



# Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter

Vol. 4, No. 3

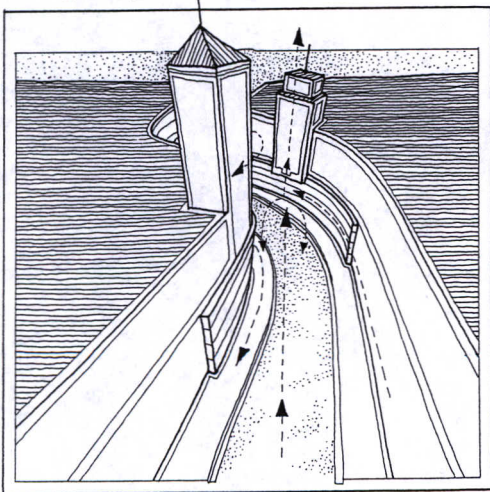
Fall 1993

This *EAP* is the last issue for 1993. We enclose a renewal form and ask that you respond promptly so that we will not need to send a second reminder at the start of the new year. The U.S. subscription rate for 1994 is \$8, while the non-U.S. rate is \$10.

For the first time, we ask EDRA members to pay the base subscription, since the subsidy we receive is not sufficient to cover newsletter expenses for EDRA members. Please realize that our finances are not entirely stable, and we would be most grateful to readers who are able to make an additional contribution. Last year we received \$335 in donations.

Also please note that the renewal form includes a questionnaire, the responses from which we plan to publish as an *EAP* membership directory. We would be grateful that you respond to these questions so that we can produce a clear portrait of members—their backgrounds, concerns, activities, and so forth.

*A drawing from Thomas Thiis-Evensen's new book on urban archetypes—see p. 3.*



This *EAP* includes regular features as well as a poem by writer Richard Kahoe and essays by architect Michael Brill, urban designer Fran Violich, and nature writer Tom Jay. Brill and Violich's reports are groundbreaking for *EAP* in that they both consider dangerous and unfortunate aspects of place—a site to store nuclear wastes safely for 10,000 years; the devastation of place because of the brutal civil war in former Yugoslavia.

As always, we need readers' contributions to keep *EAP* continuing. Please don't hesitate to send your work along to David Seamon at his sabbatical address: PO Box 1345, Hudson, NY 12534 (518-828-6706).

## EAP EVENTS AT EDRA

The annual meeting of the Environmental Design Research Association was held in Chicago, March 30-April 4, 1993. The Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology Network sponsored two events, the first of which was a workshop, "Paths to Phenomenology," organized by Duncan Case, Department of Architecture, University of Nebraska. Panel members included Margaret Boschetti, School of Human Environmental Sciences, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC; and Douglas Paterson, Landscape Architecture Program, University of Vancouver. Panelist David Seamon could not attend because of illness.

On April 2, some 15 members attended a lunchtime business meeting of the *EAP* network. Co-chair Margaret Boschetti led the meeting and recorded the following notes.

The meeting began with an introduction of people present; a list was circulated to gather names and addresses. Boschetti gave a membership and financial report. It was explained that there is money to publish a third issue of the newsletter in the fall. Several people present commented on the usefulness the newsletter to network members and other interested parties.

**Herb Childress**, doctoral student in Architecture at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, reported on plans to develop a network directory, which led to a discussion on what information should be included. In addition to research concerns and activities, the group expressed interest in knowing about papers members had published, organizational affiliations, courses taught, professional and practical work, and so forth.

A cost of \$10-\$15 was suggested to cover costs of the directory. Childress and Seamon will work to prepare a directory questionnaire to include with the renewal form sent in the fall issue of *EAP* [enclosed; *please return with your renewal!*].

The remainder of the meeting was spent discussing possibilities for an *EAP*-sponsored session at the 1994 EDRA meeting, to be held in San Antonio, Texas. Interest was also expressed for organizing an "intensive" workshop one day before the regular EDRA meeting or a half-day symposium during the conference. Suggested session topics included: life histories, personal life stories on phenomenology; how can/does phenomenology contribute to environment-behavior research; ways of doing phenomenology; phenomenological experiences in design practice.

It was suggested that a "call for participation" be included in the fall newsletter [below]. With so many non-EDRA members interested in *EAP*, it was also suggested that ways be found to encourage these individuals to participate in the session.

