’m really different!” It is, quite simply, the house next door to a boyhood home, but radically transformed from the inside out—something like a man coming back wearing the same coat he left home in, many years ago.” rhonechristine@hotmail.com.

Fran Violich

Francis Violich, professor emeritus in city and regional planning and in landscape architecture at the University of California, Berkeley, died 21 August 2005, of natural causes at his home in Berkeley. He was 94.

Since *EAP* was founded in 1990, Violich was one of its staunchest supporters (see his “Dalmatia, Urban Identity and the War, 1991—1993,” in the fall 1993 issue). We will miss his encouragement, networking, and creative insights in recognizing the considerable contribution that phenomenological understanding can offer urban place making.

Memorial contributions can be made to the Francis Violich Dalmatian Fellowship Fund. c/o UC Berkeley’s Department of City and Regional Planning, 228 Wurster Hall, Berkeley, Calif. 94720.

Citations Received

Chris Allen, 2004. Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology and the Body-in-Space: Encounters of Visually Impaired Children, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 22: 719-35.

This sociologist develops “a phenomenology of visually impaired childrens’ everyday body-in-space encounters with

their home and urban environments.” A major focus is “the various and creative ways in which visually impaired children routinely exercise agency within their home and urban environments.”

Bruce V. Foltz & Robert Frodeman, eds., 2004. *Rethinking Nature: Essays in Environmental Philosophy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

This collection of articles “brings the voices of leading Continental philosophers into discussion about what is emerging as one of our most pressing and timely concerns—the environmental crisis facing our planet.” Contributors include David Abram, Robert Mugerauer, and Ingrid Leman Stefanovic.

Trish Glazebrook, 2003. Art or Nature: Aristotle, Restoration Ecology, and Flowforms, *Ethics & the Environment*, 8, (1): 1-36.

Using the example of sculptor John Wilkes’ flowforms, this philosopher argues that “ecologically-minded art can demonstrate how production of artifacts need not affirm a logic of domination, but rather can open a space for an alternative conception of the human relation to nature.”

Tom Mels, ed., 2004. *Reanimating Places: A Geography of Rhythms*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Dedicated to geographer Anne Buttimer, this collection of 14 articles focuses on the links among lived experience, time, space, and place. Editor Mels provides an introduction on the “Lineages of a Geography of Rhythm,” and contributors include: Yi-Fu Tuan (“Sense of Place: Its Relationship to Self and Time”); David Ley (“The Stranger’s Lifeworld”); Edward Relph (“Temporality and the Rhythms of Sustainable Landscapes”); Gunnar Olsson (Placing the Holy”); Robert Sack (“Place-Making and Time”); and David Seamon (“Grasping the Dynamism of Urban Place: Contributions from the Work of Christopher Alexander, Bill Hillier, and Daniel Kemmis”).

Joy Monice Malnar & Frank Vodvarka, 2004. *Sensory Design*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

These authors argue that “a better understanding and appreciation of all our senses can contribute to a new typology for the design of significant spaces, one that would sharply contrast with the formal model that dominates architectural practice today.” The result is said to be “a new philosophy of design that celebrates our sensuous occupation of the built environment and creates more humane design.”

Stephen Mouzon, 2005. *Traditional Construction Patterns*. NY: McGraw-Hill.

This architect “explains, in layman’s terms, the vague sense of unease we’ve all had with traditional architecture done incorrectly... and provides the tools for doing it right again.” Mouzon’s main tool is a set of 108 “patterns” illustrated as Do’s and Don’t’s, for example, “simplicity of massing” (no. 1) which argues that a building should be shaped as “a simple volume or an assembly of simple volumes”; or “symmetry of the face” (no. 4), which says that “all traditional architecture reflects the bilateral symmetry of the human face in some way at the entry of the building.” Includes drawings and well-chosen photographs; see the examples on p. 1.

Juhani Pallasmaa, 2005. *Encounters: Architectural Essays*. Helsinki: Rakennustieto.

Twenty-five reprinted articles and book chapters all broadly on “the phenomenology of architecture and architectural experience,” written over the last 25 years by Finnish architect and architectural writer Juhani Pallasmaa. Includes such important essays as “Stairways of the Mind,” “Identity, Intimacy, and Domicile,” “Hapticity and Time,” and “The Rooms of Memory: Architecture in Painting.” Includes a 2004 interview with Pallasmaa, conducted by architect Peter MacKeith. A central text for “architectural phenomenology.”

Christopher J. Preston, 2003. *Grounding Knowledge: Environmental Philosophy, Epistemology, and Place* Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press.

This philosopher argues that “the physical realities of the environments in which beliefs are formed are relevant to the ways people know.” He seeks to demonstrate that “the very cognitive processes with which we contemplate our place in the world are themselves *derived from* and *wedded to* our physical locatedness. This claim entails that part of the feeling of attachment to place is quite literally an attachment of a portion of our cognitive architecture to the lands we inhabit.”

