



# Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter

Vol. 7, No. 1

Winter 1996

This issue of *EAP* marks the start of our seventh year. We thank readers who have renewed their subscription. Those who have not yet responded will find another renewal form inside. As of late fall, we have had 67 renewals from a 1995 subscriber list of 131. Many of you have forgotten! Please renew.

This issue includes items of interest as well as membership news. We also include book reviews of Watsuji Tetsuro's *Climate and Culture* and Michael Greenberg's *The Poetics of Cities: Designing Neighborhoods that Work*. Several of the illustrations in this issue are from the latter work, including the figures below.

This issue of *EAP* ends with two essays, one by landscape designer Eric Angell, the other by architect Ron Walkey. Angell discusses ways in which the designed environment might help to facilitate transformative experiences, while Walkey evokes the spirit of place of Egypt's Alexandria.

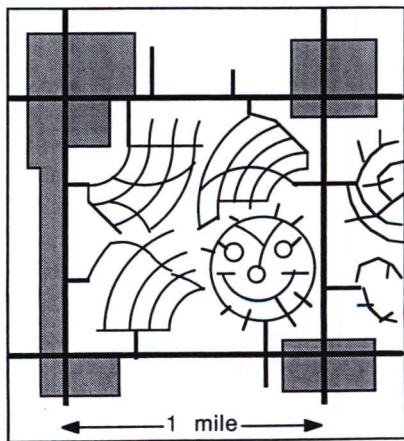
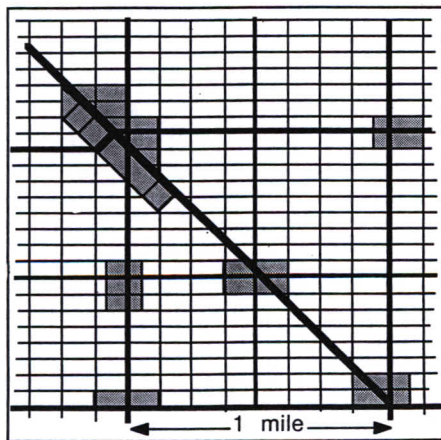
## ARCHITECTURE AND HEALING

The conference, *The Hospital as a Temple: Toward the Integration of the Sacred in Medicine* was held October 14-15, at the Leeuwenhorst Congress Centrum in Noordwijkerhout, the Netherlands. The conference was sponsored by the Forum Health Care, a "progressive group of Dutch medical providers in residence at Davidhuis Foundation, Rotterdam."

The conference prospectus read in part: "Within the hospital setting, physicians and nurses (who have been trained to *fight* disease) also witness the most sacred events of human biography, birth and death, yet the medical curriculum is not organised to address or foster the inner life."

Participants included Dutch architect Ton Alberts. Those interested in the proceedings or audio-video tapes of the conference may write: Stichting Davidhuis, Spiritueel Geboortecentrum, Slotlaan 31, 3062 PL Rotterdam (tel 010-412-34-42).

Below: Figures from Mike Greenberg's *Poetics of Cities*, a guide book to community design—see review on p. 4. The figure, left, illustrates the traditional urban neighborhood, "a continuous fabric richly interconnected by a network of closely spaced local shops" (p. 147). The figure on the right, in contrast, highlights conventional suburban planning: "the urban fabric is ripped into fragments connected only by widely spaced major thoroughfares" (p. 148).



## ITEMS OF INTEREST

The **International Ecological Design Society** is dedicated "to promoting ecological design, connecting those working in the grassroots with those in academia, government, the business world, and the design professions." Design is understood as "a hinge that connects culture and nature through flows of energy and matter. If we take ecology as the basis for designing our products, buildings, and communities, we can preserve natural capital while meeting human needs." In spring, 1996, the group will publish the first issue of *Ecological Design Quarterly*, an academic forum for the field. Write: IEDS, PO Box 11645, Berkeley, CA 94712 (510-869-5015).

The **Shared Living Resource Center** is a nonprofit education, counseling, and design consultation service to help create "shared living communities." Their work includes the redesign of buildings into extended family group houses, urban cooperative blocks, village cluster and co-housing projects, and support services for ecological housing and community development. SLRC, 2375 Shattuck Ave, Berkeley, CA 94704 (510-548-6608).

The **Green Cross Society** is a Christian ecological organization that "helps people translate environmental ethics and theology into action." The aim is to "take the substantial theological implications for ecology gained over the past dozen years and translate that into action programs." Address: 19 E. Lancaster Ave, Wynnewood, PA 19096 (1-800-650-6600).

**Global Response** is an international environmental letter-writing network whose members are "on-call" to respond to environmental emergencies around the world. The group's monthly newsletter highlights a specific environmental threat, recommends actions to take, and gives the names and addresses of the corporations or governments responsible. Situations covered include hazardous-waste-export threats to indigenous people, resource exploitation, rainforest destruction, nuclear disarmament, ocean dumping, and air pollutions, and species threat and extinction. The group welcomes volunteers and donations. PO Box 7490, Boulder, CO 80306-7490 (303-444-0306).

## MEMBERSHIP NEWS

**Bethany Wageley** is a master's degree student in visual arts at Vermont College. Her research interests focus on the phenomenology of sacred and profane space, place, and time. She explains: "I am currently looking at different architectural spaces as well as site-specific art work that have or may contain this notion of time and space."

She is also exploring what she calls "the phenomenology of classroom space" about which she writes: "I have a particular situation in my community whereby, due to an overcrowding situation in the school system, a few 'portable' classrooms have been set up to the side of the main elementary school building. These portables are not structurally connected to the main building therefore the students must make two or three trips back and forth to the main building.

"What I am going to concentrate on will be the phenomenology of (1) the classroom community and its spatial design and (2) the classroom community procession to and from the main building. This may not seem as important as the communal procession in monumental spaces but, on a more human everyday-living level, it can be important to the students in their understanding and awareness of the public spaces they inhabit as a community.