## CALL FOR PARTICIPATION, EDRA 1994

The 1994 annual EDRA meeting will be held in San Antonio, March 16-20. The organizing theme is "Banking on Design." So far, we know that **Ingrid Leman Stefanovic**, Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto, is organizing a workshop considering how phenomenological insights might provide guidance for one of the central topics emphasized in the conference announcement—"ethical questions about developers' obligations with respect to preserving natural beauty. How should we incorporate the costs of habitat loss and aesthetic disruption?"

If *EAP* members wish to contribute in Stefanovic's workshop, please contact her *immediately*. If members wish to participate in the conference in some other way, please contact Herb Childress or David Seamon *immediately*. Organizational materials must be sub-

mitted by **September 15, 1993**.

Stefanovic's address: Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto, 215 Huron Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1A1 (416-825-8662). Childress's address: School of Architecture, Englemann Hall, PO Box 413, Univ. of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI 53201 (414-229-4014).

For further information on the conference or joining EDRA, write: EDRA PO Box 24083, Oklahoma City, OK 73124 (405-843-4863).

## ITEMS OF INTEREST

**The Healing Healthcare Network** provides a "national forum for architects, designers, artists, and healthcare providers to discuss how healing designs affect hospital patients and staff." A special interest is "restorative, high-impact environments that accelerate healing and promote mental and spiritual wellness." The group publishes a quarterly newsletter. Address: P.O. Box 339, Brighton, CO 80601.

**The Earth & Body Conference** will be held in Columbus, Ohio, April 21-24, 1994. A central focus is "body numbness as a root cause of environmental degradation and body awareness as a necessary element in healing the environment." Format will primarily be experiential workshops that emphasize "concrete techniques and tools for somatic/environmental work." Contact: Columbus Center for Movement Studies, 221 Piedmont Road, Columbus, OH 43214 (614-262-4384).

**ArchiNews** is a newsletter that "links all those interested in built environment education." It is published by **CUBE**, the Center for Understanding the Built Environment. A key focus of the group is "hands-on" interdisciplinary curricula for primary, secondary, and high-school education. Contact: CUBE, 5328 W. 67th St., Prairie Village, KS 66208.

**Traditional Building**, a magazine published six times a year, provides articles and information in regard to architectural and landscape restoration, including product suppliers. Issues regularly focus on a particular topic, thus, the first 1993 issue has several articles on "restoring religious buildings" and also includes address lists and descriptions of 144 suppliers.

The introductory article on "religious revival" provides thumbnail portraits of 17 non-profit groups that range from "Partners for Sacred Places" and "Interfaith Coalition on Energy" to the "Association for Graveyard Studies," "Census of Stained Glass Windows in America," and the "Organ Research Center." A subscription is \$18/year. Address: *Traditional Building*, 69A Seventh Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11217.

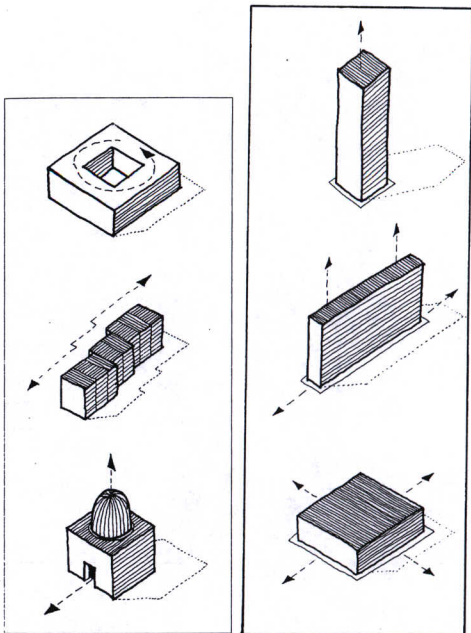
ISLE is a new scholarly journal for "interdisciplinary studies in literature and environment." Topics include ecological theory, environmentalism, conceptions of nature and their artistic depictions, the people/nature dichotomy, and related concerns. Each issue includes sections on "Theory and Criticism," "Classroom and Community Practice," "Shorter Notes," "Dialogues," "Reviews," and "Book Notes." Contact: Dr. Patrick Murphy, *ISLE*, English Department, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA 15705-1094.