Nikos A. Salingoaros, 2004. *Anti-Architecture and Deconstruction*. Germany: Umbau-Verlag.

A scathing, often “over-the-top,” attack of deconstructivist architecture, and thoughts about design alternatives, mostly focused on the work of Christopher Alexander. Many useful ideas but marred by a frequent mean-spiritedness that interferes with central insights.

Memories in Site: Toward a Renewed Understanding of Starbucks

Dylan Trigg

Trigg is a research student at the University of Sussex. He is interested in marginal spaces such as hotel lobbies, airports and supermarkets. He has also written on the aesthetics of decay and modern ruins. His current research explores the idea of the built environment as a testimony to events of past destruction. His essay here is part of a broader work that examines the role that homogenous 'sites' play in contributing to a memory-based theory of personal identity. © 2006 Dylan Trigg. www.dylantrigg.com; dylantrigg@hotmail.com.

How does space contain memories? The question is hampered in that we lack a criterion that enables us to ascertain where past memories end and unmediated experience begins. Pure experience eludes as the imagination creates spatial memories devoid of factual grounding.

Despite this apparent conflation between forms of recollection, remembering an event necessarily implicates the context in which that memory took place. A placeless memory, as Edward Casey (1987a pp. 183-84) notes, not only disallows memory to be situated accurately; it also prevents disorientation with regard to that memory.

Casey's analysis of 'place memory' is insightful and contentious. As with Gaston Bachelard, memorable space presupposes being intimate. This is a claim that allows Casey to render place "*congealed scenes*" for memory. As such, fulfilling Aristotle's original description of place as "*the innermost motionless boundary of what contains*," Casey (p. 184) is able to posit an idea of place as a place-holder of memories, so securing spatial memories.

In the present essay, I wish to contest Casey's analysis of place memory. While intimate place is often regarded as archetypal in its containment of memory, the radical dichotomy between place and non-place (principally in the form of 'site') means that any such ambiguity between the two has been neglected. Here, I wish to address this neglect and in the process posit the memorable power of site.

We can begin by examining how Casey grounds his account of place memory. In this way, an opening is provided to ascertain if spatial memories are as secure as originally thought. Echoing Bachelard's, Casey's account of memory is framed by a mistrust of temporal-centrism. Understanding time without reference to what is represented by time means there is no contrast against which the measure of passing can be established.

"It is," Casey writes in relation to the body, "only when we notice discrepancies between such states that we begin to infer the passage of time..." (p. 182). The simple 'pastness' of memory fails to acknowledge its entirety. Casey's reply to this incompleteness is to consider how embodied memory necessarily involves particularization:

To be embodied is *ipso facto* to assume a particular perspective and position... it is to occupy a portion of space from out of which we undergo given experiences and remember them. To be disembodied is not only to be deprived of place, unplaced; it is to be denied the basic stance on which every experience and its memory depend (*ibid.*).

This is an important passage that grounds Casey's account. Memory necessarily individuates events from other events by being specific. Thus, recollection suspends other events selectively to allow a particular memory to transpire.

The specificity of this recollection means that abstraction is negated. Remembering is seldom as

vague as to evade a set of defined circumstances. But this is not the case: even the most formless memories submit to the category of being specific, and an event which is specific necessarily defines itself in time *and* space: “As embodied existence opens onto place; indeed takes *place in place* and nowhere else, so our memory of what we experience in place is likewise place-specific” (p. 182).

The ‘nowhere else’ of Casey’s remark reaffirms the exclusive nature of memory and experience. Freud’s comment that “the same space cannot have two different contents” is repeated in Casey’s metaphysics of spatial memory where the particularization of memory instigates its unique embodiment.

Unfortunately for Casey, history has lost sight of the way that place contains our memories. Methods for remembrance have deviated from the Greek art of memory. The implications for this are more than a mere loss of tradition. In addition to being subjugated by a concentration on time, place has also been shadowed by a preoccupation with what Casey terms ‘site’: “that is, place as leveled down to metrically determinate dimensions” (p. 182). This division between place and site is essential, not least in relation to memory-based theories of personal identity. As such, it warrants careful examination.

Much has changed,” writes Casey with some regret, “since the early Pythagorean Archytas declared that place is ‘the first of all beings, since everything that exists is in a place and cannot exist without a place’” (p. 184).

Casey’s historical reading of place’s loss of emplacement is framed by a geometrization of space and place that occurred during the 17th century. Situating Greek thought against modern thought (Newtown, Descartes, and Bernoulli), Casey suggests that geometrical space “was conceived as continuous extension in length, breadth, and width and, thus, as mappable by the three-dimensional coordinate system of rational geometry” (ibid.). As a result of this transition, place loses its “inhomogeneous and anisotropic qualities” and instead “is conceived as sheer spatial site” (p. 185).

