



Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology

Vol. 22 ▪ No. 3

ISSN 1083-9194

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

Fall ▪ 2011

This *EAP* completes our 22nd year. We enclose a renewal form and appreciate prompt responses so there will be fewer reminders to send in the winter 2012 issue. If any subscribers wish to receive a digital copy only (as a PDF file), mark the appropriate line on the renewal form and we will oblige.

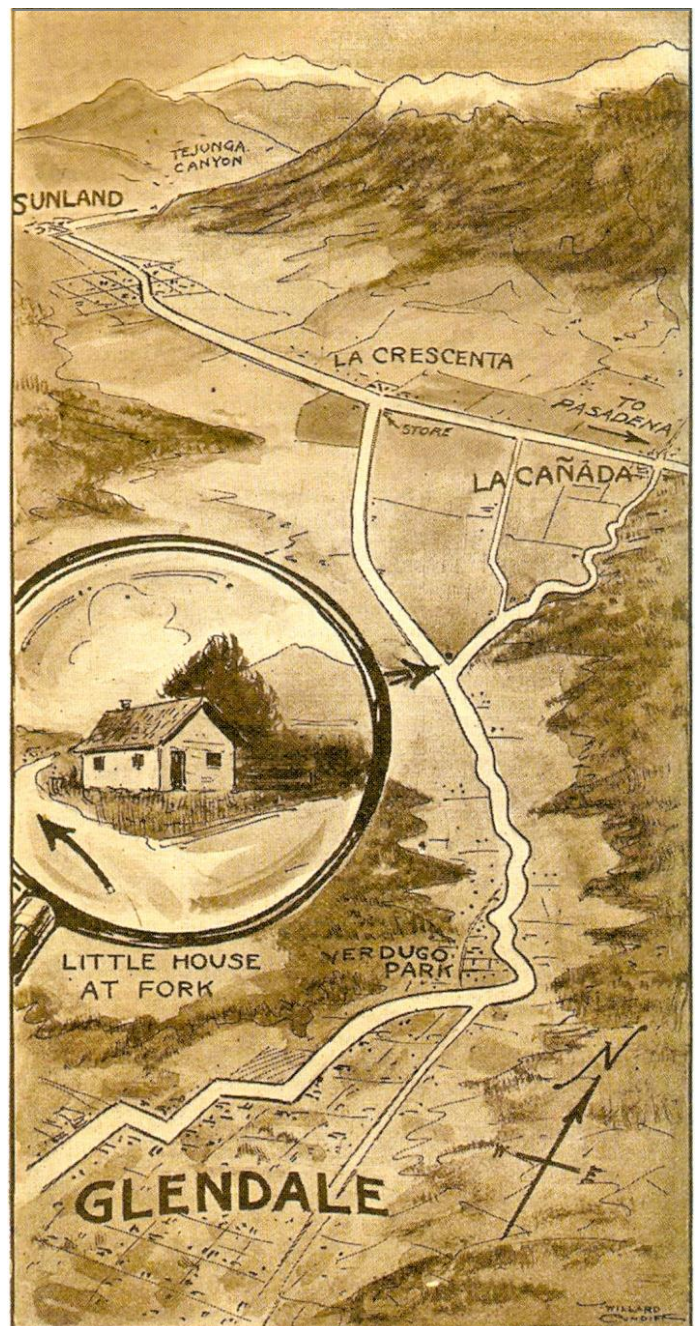
This *EAP* issue includes three interrelated essays by architects **Rachel McCann**, **Lena Hopsch**, and **Roy Malcolm Porter, Jr.** Each essay explores ways in which the lived body and architectural elements intertwine synergistically. Using the example of the Palace of Minos on Crete, McCann considers how Minoan architecture involves twisting movement and shifting viewpoints facilitated by ambiguous spatial boundaries and labyrinthine pathways.