## MEMBERSHIP NEWS

**Mark Miller** is a Chicago-area architect studying the consciousness-raising effects of living in homes in which indoors and outdoors are integrated together. Through extensive study of the martial arts karate-do and Aikido, he has become aware of the Eastern approach to getting in touch with one's spiritual dimension. Some of the key themes he is experimenting with are: making a thorough transition from one's daily routine to the special time that one practices (meditates); being fully present and focuses in the immediate moment; one's awareness of breathing and his or her physical connection to the ground (stance).

His current resources include: the writings and works of Frank Lloyd Wright, Arthur Dyson, Christopher Alexander, the Chinese art of Feng Shui, and traditional Japanese architecture. He would welcome correspondence, insights, resources, projects, and so forth. Address: 2226 Payne St., Evanston, IL 60201.

**Thomas Thiis-Evensen**, Norwegian architect and author of *Archetypes in Architecture* (Oxford, 1987 [see *EAP*, vol. 1, nos. 1 & 2]), writes that his new book on urban archetypes was recently published in Norwegian by the Norwegian University Press. The book's Norwegian title is *Byens Uttrykksformer: En Methode for Estetisk Byforming* ["The City's Form of



Expression: A Method for Aesthetic Urban Design"]. The book is now being translated for publication in 1994. The illustrations above, as well as several others in this *EAP*, are from the book, which we will review as soon as the English edition is available.

**Judith Valentine** lives in upstate New York and is interested in environmental sculpture. She writes: "I have recently completed a research paper as part of the requirements of a graduate program for a Master's of Fine Arts degree at Vermont College. The program is a low-residency, self-directed course of study. My paper is titled "A Chinese View of the Landscape: Feng Shui Principles as Applied to Moravia, New York." This research was an investigation of the Chinese art of geomancy (Feng Shui), a system of harmonizing human settlement with the landscape and the application of these concepts to Moravia.y.

"Thank you for publishing the newsletter. I always find it stimulating and have shared it with many of my classmates and faculty at the residencies in Vermont." Address: Judith Valentine, PO Box 912, 8 Keeler Avenue, Moravia, NY 13118.

## NEW ARCHITECTURAL INSTITUTE

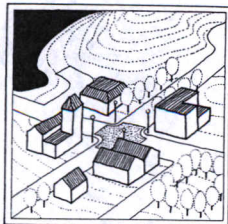
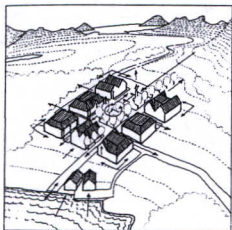
The Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture, in London, is a center for teaching and research, offering courses that complement existing architectural and building education but that also encourage radical new approaches. The prospectus reads in part:

The Institute's School is more than a school of architecture, giving emphasis to construction in its broadest sense, as well as to the human and environmental implications of construction. To achieve this the teaching attempts to relate theory to practice, traditional "building wisdom" to current processes, planning to community, and architecture to fundamental principles and feelings.

Non-architects are encouraged to apply to Institute courses as well as those intending to become professional architects. It is a key aim of the Institute to help break down the barriers between the disciplines contributing to the built environment, encouraging dialogue and the growth of a common language and purpose.

Currently, the Institute offers several programs that include a one-year *Foundation Course in the Building Arts*; a *Diploma Course* (MA) for students with a first degree in architecture or other discipline; a two-year postgraduate course in *Visual Islamic and Traditional Arts* (MA); and a five-week *Summer School in Civil Architecture*. In addition, the Institute supports a Research Department that will eventually grant advanced graduate degrees, including a doctorate.

For further information and application materials, contact: Ms. Nancy Giles, PWIA, 14-15 Gloucester Gate, Regent's Park, London NW1 4HG, England (071-916-7380).



## CITATIONS RECEIVED

Irwin Altman & Setha M. Low, eds., 1992. *Place Attachment: Human Behavior and Environment, Advances in Theory and Research*, vol. 12. New York: Plenum. \$45.00. ISBN 0-306-44071-7.

A set of articles examining attachment to place at a variety of scales and perspectives that include: possessions, ordinary landscapes, childhood environments, community attachment, place attachment for older people, cultural dimensions of place attachment, home as workplace, and environmental memories.

Anne Buttner, 1993. *Geography and the Human Spirit*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press. ISBN 0-8018-4338-3.