Site, for Casey, is thus open. Against Aristotle’s definition of place as “*the innermost motionless*

boundary of what contains” (ibid.), the relationship between a site and what occupies that site is detached, abstract and entirely devoid of intimacy. The effects of this are that as a container of memories, site falters. The “essentially empty” quality of the site undermines any claim to being memorable: “A site possesses no points of attachment onto which to hang our memories, much less to retrieve them” (p. 184).

In contrast, place, “full of protuberant features and forceful vectors” (p. 186), is distinct and able to facilitate memorability. Through containing memories, place preserves them: “To be in a place is to be sheltered and sustained by its containing boundary; it is to be held within this boundary rather than to be *dispersed* by an expanding horizon of time or to be *exposed indifferently in space*” (ibid.).

With the risk of dispersion present, we have been united with Bachelard. Indeed, at stake in both Casey and Bachelard are several assumptions that both bind and ground their theories simultaneously. Though phrased differently in Bachelard, the distinction between site and place is elemental for both thinkers.

In both cases, we observe a masterful working of space and place in which intimacy and protection are essential in the construction of memorable place. Whereas Casey opposes place and site, Bachelard forges a radical (and dialectical) distinction between inside and outside through which the universe is said to press down upon the interiority of the home.

For Casey, site has a negative quality in that indifference, emptiness, and outright geometrization suppress the power of place. In Bachelardian terms, such attributes contribute to the dispersion of the potential dweller. Bachelard (1964, p. 47) writes: “A house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space.” The alignment of geometrical space with Casey’s site affirms the lack of shelter between the two. Both expand so that memories disperse as the absence of place neglects to contain them.

Let us summarize: through lacking “variegations,” site offers no possibility of containing memories. The lack of distinction in the site—literal

or otherwise—means that nothing in particular stands out. Indeed, site is only transformed into a place through the conferment of a distinctive thing upon it, such as a house (1987a, p. 186). The presence of a house carves particularity from the homogenous and undefined. This is what we mean by the term ‘intimacy’. Lived experience, so important to both Casey and Bachelard, remedies the vacuity of the site by enforcing a narrative upon it.

In turn, place becomes animated through becoming particular. A particular place has a discernable identity. Thus, the trust we have in the continuous familiarity of a place means that indifference gives way to idiosyncrasy and character. Indeed, character and intimacy, if not synonymous with one another, remain inextricably bound.

We now must examine Casey’s argument critically. In the first instance, intimate space is said to be conducive to the emplacement of memory, since intimacy distinguishes itself from the supposed homogeneity of the site. Yet, this simple dichotomy between the place that contains and the site that disperses precludes an ambiguity between the two.

Indeed, in a later essay, Casey goes so far as to describe site rather self-consciously as the “anti-place dancing on the abyss of no-place” (1997, pp. 267-96). Thus, that site itself might afford a sense of intimacy is not possible in accordance with Bachelard and Casey’s logic.

But what if one considers the role that site plays in securing intimacy rather than undermining it? It is often said that certain places are all the same. One of the unashamedly non-distinguishing features of a place (if the term can be used in an informal sense) like Starbucks is that it remains the same despite its spatial location. Orientation and continuity are afforded in a foreign city by knowing what qualities imbue the coffee house in advance. Against the backdrop of unfamiliarity, familiarity is conceived as the indissoluble motifs and identical pastel colors of Starbucks are encountered.

In such a situation, we can pretend to be anywhere while simultaneously being somewhere. So long as the outside remains excluded, Starbucks aspires to universality in its interior spatiality.

Avoiding an indeterminate idiosyncrasy that would harbor a discontinuity between individual stores (though being careful not to sacrifice the impression of being inviting and moreover localized),¹ Starbucks thus falls from a particularized distinctiveness and fulfils Casey’s definition of site as “having no internal differentiations with respect to material constitution” and so “leveled down to the point of being definable solely in terms of distances between ‘positions’ which are established on its surface and which exist strictly in relation to one another” (1987a, p. 185).

It is not “distinct potencies” that individuates one Starbucks from another but rather the geometrical space that exists between them. That they are often confused with one another only emphasizes their essential vacuity and so reinforces their presence, not as a place, but as a site.

Starbucks exemplifies a location that outwardly reveals a lack of identity and so conforms to the category of site. Negative qualities associated with Starbucks are invariably bound to its apparent indifference as to what it contains at any given moment. “To be in place is to be sheltered and sustained by its containing boundary” (p. 186), writes Casey.

In Starbucks, shelter appears *prima facie* discounted by the absence of *particular* containment. Instead, one becomes intuitively aware of a location that undergoes (and aspires to) the mere semblance of containment.