"I am very excited about this turn in my research because now I feel I have something concrete to work with to use all the information I have found concerning sacred and profane spaces and the phenomenology of places and environments." Address: 1442 Old Stagecoach Road, Seaville, NJ 08230.

**Arlene Hopkins** is an architect living in Santa Monica, California. Her practice includes ecological building, community and residential design, library space planning, and relocation project management. She was recently a visiting professor in the College of Architecture and Urban Studies at Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg, Virginia. She writes: "I am an architect (still) in love with ideas and the pursuit of wisdom. I would like to continue my studies of traditional sacred spaces." Address: 2621 5th St., #10, Santa Monica, CA 90405.



## BOOK REVIEW

Watsuji Tetsuro, 1961. *Climate and Culture: A Philosophic Study* (trans. G. Bownas). Tokyo: Hokuseido Press. Reprinted by Greenwood Press, 1988.

This unusual book, of which most environmental thinkers appear unaware, was written by the Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsuro, whose aim is "to clarify the function of climate as a factor within the structure of human existence" (p. v).

Tetsuro's idea for the book first arose in Berlin in 1927 as he read Martin Heidegger's recently-published *Being and Time*. Tetsuro explains that he felt uncomfortable with Heidegger's emphasis on temporality as playing a central role in the nature of human existence. Tetsuro writes:

I found myself intrigued by the attempt to treat the structure of man's existence in terms of time, but I found it hard to see why, when time had thus been made to play a part in the structure of subjective existence, at the same juncture space also was not postulated as part of the basic structure of existence.... I perceived that herein lay the limitations of Heidegger's work, for time not linked with space is not time in the true sense...(ibid.).

It is on the basis of this criticism that Tetsuro launches an almost uniquely philosophic study of earth-bound emplacement. Climate, as Tetsuro defines it, is the primordial dimension of natural environment "internal" to intentional being-in-a-world that is sensed most strongly when we stress the spatial character of such being. According to this articulation, "the space-and-time structure of human existence is revealed as climate and history: the inseparability of time and space is the basis of the inseparability of history and climate" (p. 9).

Tetsuro's neo-Nietzschean way of conceiving climate is somatological--that is, it is founded in people's bodily being. He discusses his topic with a bold bodily sensibility and thus comes to place climate as an existential category equally primordial with history.

Under this rubric, Tetsuro includes sensitivity to weather as well as landscape, where the latter encompasses both soil and scenery (pp. 4ff.). We might well believe that these matters are within the province only of meteorology and topography. Yet Tetsuro's

point is properly philosophic: we are *always already* under-the-weather and over-a-land.

Even when we are ensconced in our architectural hideaways, we do not escape the climatic dimensions of our being, for the built environment is itself forever in contact with the elements of earth and sky. It might be supposed that this is a mundane contingency. It is, but not merely so--for the point being made amounts to the claim that mundane contingency is itself an "essential" or "necessary" component of existence as we know it. If climate is with us wherever we go, we must then conclude that it may not be given short shrift.

The reason why climate cannot properly be eliminated from an ontological account of humanity, says Tetsuro, is because human beings are terrestrial animals embedded in evolutionary reality. Consciousness of evolution has existential consequences in that it leads us to the self-knowledge that we are earth-bound organisms--and, as such, conduct our lives in climatic conviviality with other creatures.

At this juncture, somaesthetic phenomena become particularly pronounced in their felt presence, for it is through the live body that one is most especially aware of climaticity. As Watsuji notes, "it will no doubt be evident that there are certain points of similarity between the problem of climate and that of 'body'...the self-active nature of climate must be retrieved in the same sense that the self-active nature of the [live] body has to be retrieved" (pp. 11ff.).

As ontologists, we transcend neither terrestriality nor the carnal-cum-visceral phenomenality of physical living. Quite the contrary: "Transcendence also 'stands outside' (*ex-istere*) climatically. In other words, man discovers himself in climate...this becomes consciousness of the body [and thus] climatic phenomena show man how to discover himself as 'standing out-side' (i.e., *ex-sistere*)" (p. 12).

For environmental thinkers and professionals, Tetsuro's work offers the opportunity to share a profound thinker's perception of the interpenetration between land and culture, and later topics include the

nature of cold, humidity, dryness, seasons and three climatic types that Tetsuro identifies as monsoon, desert, and meadow.

The book represents an eminently meritorious Pacific point of comparison to the grand Atlantic tradition of "geocultural" reflection--from Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws* and Herder's "Climatic

Study of the Human Spirit" to Braudel's *The Mediterranean in the Age of Philip II* and Glacken's *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*.

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## BOOK REVIEW

Mike Greenberg, 1995. *The Poetics of Cities: Designing Neighborhoods that Work*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press. ISBN0-8142-0657-3.

In this useful book, journalist Mike Greenberg sees in America a failure of urban community, which he relates largely to the demise of a dense, diverse urban grid that fosters movement and exchange. In its place, since World War II, has arisen a generic suburbia that "honors the automobile over the person, the real estate speculator and developer over the community, concrete and asphalt over trees, plastic fast-food homogeneity over local culture, giantism over the little guy, conformity over individuality, ugliness over beauty" (p. 6).

Drawing on the traditional urban neighborhood as a starting point, Greenberg calls for a *poetics of cities*, by which he means, making cities rightly, particularly fostering diversity, exchange, and community. His hope is for a city of lively, thriving neighborhoods--integrated urban microcosms "with ample opportunities for shopping, recreation, culture, and socializing near our homes" (p. 5).

Greenberg believes that the heart of urban vitality is the *physical* city, especially its network of pathways. The key question, he suggests, is how to craft the physical city in such a way "that it can be easily used by all its people--so that not only able-bodied, well-off adults with cars but also children, the elderly, the poor, the blind, the halt and the lame can have freedom of movement and convenient access to all the good things that cities offer" (p. 8).

The most important value of the city, Greenberg believes, is its network of human relations built on *exchange*--the full range of voluntary interactions, whether commercial, social, intellectual, or the like.