This geographer presents "a panoramic survey of ideas about humanity's relationship to the natural environment" and "explores the ways that human beings have turned to natural science, theology, and myth to form visions of the earth as a human habitat." Buttner writes: "For each geographical interpretation of the earth, there are implicit assumptions about the meaning of humanness. Neither humanism nor geography can be regarded as an autonomous field of inquiry; rather, each points toward perspectives on life and thought shared by people in diverse situations. The common concern is terrestrial dwelling; *humanus* literally means 'earth dweller'" (p. 3).

Arnold Berleant, 1992. *The Aesthetics of Environment*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. \$34.95, ISBN 0-87722-993-7.

This philosopher explores "the aesthetic dimensions of the human-environment continuum" and discusses situations that range "from outer space to the museum, from architecture to landscape, from city to wilderness." The emphasis is on an experienced "reciprocity that constitutes both person and place."

Marilyn R. Chandler, 1991. *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press. ISBN 0-520-07363-0.

This book examines how several American writers (including Thoreau, Hawthorne, James, Cather, Wharton, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and Morrison) have "appropriated houses as structural, psychological, metaphysical, and literary metaphors, constructing complex analogies between house and psyche, house and family structure, house and social environment, house as text. Just as the history of the United States is a story of settling, building homes, domesticating land, and defining space, our fiction is, among other things, a history of the project of American self-

definition wherein house-building, and for women, housekeeping, have been recognized as a kind of autobiographical enterprise—a visible and concrete means of defining and articulating the self" (p. 3).

Donald G. Jannelle, editor, 1992. *Geographical Snapshots of North America*. New York: Guildford Press. \$30 soft cover, ISBN 0-89862-030-9.

This collection of 93 essays commemorates the 27th Congress of the International Geographical Union and provides an intriguing look at the range of topics in American "regional geography" in the 1990s. The essays are divided into ten sections with titles such as "Wide-angle Panoramic Views," "Filters and Lenses," "Time-Lapse," "Space-Lapse," "Icons," and "Moving Pictures." *EAP* readers might especially find useful the many essays dealing with place and environment from a qualitative perspective—e.g.,

- Arthur Krim, Route 66: Auto River of the American West;
- Michele Masucci, The Chesapeake Bay Bridge: Development Symbol for Maryland's Eastern Shore
- Janet E. Kodras, Breadlines;
- Rita Roccio, Strolling the Strip: Prostitution in a North American City;
- Grady Clay, Crossing the American Grain;
- Patrick McGreevy, The Meaning & Making of Niagara Falls,
- David J. Nemeth, The Dogleg at Frank's Cutacross [a "notorious traffic bottleneck" in mid-town Toledo];
- Charles O. Collins, The Shrine of Guadalupe;
- David Seamon, A Diary Interpretation of Place: Artist Frederic Church's *Olana*;
- Linda W. Mulligan, Santa Fe: Place of Style and Postmodern Transformation;
- Barbara A. Weightman, The Poor Person's Palm Springs: Quartzsite, Arizona;
- Morton D. Winsberg, Fantasy Landscapes and the Creation of Walt Disney World;
- Briaval Holcomb, Finding America on the New Jersey Turnpike.

John S. Loft, 1992. *Time to Write: The Influence of Time and Culture on Learning to Write*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. ISBN 0-7914-0902-3 (pbk.).

Teaching on an island off the Maine coast, educator John Loft encountered students whose resistance to writing was grounded in the tension between time values derived from the changing movements of sun, season, and tide, and the time values of school regulated by the measures of clock and schedule. Using the students' own voices, Loft dramatizes this contrast of lifeworlds: "Against the world of the clock and bell, he places the world of the lobster fisher, the clam digger, the farmer, the

cook, the scientist, and the writer—people for whom the time to do things evolves from the nature of the task."

Douglas Pocock, 1993. *The Senses in Focus*. *Area*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 11-16.

This geographer explains that "explorations of the sensory base of experience reveal...a hidden, unexpected, or lost richness" that can be better understood by "focusing on the role and characteristics of particular sense modalities through work in the field, from literary sources, and from self-reflection" (p. 11).

Singh, Rana P. B., 1993. *Environmental Ethics and Power of Place* [vol. 39 of the *National Geographical Journal of India*, special publication]. ISSN 0027-9374.