In turn, this sense of ‘obligated inclusion’ is likely to have the opposite effect—i.e., to invoke repulsion. Nevertheless, there is a risk that this outright dichotomy between repulsion and attraction will harvest a partial perspective. As a result, the possibility of the site being both memorable and intimate is apparently lost.

Arguably, the resistance against regarding a site as being memorable owes its origin to the myth of Simonides. According to Yates’ account, a memorable place tends to be both varied and sequentially related. Arranging a ‘loci’ in a defined order, says Yates (1966, pp. 22-23), enables memory to be retrieved with greater ease.

Inversely, a lack of spatial variation is likely to breed confusion and forgetfulness. In a labyrinth,

very little is remembered, and disorientation is gained as one dead end meets another. Further, a place that fails to house obvious distinctions will lose sequentiality and instead promote uniformity.

That uniformity lessens the potential for memorability is logical insofar as memorable place relies on “distinct potencies” to preserve memory. A multiplicity of diverse attributes might well furnish a place with the means to house memory. Bachelard (1964, p. 8) writes: “if the house is a bit elaborate... our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated.”

This does not entail, however, that an indistinct location is unmemorable and so devoid of intimacy. On the contrary: what it implies is that memorability relies not on “distinct potencies” determined by the natural unfolding of lived experience but rather by the cultivated and essentially *contrived* appearance of lived experience.

Thus, distinct particularization suffers a loss of actuality and instead is replaced by standardization and a sense of either implied or otherwise unlived experience. In turn, it is the cultivation itself, being essentially vacuous, which provides a platform for new memories to be conceived. Accordingly, the object of cultivation acquires a depth despite its apparent lack of intended temporal depth. In effect, it is a *meta-depth*.

Phenomenologically, this affirmation of the site’s potential for intimacy needs to be distinguished from what might be called a post-modern ironization of site. A kitsch interaction with a location, confining itself to a celebration of surface appraisal alone, fails to countenance the possibility of that location’s becoming anything more than mere diversion. Against the threat of a supposedly insipid form, kitsch appears to disarm standardization by ironically affirming it.

Hence: that which threatens to supplant the particularity of place is willed to emerge preemptively. As such, it is a pernicious strategy that evinces a passive form of aggressive resistance against site in the hope that the ‘siteness’ of the site will be overthrown by an ironic domestication of it.²

The idea that site is limited by a homogenous lack of depth might well explain the inherent nega-

tivity that is often conferred upon it. Part of the resistance felt by those who refuse to frequent Starbucks often involves the belief that it strives to the status of a traditional (where traditional usually means ‘bohemian’) coffee house but instead emerges as a sterilized artifice. The employment of implicitly organic features such as ethnic art, earthy colors, recycled napkins, and dark laminated floorboards, rather than mirror the earthly origins of the coffee bean, only emphasizes this tension between particularity and mass-produced affectation.

Even if this claim is correct—and its validity is largely extraneous here—then the standardization of a place does not serve to undermine the memories that evade that homogeneity. As Casey (1987, p. 190) suggests, “it is just one more lot to look at, and a such it is distinctly unmemorable.” A site that obtains meta-depth instead subverts the lack of temporal depth originally provoked by artificial features by rendering those features temporal in themselves.

Central to both Bachelard and Casey is the notion that the particularity of place is instrumental in developing, in Casey’s terms (1987a, p. 186) “points of attachment” or, in Bachelard’s terms (1964, p. 8), “countless alveoli” that allow memory to be contained and so retrieved.

For Casey, variegations and obtrusions on the landscape define it in a positive fashion. Through encountering them, we are said to be “slowed down, stopped, or in some other way caught-in-place” (1987a, p. 198). Becoming attentive to place is brought about by a distinction between background and foreground.

This is equally true of ‘accidental’ obtrusions. In the shopping mall, we are likely to remember the disabled elevator because it caused us inconvenience through thwarting our progress. What implicates an object being memorable is the context in which it finds itself. The elevator individuates itself from the background through countering the movement of the shopping mall.

This dynamic that allows an object to become memorable through obtruding the landscape is foreshadowed in Heidegger’s analysis of the everyday tool. For Heidegger, everyday usage with things determines a particular type of knowledge. Yet, so

long as things remain in use, they remain undiscovered: “A totality of useful things is always already discovered *before* the individual useful thing” (Heidegger, 1996, p. 64). The everyday world of things conceals itself within in a complex relationship between the assignment of usability and the production of that usability.

Thus, a thing is ‘conspicuous’ when it has subverted the “associations in which we use it” and instead disclosed itself “in a certain unhandiness” (p. 68). This subversion manifests primarily itself in the damage or absence of that thing. On the one hand, a damaged thing withdraws from use and so forces us to consider its unhandiness. As a result of this unhandiness, ‘objective presence’ paradoxically makes itself known. On the other hand, the *absence* of things causes us to be heedful to the space in which that thing was to be placed. Moreover, the greater that thing is sought, then the more objectively present it becomes “such that it seems to lose the character of handiness” (p. 69).