Exchange, in turn, is very much dependent on the city's particular physical nature--especially proximity and connectedness.

Suppose, says Greenberg, that you set out to invent a form of urban settlement that best encouraged exchange. You would create a place

where many people live and work in close proximity and routinely interact with one another; where many kinds of activity are linked together; where physical, legal and social impediments to free exchange are minimal; where there is ample diversity of thought and custom; and where that diversity is not kept isolated and inert but encouraged to recombine in unexpected ways. You would, in short invent something like the traditional city with its neighborhoods and neighborhood centers, its compactness and integration of functions, its diversity and serendipity (p. 54).

It is important to emphasize that, in Greenberg's interest in the traditional city as a prescriptive model, he is no nostalgic luddite seeking some urban golden age that never existed. Rather, he recognizes earlier city neighborhoods worked much better exchange-wise than suburban developments because there was not the technological infrastructure, particularly the automobile and mass communications, to overcome time and distance as can so readily be done today.

Greenberg's aim is to understand the traditional city and to apply its lessons to the contemporary city and suburbs to see how rules and regulations can be revised to escape the fragmentation and insularity of usual development. The aim is "to tie the pieces of a city together rather than to pull them apart" (p. 73).



## A THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CITIES

In accomplishing this aim, Greenberg breaks his book into three parts composed of 11 chapters. The first part, "A Theory of Cities," asks what a city is and how it best works. Chapter 1 develops the ideas of exchange and poetics, while chapter 2 explores qualities that transform a locality into a neighborhood that both insiders and outsiders can use and enjoy. Chapter 3 defines the city as a network of relationships all involving exchange, which in turn requires physical proximity, diversity, and connectedness.

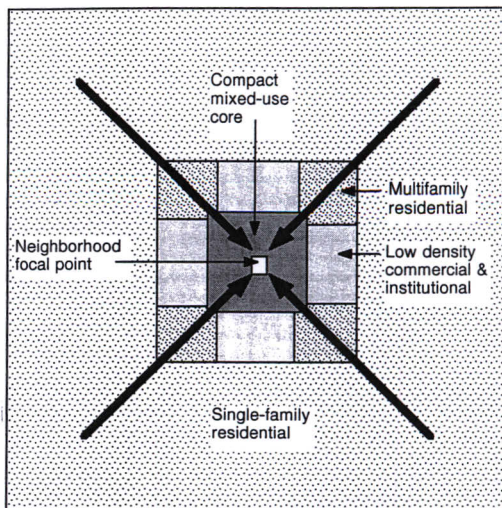
For urban phenomenologists and designers, the most valuable section of the book is part two, "A Practice of City," which explores the physical, designable qualities contributing to neighborhoods that are "unified ensembles and collaborations" (p. 57). The longest section of the book, part two is arranged, broadly, by physical scale from the largest unit--the layout of the city as a whole--to the smallest unit--high-density shopping areas with lively street life. Each chapter provides helpful discussions of how suburban and traditional urban places compare and contrast.

Chapter 4 examines the "urban matrix," which refers to the underlying grid that governs the arrangement and type of city pathways. In a successful urban matrix, illustrated by the left figure on p. 1, pieces of the city assemble in a coherent, functional ensemble: the streets, sidewalks, and neighborhood arrangement bind the parts "into a whole in which person-to-person exchange can occur with optimum efficiency" (pp. 59-60).

An integral part of the urban matrix is the city's network of sidewalks, which Greenberg considers in chapter 5. Sidewalks are crucial because "ultimately, the act of exchange depends on an encounter between a flesh-and-blood human being and some feature of his or her world" (p. 76).

## AN ARRAY OF NEIGHBORHOODS

In chapters 6 and 7, Greenberg turns to the urban neighborhood, which, today, he says, is too often an isolated subdivision of low-density residences occupied by people of similar economic status and segregated functionally (since commercial and institutional uses are usually not included). The result, illustrated



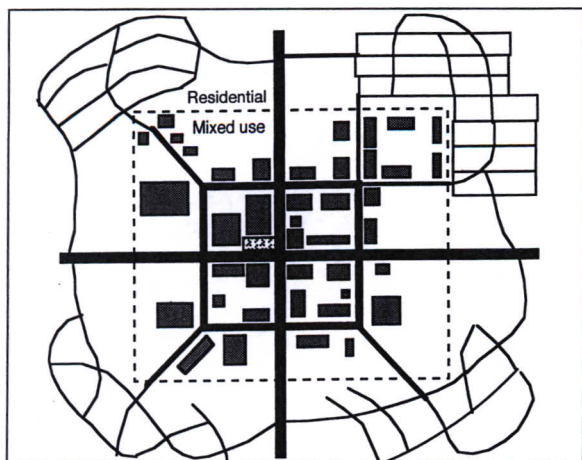
A well-formed neighborhood: A mixed-use core surrounded by larger land uses (e.g., supermarkets, high schools), higher-density residences, and single-family housing (p. 134).

in the right figure on p. 1, is that "the urban fabric is ripped into fragments...connected only by widely spaced major thoroughfares" (p. 149).

Opposing the standard conceptualization of the modern city as a grid of heavily-trafficked through roads, Greenberg argues that a better formulation sees the city's fundamental structure as "an array of neighborhoods, each with its own center" (p. 150).

Chapter 6 examines the nature of an individual neighborhood, which Greenberg argues is best conceived as a high-density, mixed-use core surrounded by rings of lower-density non-residential uses, apartments, and single-family homes--see the figure above. Chapter 7, in turn, asks how such individual neighborhoods can be knitted together into a larger urban fabric that is integrated and alive.

Chapter 8 explores the functional center of each separate neighborhood--what Greenberg calls the *market place*, which he examines in terms of such qualities as variety, density, and comfort. Chapter 9, the last of part two, asks how the ideas and schemes of chapter 4-8 might be applied to the current suburban situation in a realistic, practical way (see the figure on the next page). He writes:



One of Greenberg's conceptual schemes for revitalizing the suburbs: A mixed-use hub with circular loop and direct links to residential areas (p. 225).