A collection of over 30 essays; authors include Edward Relph ("Critical Reflections on Environmental Ethics"), Kaj Noschis ("Powerful Places as Occasions for Inner Dialogue"), Setha M. Low ("Place Attachment in Cultural Anthropology"), J.D. Porteous ("Resurrecting Environmental Religion"), David J. Nemeth ("Enlightened Underdevelopment"), Walter Brenneman ("Grough Patrick and Lough Derg: Loric Space"), and Edmund v. Bunkse ("The Emerging Postindustrial Landscape as Exile").

Tuan, Yi-Fu, 1993. *Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature, and Culture*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press. \$25. ISBN 1-55963-209-7.

This geographer examines "the meaning of beauty and the implications of aesthetic experience." He shows "how the beautiful and the good are embedded in all aspects of culture—from the arts, to politics, to ethics."

## NOTEWORTHY READINGS

Edwin Jones, 1989. *Reading the Book of Nature: A Phenomenological Study of Creative Expression in Science and Painting*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press. ISBN 0-8214-0908-5.

This philosopher examines the complicated dialectics between experience and concept and between conventional understandings and the experience by which creative thinkers and artists reach beyond those conventions to new points of view and new ways of knowing. His aim is "to analyze and to exhibit the phenomenon of creative disclosure" (p. 61).

The paradox that must be solved in dealing with

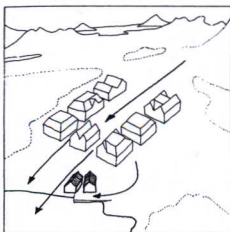
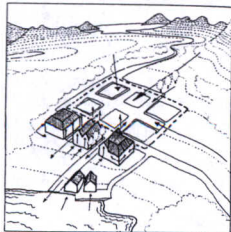
creativity involves the recognition that "expression is dependent upon a commonly understood world, or familiar meaning horizon, yet as creative it can neither remain as inherited within that world nor find its norm there" (p. 2).

Through the phenomenological philosophies of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Heidegger, Jones explores commonalities and differences in the creative acts of a scientist—Galileo—and an artist—Cézanne. Jones focuses on Cézanne partly because he was a kind of implicit phenomenologist who sought to return to originary experience through painting. "We must render," he wrote, "the image of what we see, forgetting everything that existed before us" (p. 139).

In his work, Cézanne faced existentially what Merleau-Ponty came to be call "Cézanne's doubt"—that is, how to give a secondhand communal expression to the sensuous immediacy of the lived world that he experienced firsthand and that he sought to portray directly in his non-representational paintings. This doubt is resolved, says Jones, when one realizes that:

the worldhood of Cézanne's life was disclosed through two modes of expression, and his exercise of these resulted in conflicting interpretations of Nature's reality. As a painter, he relied on his own openness to the world, and he succeeded in authentically expressing the significance revealed through his own existence, in the medium proper to a painter; that is, he made it visible. But when he attempted to voice an explanation of what he had achieved and of what was projected, he fell back on an inadequate ontic theory inherited from his broader cultural tradition. As a theorist of his own medium, he was unable to overcome the attitude in which the priority is given to conceptual constructions, and to natural science's mathematical formulations, for an interpretation of the "real" world (p. 139).

Jones includes an intriguing phenomenological reading of Cézanne's landscape painting, *Mont Sainte-Victoire Seen from Les Lauves* (1902–1904). The book is a difficult but innovative contribution to the phenomenologies of knowing and creativity.



*Phenomenology + Pedagogy*, 1991, vol. 9, 403 pp. (Edmonton: Univ. of Alberta, Faculty of Education).

The ninth volume of this Canadian journal of education offers several articles relevant to environmental experience and phenomenological method. In "The Poetics of Green Esthetics: Situating Green Criticism in the Postmodern Condition," Jan Jagodzinski [sic] seeks to "rewrite the familiar aesthetic language of line, color, texture, size, mass, and space in terms of deep ecology and a green politics" (p. 93). Jagodzinski offers intriguing discussions of "texture: the lived experience of home and familiarity," "size: the lived experience of scale," "mass: the lived experience of gravity," and "space: the lived experience of the cosmos." He writes:

The geopolitics of local and global politics are intimately related. The effects of Chernobyl, the burning of the Brazilian rain forests, and the pollution of sulphur dioxide...are felt immediately, globally. The local/global dichotomy should become a new ampersand, local&global. In terms of reversing the binary oppositions, it clearly means supplementing architecture with the notion of *dwelling*, space with the notion of *place*, and figure with the *ground* both in the literal and figural sense as Mother Earth, Gaea. As opposed to the semiological and poststructuralist musings of so many postmodern theorists, there has been the attempt to reinstate experience and environmental hermeneutics into the architectural discourse in order to recover the lived body...Regional and local differences are recognized. Buildings and cities are envisioned as living bodies. The word *building* refers us to the Indo-European base *bhu*, meaning to dwell and related to the English to *be* (p. 112).