Through being removed from a given context, a presence is created in the space of absence which in turn constitutes an *obtrusion*. This is a significant point that highlights a basic shortcoming of Casey’s account of content-dominated variegation. Whereas Casey speaks of variegation in terms of an obtruded *presence* (consummately, the “erection of a distinctive house upon...an indifferent building lot” [1987a, p. 186]), Heidegger’s analysis demonstrates that diversity and disruption are also characterized by negation and absence too.

Not only does the absence constitute a “*breach* in the context of references” (1996, p. 70), but it also disrupts the pre-mediated totality of things, so far conditioned by handiness: “But with this totality,” Heidegger (1996, p. 70) writes, “world makes itself known.” Transferring this totality to the apparent conflict between place and site, it is evident that points of attachment need not involve a logic of content and presence.

Often, being slowed down or otherwise becoming attentive to our surroundings manifests in terms of what is missing from that landscape. Thus, in the space of the site, it is the very ‘leveling down’ of variegation that constitutes a presence in its own

right. This inversion of variegations is realized in that sites produce not convex ‘points of attachment’ but, rather, entirely concave geometrical hollows.

If site is universal by dint of lacking particular content and so indifferent to us, then when that site is rendered intimate, an ambiguity between these divisions is the necessary result. Thus, until it is imbued with lived experience, site remains outside us, homogenous, universal and for Casey (1987a, p. 190) “even inimical.”

Yet, in the experience of conferring a meta-depth upon the site, a tension is created between subjective experience and the objective status of that site. Site and place appear to have converged, yet the convergence is vague because site remains as site while place maintains its distance.

Unlike place, memory does not therefore remain fixed definitely as “fossilized duration concretized” (Bachelard, 1964, p. 8). Rather, it shifts in between states of clarity. Moreover, since site itself is framed by a lack of particular distinction, experience which took place in site is never definite. This is realized in that site is not, in Casey’s words, a place-holder for memories. Instead, memory resides dynamically—the relationship between the contained and the container prone to mutability, not rigidity.

Transposing Bachelard’s topoanalytic investigation of the house onto the site, we would therefore be required to be just as heedful to detail. Since sites are easily confused, the nuances that individuate one site from another do so resonantly. Marginal details, hitherto dismissed, assume a significance that is realized in their immediate but otherworldly intimacy. If it is a specific parking lot we remember but find ourselves in a different city, even in a different country, then we are likely to notice precisely what renders one lot different from the other.

The individuation is subtle, but because of that subtlety the difference is experienced more forcefully. In the wide expanse of empty site, universality and particularity thus compound. In doing so, memory, not only assumed to have existed by means of affectation or physical ornament, is emplaced in a space of ambiguous homogeneity.

In this essay, I have sought to demonstrate that place need not hold a monopoly on memorability and that, through resisting place's 'points of attachment', site instead creates an inverted hollow that is able to contain memory. In turn, this renders site intimate, particular, and yet simultaneously vague.

That this vagueness might constitute a more accurate representation of the past, being essentially fragmented rather than complete, is a question that begets further speculation. Nonetheless, as the urban landscape beckons to become ever more homogenized, resistance against this change opens itself to the dangers of a nostalgic idealization of static place. If site, in its unflinching ambiguity, can evoke a non-fixed image of space, then it will have already proved its power through contesting the dominancy of place.

Notes

1. That local art is hung on the otherwise identical walls means that each Starbucks can vary sufficiently to warrant being distinct without wholly subverting the recognized formula. The presence of localized attributes (a Starbucks in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, has Russian menus and chess tables to accommodate the large Russian community) has the effect of generating the impression of Starbucks being a place rather than a site. As the official website

confesses: "Welcome! A Starbucks coffee shop is a special place. But most of all, it's your place."

2. Furthermore, while site and 'non-place' (particularly Marc Augé's treatment [1995] of non-place) share obvious similarities in their lack of temporal depth, their distinction ought to be maintained.

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Building a Dream Home Phenomenologically

Christopher M. Aanstoos

Aanstoos is a Professor in the Department of Psychology at the State University of West Georgia in Carrollton. His research and writings focus on the philosophical and methodological foundations of psychology, especially the potential contribution of phenomenology. He is editor of the journal *Humanistic Psychologist*. aanstoos@westga.edu. © 2006 Christopher M. Aanstoos.

First came the place. After searching for land on which to build my dream home, I finally found a property of 20 acres that was just right. Heavily wooded, subtended by a granite shelf laced with veins of quartz crystal, a portion of a much larger hardwood forest, my site included the requisite swiftly flowing river and a meandering, spring-fed stream punctuated by waterfalls.