In turn, Hopsch explores how Rome's Spanish Steps invoke a particular bodily rhythm, and Porter draws on architect Alvar Aalto's stairs at the Säynätsalo Town Hall in Finland to discuss perceptual depth and spatial experience. All three authors make use of the ideas of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty to focus their interpretations conceptually and experientially.

Right: This drawing and the drawing on p. 3 are from "The Panoramic Automobile Road Map and Tourist Guide Book of Southern California" (1914-15). These drawings are reproduced from Glen Creason's 2010 Los Angeles in Maps—see p. 4. These early driving guides "offered travelers a rather folksy, step-by-step navigation through the mostly unimproved roads in the [Los Angeles] basin. Drawn by graphic artist Willard Cundiff, the "Panoramic Road Map" included "180 whimsical looks at stretches of road between southland destinations, drawn with humor and accuracy... Moreover, this guide is purported to be the first to use aerial study, with the artist making sketches from a glider... flying over the southern part of the state from San Diego up to Santa Barbara."

The map, right, illustrates a road trip to La Crescenta from Glendale, heading north on Glendale Boulevard, which today is the Glendale Freeway. "Drivers were made aware of a fork where a 'little house' marked the spot: if they veered

left they ended up on La Crescenta; if they went right they would head to Pasadena over roads comprised of smooth stretches as well as rough, slightly sandy portions."



More Donors, 2011

Since the spring 2011 *EAP* issue, additional readers have contributed more than the base subscription for 2011. Thanks to Alfred Bay, Janet Donohoe, and Madeleine Rothe!

Items of Interest

The annual meeting of the **International Association for Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences** (IAPCS) will be held October 19, 2011, in Philadelphia, in conjunction with the annual meeting of the **Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy** (SPEP). IAPCS focuses on such topics as perception, embodied cognition, and intersubjectivity; one aim is fostering “communication between the continental phenomenological tradition, analytic philosophy of mind, and empirical cognitive science.” Contact: jkrueger@hum.du.uk.

The latest issue of the *Journal of Space Syntax* is now available in open-source digital format at www.journalofspacesyntax.org/. Founding editor **Julienne Hanson** has retired; **Sophia Psarras**, Bartlett School Reader in Architecture and Spatial Design, is the new editor. Articles include **Pe-Ru Tsen’s** “Viewing the Market: The Architectural Design of Trading Rooms in the Interplay between Face-to-Face Communication and Face-to-Screen Communication”; and **Sam Griffiths’** “Temporality in Hillier and Hanson’s Theory of Spatial Description: Some Implications of Historical Research for Space Syntax.”

EAP Session at IAEP, Philadelphia

EAP is co-sponsoring a special afternoon paper session at the 15th annual meeting of the **International Association for Environmental Philosophy**, to be held Monday, October 24, 2011, in Philadelphia (www.environmentalphilosophy.org/). Organized by philosopher Ingrid Leman Stefanovic and *EAP* editor David Seamon, the session is entitled **Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology: The Phenomenology and Hermeneutics of Water**. Presenters and paper topics are as follows.

- “A Tale of Two Cities and a River: Urban Renewal on the Trinity River in North Texas,” **Irene J. Klaver**, Director,

Philosophy of Water Project, Dept. of Philosophy and Religion Studies, Univ. of North Texas, Denton, Texas.

- “Current Thinking: Water, Boundaries, and Relationships along the Credit River,” **Sarah King**, School of Environmental Studies, Queens Univ. Kingston, Ontario.
- “Commonalities among Three Phenomenologies of Water: The Work of Hydrologist Theodor Schwenk, Sculptor John Wilkes, and Naturalist Viktor Schauberg,” **David Seamon**, Dept. of Architecture, Kansas State Univ.
- “Phenomenological Hermeneutics of Rivers: A Way to Integrate Design, Ecology, and Politics,” **Robert Mugerauer**, College of the Built Environment, Univ. of Washington, Seattle.
- “Hidden Streams: A Phenomenology of Underground Waterways,” **Ingrid Leman Stefanovic**, Professor of Philosophy and Environment, Univ. of Toronto.