Also in this volume of *Phenomenology + Pedagogy* is Robert Burch's "Phenomenology and Human Science Reconsidered," the last essay in a three-part series that provides a sophisticated but accessible discussion of phenomenology's key conceptual and methodological underpinnings. As with the first two essays in this series (see *EAP*, spring 1990; fall 1991), Burch is able to present complex issues in a straightforward way—e.g., "the meaning of the phenomenological orientation," which he discusses in terms of three interrelated themes: (1) "the study of essences," (2) "to the things themselves," and (3) "methodological conception."

The article contains many thought-provoking passages, for instance, this discussion of phenome-

nology's "putting essences back into existence":

In Kant's terms, "experience" means "empirical knowledge, in other words, what in general as detached subjects we can come to know of objects of experience, and "essence" means the a priori conditions of the possibility of experience, that is, what consciousness in general always already knows of such objects in virtue of the way it structures experience a priori.

But precisely in maintaining an essential perspective on the lived human experience, phenomenology undercuts the primacy of empirical knowledge in this sense and the deployment of the world as a field of objects for a knowing subject. The "existence" back into which phenomenology puts essences is in the first place embodied and pragmatic existence, that is, our active engagement with things in a world disclosed first and foremost as a context of action.

Phenomenologically, it is this engagement that has priority, in relation to which empirical knowledge is a founded mode of awareness. It is for this reason that phenomenology has been called, broadly speaking, a "praxis philosophy," in that it makes theory of action primary, preceding and grounding all theory of knowledge. But this means too that it must consider all questions of essence in the same way.

In other words, in contrast both to dogmatic metaphysics which presumes a purely theoretical essential insight outside the bounds of all possible experience and to contemporary skepticisms (e.g., deconstruction) which dismantle all essential inquiry, phenomenology must consider essences as they are first constituted in lived experience as a whole, prior to all reflective dichotomies, general ideas and static forms posited by philosophy (pp. 34-35).

At least two other essays in the volume may also interest EAP readers. In "The Speaking of Home," Anne Winning explores the relation between language and place by drawing on student experiences about which she learned through teaching English as a second language to Canadian immigrants. Using the students' experiences as an interpretive base, Winning develops five "axioms" in regard to language and home--*At home people speak to each other in a particular way; At home there is more laughter; An accent comes from somewhere else; When away from home we hear the sound of words; and The talk of home is different.*

Winning then asks what applied value these axioms might have in teaching immigrants a second language: "Given that there is such a homelike quality to language, what can be attended to in the...classroom to foster a more homelike feeling in the second language?" (p. 180).

In a related essay, "The Lived Experience of Being a Foreigner," Chinese doctoral student Zhou Wu uses his own outsider's experience in Canada to examine belonging, at-homeness, and "the inner conflict of a foreigner's self" (p. 268). One of the most striking sections of Wu's essay is his discussion of belonging, which we reproduce below.

### "THIS BODY OF WATER IN THE HEART..."

The feeling of belonging occurs to me frequently since I have left my country. It could be caused by meeting someone from the home country. It may be triggered by a letter from home, a movie produced at home, a book about home, or even seeing or hearing the name of the home country.

A piece of music can create strong feelings of emotion. One day my wife suddenly tuned into a radio station that was broadcasting a piece of traditional Chinese music. I was busy working... The music suddenly drew me to the radio. I put down my work. My wife was also standing there motionless. We looked at each other, and then both quietly sat down....

What a magic power that piece of music had! Our hearts trembled, echoing its beats, and the whole world at the moment was reverberating with its rhythm. I had listened to this song hundreds of times in China, but had never experienced a moment like this before.

In the music the walls that separated me from the outside world seemed to be crumbling, and gradually I emerged into the warmth of the surroundings. The music touched my roots. It brought me home. The music made me feel full and stable.