We will be seeking planning tools to help us avert the chaos that is typical of suburban commercial areas, but we will accept as a discipline the real-world facts of suburban life—wide, heavily trafficked roads, ample off-street parking, huge discount retail stores, fast-food restaurants with drive-up windows. We will assume that the neighborhood commercial hub must cross major thoroughfares. We will accept these facts of life, not because we like them, but because a planning regime that attempts to ignore them is doomed, in most localities, to political failure" (p. 199).

Part 3 of the book comprises two chapters, the first of which considers the crucial role of the political process in effecting successful design and policy changes. The last chapter considers in broad ethical and moral dimensions what our cities have become today and what the stakes might be if we don't find ways to revalue and to recreate the public realm and a shared sense of community. Finally, an appendix reviews the various aspects of Greenberg's urban matrix—urban form, neighborhood structure, neighborhood center, market place, pathways—and suggests policy tools that might help in their actualization.

## COMMENTARY

In its emphasis on spatial permeability, mixed uses, concentration of people, and physical centeredness, Greenberg's thinking has much in common with

other students of urban life who also believe that the city, first of all, should be a place of diversity, integration, and civilized exchange. One immediately thinks, for example, of Bill Hillier, Paul Murrain, Christopher Alexander, and—Greenberg's heroine—Jane Jacobs.

Each of these thinkers has, in some ways, developed his or her ideas about urban design more deeply and more practically than Greenberg, who, as a journalist, forges a style of presentation that is simple and engaging (though sometimes distracting—e.g., chapter 9's title, "The Asphalt Bungle or: How Can the City Cross the Road"). Greenberg's greatest strength is his love for the traditional city and his ability to portray, in an entertaining way, its workings and potential.

In this sense, the book should be a good vehicle for introducing laypeople and undergraduates to the dynamics of cities and their better design. In addition, Greenberg provides many conceptual drawings that readers will find helpful and stimulating.

On the other hand, much of Greenberg's information and evidence arises from real-world places that he has known firsthand, yet there are few photographs to help the reader enter into these examples. For beginners—especially because the written text is so accessible—the absence of this visual material may be missed. This lack makes me hesitate to recommend the book for introductory courses on the city, though I strongly believe *Poetics* would be a stimulating tool in upper-level courses in urban design and planning, environment-behavior issues, urban geography, and the phenomenology of place.

For environmental and architectural phenomenology, Greenberg's book is most encouraging because of the way it lends support, largely through independent verification, to the above-mentioned ideas of Hillier, Murrain, Alexander, and Jacobs. One begins to see that all of these authors, each in his or her own way and mostly without any conscious awareness of the approach, point toward a phenomenology of the city that sees the heart of the matter in the synergistic relationship between material and human



worlds--the way that physical qualities like proximity, permeability, and density are necessarily a part of how people are with each other socially, economically, and ethically.

All these thinkers on the city clarify different aspects of this intimacy between material and human worlds--for example, Hillier most thoroughly clarifies how the liveliness or emptiness of a city's streets is related to the pathway system, while Jacobs best helps one understand how a city district's vitality is dependent on primary uses--i.e., functions like work places and homes to which people must necessarily go.

Greenberg's book is important for its clarity, integration of the city's various parts, and discussion

of the sprawling, auto-bound dimensions of suburbia. Coupled with the ideas of these other urban thinkers, Greenberg's ideas point to a thorough phenomenology of the city that has yet to be written.

At the same time, the book works powerfully on its own, and one hopes it will have many readers. In addition, its style and content seem readily adaptable to other media--I can readily imagine a video version or perhaps some sort of computer presentation that would give action to Greenberg's stimulating conceptual drawings. In short, this book is an important contribution to the urban and urban-design literatures. Its honesty and creative view point offer a host of possibilities for giving new life to the city and to the way we think about and design it.

David Seamon

### **SIDEWALKS AND EXCHANGE: A PASSAGE FROM GREENBERG'S POETICS OF CITIES:**

Ultimately, the act of exchange depends on an encounter between a flesh-and-blood human being and some feature of his or her world. Electronic communications and mail-order shopping have not greatly reduced the field of action in which physical proximity is necessary for exchange. You still cannot try on a suit, test the ripeness of a cantaloupe, or make love electronically.

Electronic media have given us immense options for learning and entertainment in solitude, but these cannot reproduce the sharedness of the theater, the concert, or the lecture hall, where many strangers participate together in a transformative experience and in that way strengthen the bonds of community.

The library and the bookstore, the park, the doctor's waiting room, the shops and restaurants and bank lobbies where people act out their lives in the company of others, all these are places where community building happens in ways that cannot be duplicated by electronics. Physical places matter, and that is why the pathways that connect those places also matter.

Human physical attributes impose natural limits on the ability of the human being to participate in exchange. In addition, some psychological and cultural attributes may be so nearly universal, at least

within a particular region or culture, as to constitute additional natural limits--how we perceive time, distance, security, and comfort, for example. Because these attributes are nearly universal, the limits they impose on participation in exchange are also nearly universal--that is, applicable in every part of town for equivalent land uses, but most particularly for those in the consumer sector of the economy: retailing, cultural and recreation facilities, residential neighborhoods, and many kinds of offices.

If our objective is to facilitate exchange, what do human anatomy and psychology imply for the dimensions, surface characteristics, and continuity of sidewalks; or for their location in relation to roadways, on the one hand, and the places where people want to go, on the other?

For the answers, we need only look at the sidewalks in older residential and commercial districts--those built between, say, 1880 and 1940--and understand why they were laid out as they were. The sidewalk was not an afterthought, as it usually is today, nor was it just a ribbon of concrete indifferent to its surroundings. Rather, the sidewalk was part of a coordinated ensemble, a technology that responded effectively to specific problems and opportunities of urban life (pp. 76-77).