IHSR Conference, Oxford

EAP sponsored a symposium at the 30th annual meeting of the **International Human Science Research Conference**, held at St. Catherine’s College, Oxford, UK, July 27-30, 2011. The title of the symposium was **Environmental Intertwinements: Lived Relationalities among Place, Space, and Environmental Embodiment**.

In the first presentation, “**Space, Place, and Home: Lived Experiences in Hospice Day Care**,” health sociologist **Andrew Moore** examined how patients experience a hospice as a place. Largely through semi-structured, photo-elicitation interviews, Moore discovered that, through three “existential modes of being” that he labeled *drifting*, *sheltering*, and *venturing*, patients establish a sense of “homelikeness,” both within the self and within the world.

Moore discussed how specific spaces and places facilitate a movement toward “homelikeness,” on one hand; or toward “un-homelikeness,” on the other hand. He argued that the three existential modes of being can be utilized as a conceptual framework for future research within a variety of health settings to understand the lived experiences and meanings that individuals give to space and place.

In the second presentation, “**Possibilities of Space and Place in Industrial Sheffield, c.1750–1910**,” urban historian **Sam Griffiths** drew on the theory of “space syntax” to identify a range of “spatial descriptions” for Sheffield, England, during the

Industrial Revolution. Rather than focusing on quantitative aspects of space syntax, Griffiths argued instead for its *qualitative* potential in providing the conceptual basis for a hermeneutic of spatial situatedness. Griffiths used this explanatory framework (which drew on phenomenological and anthropological literatures regarding the corporeality of social practices) to examine a range of historical sources with a bearing on the “movement culture” of industrial Sheffield.

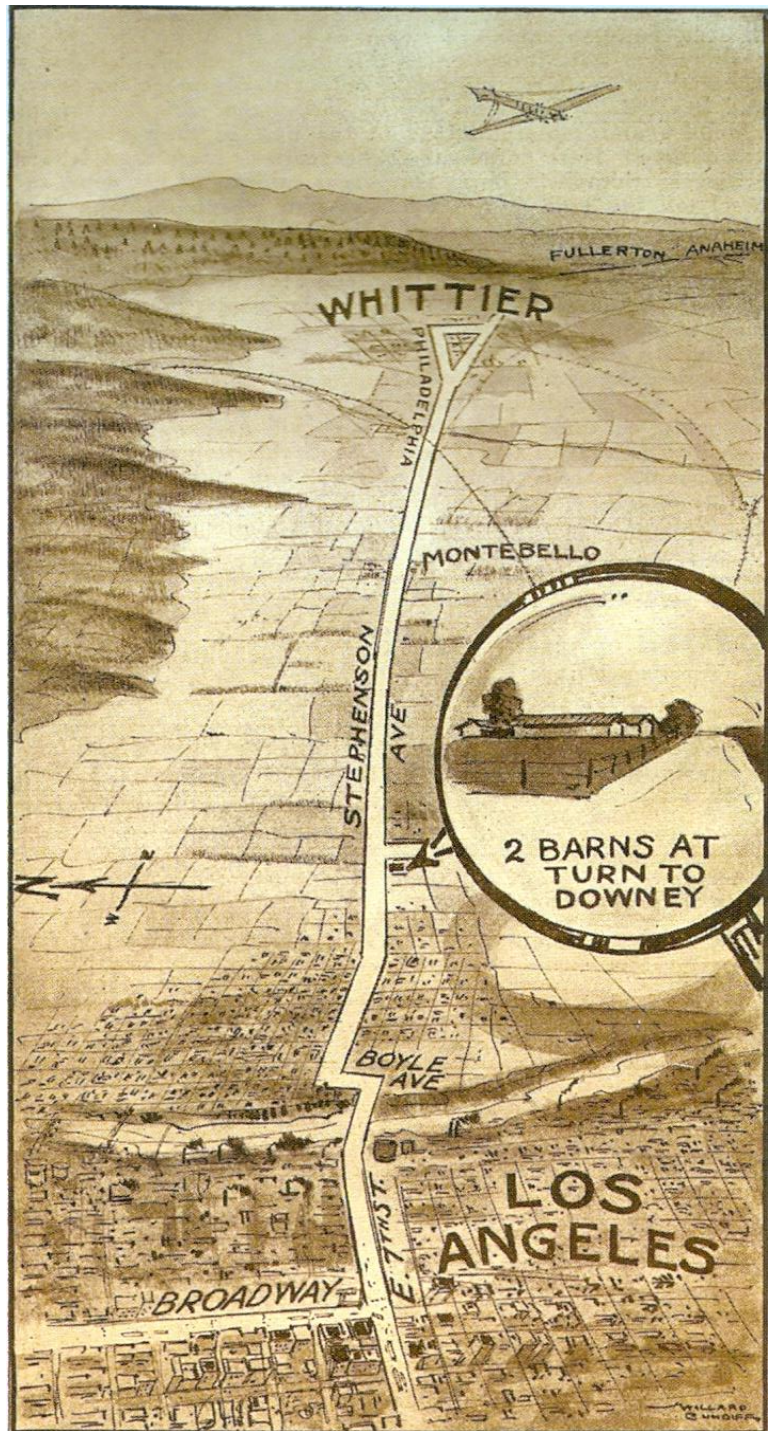
Griffiths contended that semantically “rich” practices such as processions cannot be understood in isolation from non-discursive “everyday” activities, implying the need to reconsider conventional distinctions between “routines” and “ritual” practices. He suggested, more generally, how apparently generic descriptions of “space” have a role to play in understanding the particularity of place.