It was not, however, the “parts” that compelled the conclusion that this was the spot, for the “parts” never do quite make up the “whole.” Rather, I think it was the way the rolling hills palpably undulated the first time I walked this land that persuaded me this was my spot. Validating that conclusion was an old Indian marker tree—a large oak that, in its youth, had been deliberately bent horizontal and then again vertical. Yes, this was a powerful place.

But building the house would wait an unexpectedly long time and afford many decisions and revisions. First, where to build? With so much beautiful land, I could choose from several sites. One had early on caught my fancy on the far edge of the third ridge in, near the Indian marker tree, with a 270 degree panorama of the river valley 200 feet below.

As I came nearer to building, however, I realized the small stream would need to be dammed so that a driveway could traverse the first ridge nearest the road. But imagining the small lake the dam would make, I now became interested in an alternative building site: the second ridge overlooking the lake. This site was only an acre but would nestle between tall trees on either hillside while opening up a vista of sky in the otherwise thick forest.

Now there was a dilemma—really, the basic existential dilemma of our embodied finitude. Shall I live here, in this life? Or there, in that one? Two possible futures, and the responsibility of choosing one. But which one? We know our lives will be different depending on which fork we take on the path, but we cannot know beforehand the difference. So we are “condemned to choose” precisely when we do not know what we want. As the Greeks long ago recognized, we remain in this “all too human” trap as long as we are ignorant of who we really are.

Instead of choosing blindly, I did what I learned to do in such situations: wait and see. I would ask many others, “Which would you choose?” They would tell me, “This one” or “That one” without really convincing me.

Then, one day, a wise old Cajun walked the land with me. When I asked him, “Where?” he replied, not by picking one site or the other, but by noting: “If you choose the higher ridge, you will build the home for your outward looking self. If you choose the ridge beside the future lake, you will build the home for your inward looking self.”

At that moment, I could see both “selves” clearly, and these “sites of vision” forcefully clarified who I was. I also saw myself in a developmental perspective: I had lived forty years mostly cultivating my “outward looking self.” It was time, divorced and at mid-life, to devote the next stage to nurturing my “inward looking self.” It was time for this inward turn, time to sit by the lake. I would not lose the ridge top view. It would be the spot to which I would walk to have my breath taken away, savoring that place precisely because it would not become inhabited and habituated.

Seeing My Site

When it came time to build, a further “siting” had to be made. Now it became imperative to set the veritable stakes into the ground: to actually demarcate the “footprint” of the house on the land. More choosing! Should the house sit higher up the ridge, or farther toward the tip end? And exactly what angle would the house have toward the little lake, itself still only a figment of the imagination?

How to know? By an act of “emplacing” myself into the “virtual house”—and seeing how it felt to be “there.” How does the land beneath this spot feel? How do the trees surround this one? Where is the sun? The wind? The sound of the stream, running over the rocks? Husserl described the task of phenomenological analysis as requiring acts of “empathy” with imaginal, or virtual experiences, and this is what I attempted. I employed the skills I had learned as a phenomenologist to “find” where my house was by virtually inhabiting it.

But it wasn't only the house that had to be sited. Next came the driveway. It was “raw” land after all—a hardwood forest that had been undisturbed for generations. The house was to be about 800 feet in from the road, so cutting a driveway through the woods would be the first “gash” to this ecology. It felt analogous to the strange sense of violation that must have accompanied the first surgical incision.

The challenge was to find a path so closely following the contours of the land it would be at home there and not washed away by the natural forces of erosion that otherwise would tend to close that dehiscence, much as the body heals its own wounds. Again, this task was greatly aided by an “empathic immersion” in the roll of the land coursing, like water, over its swells and around the large trees.

A particular challenge was the gap between the first ridge, nearer the road, and the second ridge, on which the house would be built. The drop and rise in elevation was too much for a driveway, so the driveway's lowest point would have to be built up.

But a lovely small stream eddied its way along the floor of this small valley. So, to bridge these two ridges would require an earthen dam spanning them, and the stream would be backed up to form a lake. Of course, the tall old oaks along either side of that

streambed would have to be cut down—trees and a lake just cannot co-inhabit the same spot. While I had found a way to wind the course of my driveway around the tall trees, sparing every one, here there could be no compromise: these trees would have to die, for the sake of my house.

It was shocking to watch two men with chainsaws and bulldozer massacre the trees in one day. The slaughter was horrific and, at day's end, with the beginning of an earthen dam starting to back up muddy water over the site of devastation, I felt heartrendingly sad. All I could do was to take responsibility for what I had done, by sitting with the felled trees, being with them as they died. I could feel their suffering as twilight settled around us.

And then the lesson. It was the frogs who taught me. They quickly found this expanding pool of new water, and arrived by the dozens, maybe the hundreds, and began to sing, to celebrate the appearance of this new watery wonderland! And here, before my eyes, was the old lesson of Shiva: that destruction and creation were two halves of the same wheel, always turning upon itself. Living in the forest since then has given me innumerable instances of this profound truth.