Then I realized what belonging means. There is nothing political in its connotation, nothing racial, national, or geographic. This belonging is as down to earth as pure water. I feel a sense of belonging to that world for the simple reason that I am a part of it, and it is a part of me as well. In the new world, I am a drop of oil on the water. In contrast, in the old world, I am a part of this body of water. I feel my own power through the power of the whole.

The meaning of the old world to foreigners is often elusive. It is very hard to measure its volume. This body of water in the heart of a foreigner can be as vast as an ocean, as it often occupies his or her whole inner world. It may also crystallize to a valuable pearl, hanging like a drop on people's hearts and getting lost at times.

To some people, the "old world" means their "home country." But sometimes it means "home town." And, quite often, a foreigner thinks about his or her own past home, or the people he or she loves. Perhaps mostly it is something beyond words. I am homesick, but I do not know what I am missing (p. 274).

--Zhou Wu

## CULTURE IS A MORTAL NEST

Tom Jay

Walking the forest path in winter, the few bare trees and brush in this evergreen world bloom again in empty nests; wren nests, robin nests, nests once secret bowers in summer's verdant haze now stark dun gray blossoms, cupped skyward in the dark bony arms of trees bereft of green and sleeping now in its absence.

In the elderberry and alder thicket, a shadow of a patch we cut for cedar house poles, I spot a wren's nest, hoary with moss, its spiny twigs weak with rot. This woven bowl with bits of blue egg, the subtle variety of its weft fragrant and savory in the winter snap holds me in an hallucination of scale. I imagine the lip of the nest as a ridge in the landscape and, closing my eyes, I peer into a mountain swale, dark forest and chimney smoke feint and fey in the air; I expect to hear singing but none arrives. This begged shape, this sewn bowl, this nest fascinates and stirs an older soul in me that unbidden reads the runes in old clothes, the hand haunting the discarded glove, the coursing stream beneath the city street.

This mortal nest perched starkly in the leafless thicket, the wren's spring green secret recalls the biblical punctum, "the birds and the beasts have their lairs but the son of man has no home." And my mordant muse returns to question "Where is your home? Where is the grave wherein your ghost might dwell?" And I drift into the confusion that dogs my modern days, confusion of the illiterate guest in this fateful forest, alive in a language as strange as I am to the soul of this place. The reverie refracts into my unease with modern life, contemporary culture, this electric neon nest, haunted by an imagination that is a manic hybrid of demonic mercantile wit and mechanical skill, a sexy automation that titillates but cannot breed or die and is learning to clone itself, the mirage in the mirror polished by the smooth abrasion of money, money...solvent of soul, precipitous, volatile, any value cashed in and wagered; the ancient essential masks of the world become kindling for money's fiery hunger.

And before me this mortal nest, this cupped silence and its bits of sky speckled eggs deepens the reverie, reminds me *culture is a mortal nest*, a woven circle

nestled in the trees, founded in the dark wind deft accuracy of intuition, our various breaths weft and waft among the firs, vernacular. The nest is a place the soulful birds find and found; the quick darting intelligence of wren, the aural patient wit of robin, plaiting their nests in the right places *finally* in nooks, crooks, elbows, sills, hollows, ledges and edges, small cogent synchronies sustained over and over; the nest rebuilt and repaired, haunting the truthful tree. *Culture is a mortal nest*; this phrase affirms the natural association of birds and souls; "A little bird told me," the falling bird headed man and his avian staff painted on the walls of Lascaux.

The nest is a circle, a prescience of eternity assembled locally, moss, twigs, bark, string, leaves, bits of this and that, a poetic vernacular, an architecture of renewal articulated in the poignant beauty of necessity. Likewise, culture is the human cycle artfully fit to locality, articulated into the "biologic" and "ecologic" of the place, harmonious and resonant with the ecology, the legend of the house--*oikos*. Contrast this nest notion of culture with the conventional wisdom that culture is an entertainment, a diversion; its aim, distraction not enhancement and transformation; the seminal discipline of a death song.