In the third presentation, **“Seeing’ Merleau-Ponty’s Perception: Possibilities in the New York City Photographs of Saul Leiter,”** *EAP* Editor **David Seamon** drew on images from New York City photographer Saul Leiter (1923—) to clarify Merleau-Ponty’s notion of *perception*—the always already immediate givenness of the world founded in corporeal sensibility. Perception is difficult to understand intellectually because its presence typically lies beneath conscious cerebral awareness.

Seamon demonstrated how many of Leiter’s photographs facilitate a rupture in what is seen so that the tacitness of perception is given attention. Because of some visual shift in the world’s usualness, viewers bring direct awareness to the “unusualness” of the situation seen; as a result, the perceptual stratum moves to the foreground because we are not exactly sure what we see.

Seamon identified several ways in which Leiter’s photographs call into question our looking: Unraveling the ‘unknown’ through finding the recognizable; picturing parts of things; presenting mirror and window reflections that at first glance don’t make sense; portraying ordinary things oddly framed; and depicting unusual images of people-in-place.

The 2012 **IHSR Conference** will be held in Montreal, Quebec, in late summer. Upcoming *EAPs* will provide details.



Above: Another drawing from “The Panoramic Automobile Road Map...”—see p. 1. This map details directions “east over 7th Street, crossing the bridge over the river through Boyle Heights and following Stephenson Avenue (now Whittier Boulevard), all the way out to the Quaker-founded community of Whittier. If you wished to take a turn to Downey you would merely wait until you saw the two barns and make a right.” Note in the sky, right, cartographic artist Willard Cundiff’s glider from which he did aerial surveys for his maps.

Citations Received

Glen Creason, 2010. *Los Angeles in Maps*. NY: Rizzoli.

An intriguing selection of Los Angeles maps, ranging from Native American presence and Spanish missions through early growth and land booms to social life and the birth of the suburbs (see images, pp. 1 & 3). Creason writes: “Each map seen here incorporates in essence the contributions of hundreds of characters from Los Angeles history playing their parts behind the scenes that make the story interesting. Not just the mapmakers or publishers but the forces in society that created the necessity to create such documents. In looking at the maps of Los Angeles you will meet many engaging characters that are unique to this place and their time... The mapmakers, while different in styles and purpose, created geographical guides that in many cases were much more art than direction.”