Building My Home

I had an overall design idea in mind. Indeed, it had been “in my mind” long before I had even seen the land. I had long dreamed of a house that would be a Victorian style—a real “painted lady” with lots of gingerbread trim, turrets and towers and such. But now, facing my spot here in my woods, I realized quite definitively that this dream house was not the house that this spot called for. Such a house would be an interloper never at home.

I began all over again, asking this place what sort of house would be “at home.” I did my best to empty my mind to see what might belong. Slowly at first, then faster, a house came into view—with unpainted, cypress siding that would weather naturally from golden brown to the soft grey of the surrounding trees, until the building would so blend into its surround that one would have to almost run into the house before seeing it.

And lots of windows, large ones, with no dividers. French style and pivoting open to give untram-

meled views of the woods. Ceilings a little higher than usual, to give airiness and space, within the vaulting trees outside. A two-story house that would provide the most area for the smallest footprint, nestling midst the trees without dominating them. The surrounding oaks would encompass the house, embracing and including it within their world.

It would be essential that as few as possible be cut. With great care, we saved several large ones within a few feet of the house. Most builders would have said, "Take them out, they're just going to die anyway." Treated with care, however, they didn't.

There was one, particularly near the house, a lovely double trunked old white oak. Almost everyone said it would die and should be cut down. Deeply torn, I asked one very old local what he thought. After standing silently before it for a few minutes, he replied, "It's got a long and deep tap root. It'll be fine." I kept it. He was right.

As for the design of the house itself, I again did my best to proceed phenomenologically. I placed myself within my imagined house, and anticipated how each room would unfold around me, how it would "feel" to be "there." These repeated acts of "experiential imagining" brought forward the house in its virtuality, and it was with this "virtual house" that I worked to refine and clarify its design.

For example, wanting the house to be as intrinsically connected with its place as possible, I was sensitive to the essence of "layers" and gradations between "inside" and "outside." I pictured a porch wrapping around the front and an upstairs balcony, both of which were "outside layers of the inside." Next, on one side, a sun room—a warm, enclosed space with walls of windows on three sides and filled with plants. With a floor of rougher wood, this room would be filled with wicker furniture and help shape the "inside layer of the outside."

In short, there was to be no sharp dualism between inside and outside but, rather, a continuum of interconnectedness even manifested by the front door, which, already set back within the front porch, marked the transition between the "inside layer of the outside" and the "outside layer of the inside." A solid oak door but with a long centered oval glass and long, narrow flanking transom windows.

Spaces Within

Next, the interiority itself. The front door opened onto a foyer, a small square area to provide a further transition between inside and outside but now on the "inside of the inside." Bordered by a coat closet on one side and a small bathroom on the other, this foyer faced a center oak staircase that was like a waterfall of wood, flowing up and down, inward and outward. Atop the stairs was a landing, framed by a large window, through which the sun and trees streamed in. The stairs led up to the trees which, welcomed in, flowed down.

I wanted each area of the house to have its own distinct atmosphere and each room to be its own "lived world" of experience. In addition to making separate rooms (rather than the now common "great room") I was determined to amplify these distinctive atmospheres by the use of color. The foyer, staircase walls, and central upstairs room would be a salmon, which invited movement into its space and opened with ease onto the other atmospheres.

To the right of the foyer, through an open double doorway, would be the dining room, a place to gather for spirited feasting and conversations, for family life, romantic intimacies and friendships. For its walls, I envisioned a dark red, softened and warmed by a hint of brown. And trimmed in white to evoke a depth that, particularly in candle light, would give the room a dimensionality, of latencies emergently subtending the manifest.

Off the side of the dining room, a narrow doorway would lead to the kitchen. Most kitchens strike me as oppressive "work stations" where one is surrounded by equipment and storage facilities. One too often feels trapped in a kitchen, and I wanted exactly the opposite. My kitchen, facing south, would open to the rolling land that undulated its way up the long ridge.

To fashion this view, I wanted twelve-foot-wide windows across the wall but where, then, could cupboards be placed? The solution was to break the kitchen into four sub-areas. An interior side, opening to the dining room, would become the "dish pantry," lined on both sides by cupboards and cabinets, sink and dishwasher.

An exterior side would serve for "food prep," accommodating a long counter top beneath the win-

dows, plus a range and second sink, both at the level of the counter, which would be anchored at one end by a food pantry and at the other by a cabinet enclosing the refrigerator. Here, Heidegger's "readiness to hand" served my planning, and I arranged for implements and ingredients to be right where my hands would most easily find them.

I envisioned a third sub-area of the kitchen tucked beneath the descending ceiling of the staircase and containing laundry machines, linked via laundry chute to upstairs. Last was a small sitting space with desktop and cookbook shelf.