## DESIGN FOR NONDUALISTIC EXPERIENCES

Eric Angell

*Eric Angell recently completed a M.A. in Landscape Design at the Conway School of Landscape Design in Conway, Massachusetts. Currently, he is an open-space and environmental planner for the Delaware County Planning Department, just outside of Philadelphia. He is contemplating a Ph.D. on the epistemological barriers to ecologically-informed land use. Address: 320 Cornell Avenue, Swarthmore, PA 19081.*

Dualistic thought is one aspect of Western epistemology that must change before there can be truly constructive changes in human behavior. The perceived dualism of human beings and nature, in some ways an extension of subject-object dualism, has led to an alienation and loss of context that threatens life. But how can epistemologies be changed?

Rational information is often thought to be an effective method of changing people's world views, with scientific ecological information especially relevant to understanding the people-nature relationship. Often, however, there is a gap between information presented and the way a person's perceptions and values filter that information. A more powerful method to internalize the primary ecological lesson of interrelationships is through direct experience of our natural surroundings.

Are there ways designers could facilitate experiences that transcend the people-nature dualism to impress a revelation of our interrelationships on the experienter? Such an experience of nature could be nondualistic in two complementary ways. First, it could illustrate a relation of people to nature. Second, and more fundamentally, if one "loses oneself," the experience could get around the subject-object filter of consciousness and become transformative.

From my own environmental experiences and from frustrations with the design fields, I offer four design suggestions for potentially facilitating transformative nondualistic experiences.

### 1. EVERYDAY CONTACT WITH THE WILD

For many individuals, protected wilderness areas provide spaces for rare connections to nature, but most people feel that genuine wilderness largely excludes human residence. To visit wilderness, therefore, is to leave everyday life. The result is that many people strive to protect wilderness while not

changing daily habits of thought and action that are destructive, such as commuting long distances to work by private automobile or buying a five-acre lot in sprawling suburbia.

To be most effective in changing perceptions and behaviors, a transformative experience is better connected to everyday life. The need, therefore, is to have these experiences take place *in* daily life or, at least, in proximity to home on an ongoing basis.

This possibility points to the designer's role. The focus is not the nature preserve of several-million acres (although such places are critically important for other reasons) but, rather, the numerous small spaces near people's homes and work places. These are the transition spaces: not completely "tamed" like lawns or modern buildings, but not entirely "separate" like wilderness either.

It seems to me that there is a fine line between too ordinary a place and one too removed from daily life. A transformative place might be one able to be experienced often, not requiring a long trip or special preparations, but one also just different enough to help people break out of a rut of obliviousness.

Researchers are increasingly aware of children's psychological need for an ongoing connection with nature. Here also the proximity of wild spaces is important, for children have limited mobility.

In suburbia and cities, the best spots for children's exploration are often some out-of-the-way place down the block, if a child is lucky enough to have such a place. Clare Cooper Marcus writes that eighty to ninety percent of her university students' favorite childhood spaces were "wild or leftover places...that were never specifically designed.... If they grew up in a developing suburb they remember the one lot at the end of the street that wasn't yet built on, where they constructed caps and dug tunnels and lit fires" (cited in Arendt, 1994, p.5).



## 2. RELINQUISHING CONTROL

The degree of complexity is often a telling difference between designed and wild landscapes. Even if we had the knowledge to mimic functioning ecosystems, the cost would be prohibitive. The best way to accomplish complexity is to relinquish control. Let natural processes alter the landscape. Let the landscape evolve. We can work subtly to push a landscape in the desired direction and, then, with humility, let it go. Allow enough complexity to encourage people's curiosity, so that they may return time and again to see the seasonal and long-term changes.

The wild that we need to connect with is not controlled and includes wild animals moving into a designed landscape. Many people know the fascination of seeing wild animals, and children are usually especially mesmerized. In animals, we see something of ourselves and something of the Other. In a direct, visceral way, we realize we are not alone. The writer Annie Dillard (1982), for example, describes an unexpected encounter with a weasel at a suburban pond as "a clearing blow to the gut" and a "bright blow to the brain" (p. 14).

## 3. ENGAGING ALL THE SENSES

Too often, environmental designers concern themselves primarily with the visual. The other senses can also be wonderful avenues to involve people in their surroundings. One way to conceptualize a nondualistic experience is to think of a time when your attention was completely focussed outside yourself. As with Annie Dillard and the weasel, you lose your sense of self and are fully involved.

In Dillard's case, the primary contact seems to have been visual, but would she have had the same experience if she hadn't been sitting silently on a "lap of lichen" with her back against a tree? What if she had been sitting in a lawn chair? Or looking out the window of a car?

Children have a kinesthetic experience of their surroundings and value being able to interact physically with the world. Why do we lose this richness of environmental experience as we get older? Perhaps there are experiences that designers could plan to help adults get back in touch with more sensual relations with their surroundings.

One possibility is to provide edible plants in the environment. Wilderness backpackers often rely solely on "imported" food and would starve without it. This situation lends an air of non-belonging. Obviously, heavily-travelled national parks cannot allow everyone to eat the plants, but there are design opportunities near home and work where low- or no-maintenance fruit and nut trees or other edible plants could be included.

On a trip to some of the national parks of the Southwest, I stopped at Capitol Reef where the Park Service maintains an historic orchard. There were no guards or rangers--only a sign telling me to help myself but only pick as much as I could eat on site. I happily spent an hour up in the cherry trees (and climbing trees is another excellent way to get involved in the landscape), eating my way around the limbs. Looking back, I realize that this experience sticks in my memory more than does most of the magnificent scenery I saw.

Capitol Reef was a wonderful exception to an unwritten but pervasive rule of public space management: keep people from interacting with the land. Clare Cooper Marcus' research cited above did not point to official "preserved" spaces. Children loved best the places where human control on human beings as well as non-humans was relaxed, as in unbuilt suburban lots, which allowed the freedom to interact with and change the surroundings.

Unfortunately, in the sprawling suburbs or cities where most people live, such undesigned places are becoming more rare. This is one reason why we need to be more aware of the types of experiences that designed spaces can, but often do not, provide.