Ann C. Colley, 2010. *Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

This study “examines the shift away from the cult of the sublime that characterized the early part of the 19th century to the less reverential perspective from which the Victorians regarded mountain landscapes.” In part, Colley considers “how everyday tourists and climbers both responded to and undercut ideas about the sublime, showing how technological advances like the telescope transformed mountains into theatrical spaces where tourists thrilled to the sight of struggling climbers.”

Patrick M. Condon, 2010. *Seven Rules for Sustainable Communities*. Washington, DC: Island Press.

This landscape architect presents seven rules that provide “a set of integrated urban design therapies for healing the urban landscape”: (1) restore the streetcar city; (2) design an interconnected street system; (3) locate commercial services, frequent transit, and schools within a five-minute walk; (4) locate good jobs close to affordable houses; (5) provide a diversity of housing types; (6) create a linked system of natural areas and parks; and (7) invest in lighter greener, cheaper, and smarter infrastructure. Condon provides a chapter on each “rule,” though disappointingly, in rules 1—3, he offers no discussion of the crucial importance of space syntax to better identify and design what particular pathway interconnectedness would work best for the particular urban place.

Norm Friesen, 2011. *The Place of the Classroom and the Space of the Screen*. NY: Peter Lang.

This educator considers “how common e-learning technologies open up compelling, if limited, experiential spaces for

users, similar to the imaginary worlds opened up by works of fiction. However, these experiential worlds are markedly different from the ‘real’ world of physical objects and embodied relations. This book shows these differences to be of central importance for teaching and learning.”

Torgrim Sneve Guttormsen, 2007. *The Embodied Landscape of Roads: The Case of Via Egnatia in Macedonian Greece*. In Z. Roca, T. Spek, T. Terkenli, T. Plieninger, & F. Höchtl, F., eds., *European Landscapes and Lifestyles: The Mediterranean and Beyond*. Lisbon: Edições Universitárias Lusófonas.

This article points to a phenomenology of the lived geography of movement and roads: “The concept of mobility is fundamental in a hermeneutic phenomenological approach as it deals with how people experience and perceive their surroundings socially and culturally.” Guttormsen writes:

The material manifestations of roads reflect distinct ways of moving between places and are thereby structuring space and, more specifically, a social travelling space. Landscape historical analyses of travelling spaces can thus link mobility to a socially and cultural-historically specific definition of a home-valued space. Could different road systems define different embodied modes of “being” as interpretative, experiential frameworks? And if this is the case, how is such a travelling mode of “being in the world” reflected as a home-valued or differentiated social space in the landscape?

Jonathan A. Hale, 2000. *Building Ideas: An Introduction to Architectural Theory*. NY: Wiley.

This book overviews major theoretical positions in architecture in terms of five broad headings: engineering (the technological revolution); art (aesthetics in philosophy); return of the body (phenomenology in architecture); systems of communication (structuralism and semiotics); politics (Marxism). Oddly, Hale ignores the environment-behavior and analytic traditions in architecture entirely (e.g., no mention of space syntax); similarly, his discussion of phenomenological work is limited, focusing mostly on the sensuous, embodied dimension of architectural experience.

Blake Harrison and Richard W. Judd., eds., 2011. *A Landscape History of New England*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

The 23 contributors to this collection examine “New England’s diverse landscapes and our varying perceptions of them, across two centuries of settlement, work, and recreation.” Topics include the Native American presence in the Maine Woods; a history of New England agriculture through stone

walls, woodlands, and farm buildings; and ethnic stereotypes informing Colonial Revivalism.

Gary E. Holms, James R. Patterson, & Naice E. Stalling, 2003. *Sense of Place: Issues in Counseling and Development. Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development*, vol. 42, no. 2 (fall), pp. 238-51.

“The authors present an interdisciplinary view of the concept of sense of place as a primary issue in human growth and development. The article summarizes research and theoretical ideas about sense of place that can help professionals in education, counseling, and human development understand how individual and group development is tied to the experience of geographical place.”