*Culture is a mortal nest*, its shape central to the cycle of dwelling. The nest is built by male and female to shelter and raise their young. The nest is the inevitable shape of dwelling and yet the young must leave it to try the form again, renewing the nest in the neighborhood. And always the wild card, the young raven, flies north. The salmon turns up the "wrong" creek; new worlds to try the old form. The young find courage and heart in the nest and its obligatory arrangement. Still, many nests fail and become threads in a larger nest, a revolving, evolving synchrony wherein the living remain to rearticulate the ancestor's haunt. *Culture is a mortal nest*; this sodden nest before me about to fall in December rain. The nest eventually feeds the tree as the tree shelters the nest, all beings articulating the ever darkening, mysterious light into smaller and smaller nests, secret rooms where old women with egg-tooth haberdashery,

dance in silence, dark pools where blind trout flash...

*Culture is a mortal nest.* The nest must be worked and reworked in place. Curiously the etymology of *culture* traces its roots to Latin *colere*, *cultus*--to turn and re-turn the soil. (Soil is also a mortal nest, cultivation turns its fertile past into quickening present light.) The metaphoric heart of culture is not abstract, it belongs to the plutonic wealth of the soil under ground; it belongs to places the herba buena and wild strawberries on the sunny hillside. In the human world it is the alchemical composting of moments, taking the food value out of history, growing myth in the dark soil of the past.

Culture is the tempo and shape of the human fit with local nature. It is the human compliment to weather, our gift to the larger world. The forms of culture are changed and worked like the form of a boat is worked by generations to fit the local waters, hence local *craft*--dories, canoes, coracles, punts, rafts, kayaks, outriggers, and skiffs; hence poems, jokes, folktales, superstitions, carols, chants, songs and keens. Culture is worked, not invented. You can't invent soil. It is the way a cherished song, polished by use, bears the daily life of people, not noisy ivory tower heroics. The diverse forms of culture are not static as totalitarian governments propose, nor revolutionary as the entrepreneurs and the avant garde maintain. Rather, they are conservative. Like a grandmother's reveries, lively, ribald and deeply wise, her stories and songs bear us on in time evolving, rolling slowly forward, not running in fashionable circles; her narrative changes by inspiration and necessity into nuanced connections to the neighborhood, mythos, a language that names the many hands of rain or the color of cedar trees at dusk.

*Culture is a mortal nest*, a temporary home in the trees, our children's bed, our burden; the firm ledge they leap from, their precipice the barrow of our love. *Culture is a mortal nest*--curiously, nest is related etymologically to silence and situate. They share a common root *si*. So there is an original connection between silence, situation and nesting. Perhaps it is because there is a fundamental silence in every situation, every nest. Maybe true culture seeks to grace that silence, congratulate it, like prayer or dancing at a wake or a wedding. Culture rises from silence like plants rise from the soil, each human being a kind of seed or larva that may or may not hatch in the silent light darkened soil. Culture nests in silence; broods in silence; silence is its secret fertility,

its mystery.

*Culture is a mortal nest*, your grandmother's Sunday hat blown off in a black easter storm stuck upside down in a ghost berry bush--waiting for the egg.

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### OKLAHOMA HOMECOMING

*When California quakes or Florida hurricanes  
eclipse tornado memories,  
when Houston unemployment goes ballistic,  
when death or divorce dulls the luster  
of the Rockies or the Ozarks,  
can you go home to Oklahoma?*

*A pipeline matrix echoes busted oil booms;  
"deer crossing" warns where whitetails  
were never known before, but armadillos  
challenge possums for road kill honors--  
as egret immigrants curry beef,  
hide-bleached by Charolais DNA,  
ears half-masted by Brahman spin-offs.  
And turnpike restaurant arches  
are gilt McDonald's gold.*

*But strangers still hail strangers  
as pickups meet on country roads;  
Native American faces look up from  
highway crews, toll booths, and nursing stations.  
Flat-topped elms and spreading cedars  
bow to sun, wind, and drought;  
mid-day glare engenders crow's-feet,  
while wildly whirling windmills  
invoke the psychic ache of steady winds.  
Cicada summer roadside songs buzz incessant,  
where terra-cotta buttes table over grassy plains;  
melon stands overflow from fertile sands,  
the fatted wheat gilds June expanses,  
and sorghum plush red-carpeted August fields.  
License plate codes prime dim memories  
of counties ingested for Oklahoma History, and  
sky blue state-flag fields shimmer over choice sites.  
Small town diner menus lean on beef and fries--  
"cholesterol" an oath in a foreign tongue.*

*But it can be.  
Eat your heart out, Mister Wolfe,  
I'm coming home.*

--Richard D. Kahoe

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