Walking is another important way to engage people more deeply in the landscape. The rhythm, pace, and physical connection with the ground bring awareness of one's surroundings. Obviously, people need to get out of their cars, but also, I believe, they need to get off their bikes and in-line skates.

Bikes are wonderful for longer distances but, to experience the landscape at the level of detail and interaction desirable, walking is best. Bruce Chatwin (1987), who believed ancestral nomadism to be a potent force still in our bodies, has collected fragments from many sources on the importance of

## AGAIN ALEXANDRIA

Ron Walkey

*Ron Walkey practices architecture in Vancouver and teaches in the School of Architecture at the University of British Columbia. He wrote this essay on the Greek island of Tinos, shortly after a return to Alexandria in the spring of 1994. Quotations from Lawrence Durrell's four-volume "Alexandria Quartet"--Justine, Bathasar, Mountolive and Clea--are from the Faber & Faber edition, London, 1962. The quotation from Cavafy is from his poem "In the Evening." The drawings are by Walkey. Address: School of Architecture, UBC, 6333 Memorial Road, Vancouver, BC V6T 1W5, Canada.*

I've escaped the human press of Cairo for a few days in Alexandria. This morning the wind pulls off the sea sending clouds scudding low over the rooftops of this city of imagination. From my sixth floor balcony there's a glimpse of the Corniche sweeping east to Chatbi. Across the narrow street to the side, the building is wearing an assemblage of Moorish, Venetian and Arts and Crafts--one of so many here that filled the dreams of the European Diaspora.

The sea wind has been grinding away at this jewelled facade for eighty years. It's resisting; giving up only a decorative column, two balcony rails and some tiles. Closer to me, across on the roof and leaning against the many parapets, are the patched lean-to's of the roof squatters--the two eternally

different worlds here, separate, but intertwined.

I have just finished once again Durrell's *Justine*, thirty years and thirty meters from the last time. In fact I can look down two floors below the crumbling roof through an open window where a bed edges now into the sun like an angled Van Gogh. It is covered with a sparse grey army blanket. In that room I sat, desperate for news of a passage east, feeding on Durrell's Quartet.

It was Madam Rametta who had opened her elegant apartment into a pension for travellers. Ancient and fragile like her regime, I remember that her sentences trailed off, while quietly, like a giant Djinn, moved her Nubian servant leading with his round belly. He made us the silent breakfasts with toast too polite to crunch. The hush of the place--with dust settling on fine oiled furniture, the sagged and settled armchairs, greying ceilings, time suspended, waiting for...?

Both Madam Rametta and her Djinn are now long gone, but the window stands open to this sunny morning. There's the bed, but I see no one. The place is still out of time, but now the balcony rail looks more than treacherous. Meanwhile I sit over here on this balcony feeling safer, in one of the white plastic chairs that have infected our new world, and I'm down to the dregs of a skillfully brewed Nescafé. Alexandria's memories, my memories, Durrell's, Cavafy's rich load--and his imagination that leaps millennia--how this place has been midwife to so much. For the longing to belong.

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My memories of this place begin with trudging from a Beirut boat in western harbor through the throng of Arab streets. Bitten by





walking and travelling. He describes an experiment demonstrating that normal babies scream if left alone but stop crying at once if rocked to the movement and pace of a walking mother (p. 229).

In the realm of walking, too, we need to relinquish control. Walking on trucked-in gravel is not the same experience as walking on an earthen trail, and walking on a path is not the same experience as wandering where one will. Designers could develop some rudimentary trails and also design areas that subtly invite people in without trails.

One of the times I felt most alive was when a friend and I, on a drizzly March afternoon, walked down a path near to town along a stream. When we turned around to go back, we decided to cross the stream and return by way of the path on the other side. We took off our shoes and carefully waded across the cold water and smooth, hard rocks.

Though the path on the other side was nothing special, (I had walked it many times before), the feeling of being fully alive and engaged with the world lasted much longer than the cold feet. Years later, when I walk the path and pass the spot of our crossing, I still think of that afternoon.

#### 4. REVELATION, NOT EXPECTATION

Feeling a systemic relationship with the living world is at least partly a *sacred* experience. Scientist Gregory Bateson (1972) writes in regard to this type of connection to the larger natural system, "A certain humility becomes appropriate, tempered by the dignity or joy of being part of something much bigger. A part--if you will--of God (p. 462).

When approaching the sacred, expectations can be stultifying. If people expect a spiritual experience, their attitude will be grasping rather than receptive. In this sense, signs, publicity, or other direct declarations of intent are antithetical to an experience of interrelationship with the non-human. Self-consciousness can also lead to defensive joking or overanalysis and rob the sacred of its revelatory power.

The sudden nature of insight is one of the most powerful teaching tools and can generate strong

perceptual shifts. As humanistic geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) explains, "The most intense aesthetic experiences of nature are likely to catch one by surprise. Beauty is felt as the sudden contact with an aspect of reality that one has not known before" (p. 94).

Revelatory experiences gather some of their power from their prereflective nature, thereby avoiding the dualistic subject-object filter. Because of this bypass quality, revelatory experiences are ideal methods for facilitating a sense of interrelationship between people and the natural world. The importance of revelation suggests that secrecy, spontaneity, and human silence are all aspects of a sacred/nondualistic experience of environment.

#### TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES

Dualisms can be useful cognitive tools, but our culture has gotten lost in taking them literally. Environmental designers are concerned with modifying the environment to suit human needs and desires, thus sitting on the fence between culture and nature. Perhaps some designed places can help people to realize that the fence is only a metaphor.

Ecology can show us evidence of our intimate interrelationships with the world, but experience can go further in teaching people of interrelationships due to the inherent nonduality of revelatory experience. Such experiences often occur in non-designed wild places, but these places near our homes are being paved over and pushed back. Designers can try to step into the breach and learn how to create desirable spaces to facilitate extra-ordinary experiences. We have forgotten how to live in the world, but there is hope if we can now "forget ourselves."