Extending out from the west side of the house would be the sun room, with three sides of windows and linked to the woods beyond. During the half year from May through October, the forest would shelter this room from the hot sun but, during the other half of the year, this room would receive the sun's warmth and invite sunsets into the house.

On the opposite east side of the house would be the study. Located at the end of the hallway off the front foyer, this space would be distanced from the rest of the house—a retreat and place of contemplation. I envisioned, upon entering, a nook to the left—a wall alcove with a raised platform of cushions and pillows, long and wide enough to recline and read. Beyond the alcove, one would enter the main space, which is centered by a large stone fireplace. The study is drenched in dark green and rimmed by the dark wood of floor-to-ceiling bookcases built into the walls.

Though primarily an inward-leaning space, the study would have a large desk looking out a south facing window, allowing flights of fancy to the world beyond. Behind the desk is a window seat for an east-facing window from which, during times of quiet reflection, I might watch the moon rise, then, through the other window over the desk, watch the moon move as it marks the passage of time.

Going Up

I have always preferred a two-story house to concretize the experience of going to a different level in our nocturnal dreamscapes. The staircase in my house leads upstairs to a center room from which, set back by little alcoves, all the other upstairs rooms radiate. This central space is designed to be a

"family room" connecting the private rooms of all the members of the house. It is the "game room" where we come together to play.

The east upstairs wing includes the bedrooms for my two children, both of whom participated in the design (following appropriate instruction from me on how to phenomenologically "emplace" themselves "in" their virtual room).

In imagining his room, my son, then six years old, included a fireplace and a "secret doorway" disguised as a bookcase opening on a passageway to a secret room in the attic. He chose a bright shade of green for his walls, much like the color of the new leaves of the forest trees in early spring.

My daughter, then eleven, designed her room as a suite of two spaces: an "outer" or "public" room open to the house beyond, and an "inner" or "private" room, itself accessible only through the outer room. In her "public" room she set up her study, with built-in bookcases (one of which opened onto the secret passage). Her inner room included a wall alcove with a platform for her waterbed. This space was also a dressing room and play room—the place where she kept the toys and the doll house she and I had made when she was much younger. If her study was the place of her *telos*, this room was the place of her *arche*. She painted her study lavender, while she painted the inner room bright pink, her favorite color when she was very young.

On the western wing upstairs was my bedroom, which I designed to be infused by the image of a favorite enclosure of my childhood—a tree house. High off the ground, this space incorporates large windows on three sides opening to the nearby tree branches. I wanted to feel amidst the trees, including the old white oak saved from cutting when the site was first prepared. I arched the shape of the ceiling so the patter of rain would be directly overhead. The front of the room opened onto a balcony, itself hidden into the roof of the front porch below. On the balcony sits a hot tub—a place for relaxation beneath the stars. Both the bedroom and the balcony face the setting sun and moon.

Elegant, Rustic, & Whimsical

Through this project of designing and building my dream home, I realized that there was so much more



than making a structure that would be safe and efficient. More even than an intelligent design. By imaginably placing myself as intensively as I could into the experience of living in the house I was building, I found the house that was to be my home. In hindsight, I can see that there were three essential yet implicit constituents of the experience I was seeking to incarnate: I wanted my home to embody a sense of elegant, rustic whimsicality. It had to be beautiful, at ease, and playful.

While this essential structure of the “experienced home” remained implicit during its building, by being as conscious as possible of how the design opened a lived experience, I was able to be guided by that virtual experience, so that the imagined house emerged as a particular and personal experiential reality, a dream home of one’s own.

Acknowledgments

While wanting this article to be a narrative of an experience, I also want to acknowledge the many published sources that have contributed to my ability to do phenomenology in the context of house design. With respect to this theme of place, I am particularly indebted to the work of Casey (1993). Also valuable are Hiss (1990), Malpas (1999), Relph (1976), and Tuan (1976). From early childhood, forests have always been enchanted places for me, and trees have been sacral presences. A worthy depiction of this theme is Perlman (1994).

With regard to the theme of human finitude and freedom, all the existentialists are relevant here. My own preference is Heidegger (1927/1962). Concerning the role of the mid-life

transition, Jung has been inspirational, but it is Levinson (1978) who has most thoroughly explicated this significance developmentally. Concerning phenomenological method, Husserl’s pioneering work (1962, 1970) is particularly important.

Applied spatiality, Merleau-Ponty’s innovations (1962, pp. 98-147, pp. 243-98) are especially valuable. With regard to the role of the experiential in architectural design, many sources explore features of the home, e.g., Lang’s insights about doors (1984).

For a synthetic understanding, Bachelard (1964), Heidegger (1977), and Seamon (1993) are seminal. Lastly, I heartily recommend Kohak (1984) for his profound understanding of the place of the human in nature. More than any other, it was this book that guided me.

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