Pavlos Lefas, 2009. *Dwelling and Architecture: From Heidegger to Koolhaas*. Berlin: Jovis.

Lefas traces philosopher Martin Heidegger's thinking into the current debate on architecture generated by current designers and thinkers such as Aaron Betsky and Rem Koolhaas. Ten chapters with titles that include “Modern Architecture and Traditional Dwelling,” “Earth, Character, Aesthetics,” “The Building of Dwelling,” “The Building of Places,” “Modern Spaces—Contemporary Places,” and “Dwelling Disengaged.”

Juhani Pallasmaa, 2009. *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*. London: Wiley.

This architect and major phenomenological thinker aims to examine “the essence of the hand and its seminal role in the evolution of human skills, intelligence and conceptual capacities.” Pallasmaa argues that “the hand is not only a faithful, passive executor of the intentions of the brain; rather, the hand has its own intentionality, knowledge and skills. The study of the significance of the hand is expanded more generally to the significance of embodiment in human existence and creative work.” See sidebar, right.

John Percival, 2002. *Domestic Spaces: Uses and Meanings in the Daily Lives of Older People. Ageing & Society*, vol. 22:729-49.

Using a phenomenological approach, this gerontologist considers older people's everyday routines and implications for the uses and meanings of domestic spaces in housing situations. The author concludes that older people require adequate, accessible, and personalized domestic spaces to support “routines, responsibilities, and reflection.”

From Juhani Pallasmaa's *Thinking Hand*

I have always found it easier... and more efficient to explain phenomena of the art of architecture through other art forms. “All painters and poets are born phenomenologists,” as [phenomenological philosopher] J. H. van den Berg suggests. This observation implies that all artists look at the essence of things. Besides, all arts arise from a common soil; they are all expressions of the human existential condition.

The title of the book, *The Thinking Hand*, is a metaphor for the characteristic independent and active roles of all our senses as they constantly scan our lifeworld. The subtitle—*Existential Wisdom in Architecture*—refers to the other knowledge, the silent understanding that lies hidden in the human existential condition and our specific embodied mode of being and experiencing. Many of our existentially most crucial skills are internalized as automatic reactions beyond conscious awareness and intentionality.

We are hardly aware of the fantastically complex and automated metabolic processes, for instance, without which we could not survive a split second. Even in the case of learning skills, the complex sequence of movements and spatial and temporal relationships in the execution of the task is unconsciously internalized and embodied rather than understood and remembered intellectually.

The prevailing educational philosophies regrettably continue to emphasize and value conceptual, intellectual and verbal knowledge over the tacit and non-conceptual wisdom of our embodied processes. This attitude continues against all the overwhelming evidence of this catastrophic bias provided today through philosophical arguments and recent developments and discoveries in neurology and cognitive science.

The object of this book is to help to shake the foundations of this hegemonic but erroneous and harmful paradigm in the realm of architecture (p. 22).

Edward Relph, 1976/2008. *Place and Placelessness*. London: Pion.

This reprint includes a new preface to one of the first academic efforts to explore the nature of place and place experience phenomenologically. Relph's book is seminal, and it is wonderful to see it again in print. See sidebar, right.

Theodore R. Schatzki, 2007. *Martin Heidegger, Theorist of Space*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.

This philosopher provides an introduction to Heidegger's thinking broadly and then considers his changing views on space, spatiality, and dwelling. Schatzki then considers how philosophers, geographers, architects, and others have used Heidegger's ideas to explore environmental and architectural topics. Headings of the book's last chapter on "Legacies" include "In Heidegger's Wake," "The Legacy of the Spatiality of Existence," "The Legacy of Place and Dwelling," and "The Legacy of the Clearing."