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youthful frugality, I refused to bargain a few cents for a ride. The driver, the carriage and the horse all were bent with the weight of years on cobbled streets. I remember wondering, "was this the one that Darley and Mellisa took when...?" The pieces of the city resist time. They sag but do not break.

I would step past the swaddled boabs out into the morning sun of the street to be met by the boy on the board with wheels. Our morning bak-shiesh run would begin. Life on a board, legless, he could roll, manoeuver and mount curbs to keep any pace. My reaction began as pity and escape, wanting first to turn away from his plea for small change.

But then, as the days followed one another, we seemed to strike a bargain. My walking quickly became his challenge, his pursuit my challenge. So the journey for morning yogurt became center ring--down the side street, across the streetcar line, into a cool doorway for a moment's invisibility.

I'd lose him, but then at the shop, there he was with a wide grin as I dropped money into the street dirt of his palm. There's still a turn of guilt that lingers, but I'm wrapped with the memory that somehow we connected, dropped the gulf of differences and just had a little human play. Or was it my imagination? From my separateness?

Like Madam and the Djinn, my boardman--master of the pavements--is gone, but I look closely at the curbs and the warped streetcar tracks that were his path. Still here.

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And Durrell's memory? As I read again, the images leapt off the page, scurried within and exploded--people and places on the edge, transformations

arranged against the dark of difference. The many masks of Dionyseus that, like this city, outlive the wearer. A line of Eduard Munch comes to mind: "I paint not what I saw, but what I see." Letting the soma of memory be formed by imagination into a larger reality--is that what Durrell did?

I'm thirty years older as I meet again the faces of Justine. The worlds of experience that have stuck to me over these years now help to put some of his connections into a context thereby making them less exotic, yet closer in.

And my own life is now inhabited by characters with depth and eccentricity that I try to have the emotional courage to look into. Yet his lines continue to explode--new doorways into the light and the dark. Perhaps it is the "loose sketch" he makes of a person, of a feeling, of a foreboding. The openness of the lines seduce, like the wild pen of Felix Topolski. Then the shift: something is peeled back to reveal something new about Capodistria, and the dice are tumbled again to a new conclusion.

Behind all this mask and chimera towards Durrell's truth stands the place and the form of Alexandria, fixed and monumental. Almost every scene is preceded by a careful "placing." The landscape of the event is revealed.

The first bank lamps had begun to stiffen the damp paper background of Alexandria. The sea wall with its lines of cafés swallowed in the spray glowed with a smudged and trembling phosphorescence. The wind blew dead south. Mareotis crouched among the reeds, stiff as a crouching sphinx. He was looking, he said, for the key to his watch...

And closing in on many scenes we are surrounded with the dark and unknown--the threatening. In so





doing he gives us not only the comforting wall, but also its shadow.

At the fort we doubled back and entered the huddled slums which lie behind Tatwig Street, our blond headlights picking out the ant-hill cafés and crowded squares with an unaccustomed radiance; from somewhere behind the immediate skyline of smashed and unlimbered houses came the piercing shrieks and ululations of a burial procession, whose professional mourners made the night hideous with their plaits for the dead.

Like so many before him, Durrell uses the Egyptian Arab world as the dark force. Except for Hamid, his servant, no Muslim Egyptian plays in the light on his stage. He writes, through Arnauti:

The city has been built like a dike to hold back the flood of African darkness; but the soft footed blacks have already started leaking into the European quarters, a sort of racial osmosis is going on.

This dark is for me an engine in his making my imagination work. The light city, sea-swept with Hellenistic history, the players in his circumscribed, doomed world are pressed in by the "African darkness." Many of the descriptions in the quartet--the street labyrinths, night festivals, unseen sounds, the places of sexual trade--are haunted by this "other." And in Madam Rametta's hushed world?

What is solid is the physical city and the crisp geography of its shores. But this too is a garden for imagination--the grand house of Nessim, the dawn on Lake Mariotis, Melissa's tawdry dance hall, the tall pastry shops, Scobie's bedroom lair-- and what of Mnemjian's Babylonian barbershop?

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What was, what is in Durrell's Alexandrian crucible of imagination? Now the street names have been changed to echo Egyptian heroes, yet it is easy to find the trail to Rue Lepsius, and the rooms of the old poet. I find the door open only on my third visit. The small museum in Cavafy's flat has his books and papers laid open on pieces of furniture. Copies of his original poems reveal that nearly each line of heavily



accented Greek has been blessed with a tiny drawing or symbol, like in a child's book.

I sit in the dim and shuttered corner room at his desk on an arthritic high backed chair. (Is it here where the candles were lit in measure with the quality of the discourse?) I turn pages of a great tome on the lost Greek community. Then I move into the drab bedroom, turn the door and step out onto the balcony. Below are the small workshops where a few moments ago those at coffee tables called to me with "Kalimera" and "Yunani Yunani," Arabic for a Greek, a Greek from the Ioanian!

Durrell weaves this balcony into his web with a description of Justine reading where

With what feeling she reached the passage where the old man throws aside the ancient love letter which had so moved him and exclaims: "I go sadly out onto the balcony; anything to change this train of thought, even if only to see some little movement in the city I love, in its streets and shops!" Herself pushing open the shutters to stand on that dark balcony above a city of colored lights: feeling the evening winds stir from the confines of Asia: her body for an instant forgotten.

It's as if the three of us are here on this tiny stone threshold: Cavafy, the old kite flyer who pulled so many heroes down to this humble room, feeling the desperation of his years; Durrell showing us the balcony as a release from bondage. Memories and imagination, like canaries, seem to thrive on a good balcony.

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Alexandria, like the old poet, is losing, trying to stand against the flood of time and change. Even if the modern Egyptians have finally broken through the dike, changed names, worn all the old costumes and piled high to the east a new but faceless city--it still enchants. But then Alexandria has always been second best. Even Constantine bypassed it to continue his Roman dream at little Byzantium. Younger, more innocent cities play at being heroic, oblivious to the life-giving vulnerability of this struggle with time.

And after the poet's house, what about Mnemjian's barbershop? Is it a "was," a "never was," or an "is"? Can I find it, the mirrored shop of Durrell's memory man, the archive of the city?

Mnemjian's Babylonian barber's shop was on the corner of Fouad I and Nebi Daniel and here every morning Pombal lay down beside me in the mirrors.

Little Mnemjian is a dwarf with a violet eye that has never lost its childhood. He is the Memory man, the archives of the city. If you should wish to know the ancestry or income of the most casual passer-by you have only to ask him; he will recite the details in a sing-song voice as he strops his razor and tries it upon the coarse black hair of his forearm. What he does not know he can find out in a matter of moments....

I go down the wreck of the hotel elevator (just one more time please). Down past a Fellini-glimpse of an elegant door, "Nile Cotton Exports," not wiped since the great capitalists packed their overstuffed bags and left Nasser's children to play. Down to the heap of broken plaster and cement bags on the ground floor that is part of a conspiracy of repair, to stop time--somewhere above.

Across the fine cream-white marble steps of the lobby where, close to the rail, each stair has been worn away through to the concrete sub-floor--threadbare marble with the bones showing through. And out into the light with a brief thought of the boy on

the board. Crossing Ramelah Square I'm stopped in the middle by the blue tram, with its separate carriages for men and women, as it lurches along, clinging to those sunken and warped rails.

Along Nebi Daniel, once the Street of Soma in Alexander's city, each glittering new shop has been inserted into the old buildings like a cigarette holder in an unpainted mouth. Mirrors and quartz lights try to conceal all the pasts that hover above and behind.

Near the crest of the street I pass a vast doorway, gaping umber, in its measured renaissance facade. One of the great carved leaves is iron-bolted shut and by the open one two Nubian boabs squat against the wind, sitting on a sort of bench that has been tacked together with slats from some broken lettered crate.

The elegance of formal imagination beside the necessity of the make-do world. Parallel worlds exist here, but the dike holds--there is no racial osmosis. One stands, the other sits, looking away.

Approaching Fouad I Street, I am apprehensive. Chasing a ghost in a shop that never was? But the hubbub of street life and my northern purposefulness don't leave me time to savor this hung moment. It is an intersection with a third street entering close to the junction. Imposing buildings from the 1920s in lavish Italian and French style seem too grand ever to have housed a two-chair barbershop, even Babylonian.

Now a bank is next to a leather store that's all ablaze. Next is another place of suspended time. A shop--one light bulb, blue faded walls fuzzed with yellow dust, rubbed (not clean) windows. It seems sentenced to remain open until the last three items are sold from the 1951 inventory to finally lay bare the shelves.

Next radios, and a high Cairene fashion shop with a clutch of scarfed ladies both inside and out. No barbershop, no Mnemjian's bald head...but...? No doubt it's just my imagination tying to ground ideas in place, for without place where is imagination? Looking for another thread to tie--somewhere else perhaps... like a name on the tip of the tongue.

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On my last day I set out for a long walk along the Corniche past the yacht club whose white plastic chairs now announce the conquest of the American



chicken Colonel--and out to the gusts of Fort Qaitbey. Then I doubled back and sank into the old Turkish quarter. I've been trying to understand the Egyptian city and Islamic urban place where the "look-at-me" public front is unknown. After four months in Cairo it is less strange, less "dark African" and I relish its immediate human resonance.

Past buildings still "smashed and unlimbered" whose foundations may well have been the order of Mohammed Ali, that Albanian governor of Egypt who opened to the west in the nineteenth century. (He dug the new canal to the Nile that allowed Alexandria to resume her pride of place.)

Then into the sour-Souk streets with hanging carcass being carved for housewives, past the spice shops' blazing bags of saffron and the teams of shisha bubbling close to tall brass-topped coffee tables. The many one-eyed. The mounds of rubbish in the streets (there is no "away" to throw things to). A broken sewer makes the step cautious.

Children peer from corners and I say "Mickey Mouse" to their chorus of "what's your name" and am showered with giggles of disbelief. The buildings close in overhead. All streets off the main ones twist and turn as if they themselves want to get lost. Where was Scobie's room? Behind that crumbling French window where a canary hangs? Or maybe that screened balcony held his bed and the cake stand?

The most black and hidden arched passageways, crouching low in the dirt, evoke the groping of Mountolive toward the abyss of the child prostitutes. My imagination is still sailing on from the high seas of Durrell into these little channels and backwaters that really have nothing to do with his myth making. Here survival and the magic of their own sufic sheiks are afoot in this quarter. Still barefoot.

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By late afternoon I am back to the gridded streets where buildings are shabby but coaxed to stand in straight lines. Down Fouad I, past a few grandly peeling Greek mansions, again to the Nebi Daniel crossroad. Before heading north to the sea and my bag at the hotel, I pause at this old fulcrum--am drawn to step left a few paces into that third street that angles in close to the intersection. There it is. The small shop, only one chair, green paint. And the small barber moves to the glass as if to smile.

My mind tumbles and I step back to escape into

the familiar, the fixed, the shoes, the bank. How can I say what for me is imagination in this city? Almost every stone waits to tell a story and then retell another. "And so there you are" between all the memory, "mothered" like all the others by this skewed and tethered place.

The physical stuff of it is still clinging to time like an iron barnacle, not giving in, just slowly getting more thick under the shroud of dust and neglect. Wearing through marble takes time. The new imagination flowing into this city, the Islamic one, a lover of spirit and void, pays no-never-mind here. The piling of stones and metal into grand buildings for the European public dream doesn't fit. There's too much public extravagance for Islam's personal subtleties.

Bag in hand I cross the asphalt made slick by the droppings of crippled Fiat taxis, into the stale wedding cake that is the train station where a few scattered strips of fluorescent let green be the color. I duck into the silver train that will glide me through dark Delta fields where shadowed buffalo stand--back into the night dust and human thickness of Cairo.