Jacob Sowers, 2010. *A Phenomenology of Place Identity for Wonder Valley, California: Homesteaders, Dystopics, and Utopics*. PhD dissertation, Kansas State Univ. www.krex.k-state.edu/dspace/handle/2097/7052

"Sprawling over 180 square miles of California's Mojave Desert, Wonder Valley was founded in the early 1950s and today is an unincorporated community of approximately 1,000 residents. The community's landscape is expansive and unsettling, featuring a chaotic assortment of residences that include abandoned homesteads, squatter settlements, artists' studios, middle-class cabins, and luxury vacation properties. This dissertation explores Wonder Valley's enigmatic place identity from residents' points of view, drawing on an experiential understanding of place grounded in humanistic and phenomenological geography....

"Drawing on interviews, place observations, and textual analysis, the dissertation identifies and explicates three distinct Wonder Valley identities—*homesteaders*, *dystopics*, and *utopics*. Arriving in the 1950s, homesteaders were Wonder Valley's first inhabitants and express a practical connection to the landscape that is interpreted in terms of *environmental reach*, specifically, the creation, maintenance, and extension of environmental and place order. During the 1970s, as many homesteaders abandoned Wonder Valley, dystopics arrived and today include two subgroups: a criminal element pulled to Wonder Valley because of its local isolation but regional proximity to Los Angeles; and destitute squatters pushed from other communities and having nowhere else to go. The third group identified is utopics, primarily artists from Los Angeles and San Francisco, who arrived in the early 1990s, attracted by Wonder Valley's natural beauty and sacred ambience."

From *Place and Placelessness*, 2008 edition

I write in *Place and Placelessness* that home is the essence of place and suggest it is grounded in a particular setting or landscape. Increased mobility means that ideas of what constitutes "home" must also have changed, and my interpretation is now more complex [and] derives partly from philosopher Jeff Malpas's interpretations that "home" has to do with "the nearness of being," an awareness of openness and connectedness of the world (J. Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology*, 2007, pp. 309-10).

In this ontological sense, home appears through specific places yet also transcends them; it is an experience that simultaneously is rooted in a particular, familiar, meaningful place and yet opens into wonder at the differentiation of the world. From this it follows that every home and, indeed, every place is simultaneously grounded and boundless. We know from our own experience that there is no contradiction in this....

All this points toward a rather different interpretation of the relationship between place and placelessness than the one presented in this book. What I wrote in the 1970s suggests a Manichaean struggle between place, represented as good; and placelessness, represented as bad. This dualism is especially apparent in the final chapter, which begins with the bald statement, "There is a geography of places, characterized by variety and meaning, and there is a placeless geography, a labyrinth of endless similarities."

In this postmodern era, things are not so clear. Mobility, commercialization, disneyfication, museumization, all of which I proposed as roots of placelessness, have developed a potential to be sources of enhanced diversity.... My inclination now is to see landscapes not simply as revealing *either* place *or* placelessness, but everywhere as manifestations of *both* distinctiveness *and* standardization.

Place and placelessness exist in a state of dynamic balance.... Too much place can lead to parochialism; too much placelessness results in the confusions and disappointments of a surfeit of sameness. In between, there is a multitude of possibilities that reflect the character of the tension between difference and sameness (2008 Preface, pp. iv-v).

Perceptual/Spatial Unfolding: Body, Rhythm, Depth

Rachel McCann, Lena Hopsch, and Roy Malcolm Porter, Jr.

McCann is Professor of Architecture at Mississippi State University, where she teaches architectural history, theory, philosophy, and design. *Hopsch* is Senior Lecturer in theoretical and applied aesthetics in the Architecture Department at Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg, Sweden. *Porter* has taught at the Universities of Kentucky and Wyoming; he currently serves as a Historical Architect in the National Park Service. rmccann@coa.msstate.edu; hopsch@chalmers.se; Roy_Porter@nps.gov. © 2011 Rachel McCann; © 2011 Lena Hopsch; © 2011 Roy Malcolm Porter, Jr.

French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's early work on the nature of perception laid the groundwork for a revision of Cartesian ontology that has tremendous implications for architectural experience. In Merleau-Ponty's concept of Flesh, there is no longer a human subject dispassionately manipulating a world of objects, but a reciprocal intertwining between perceiver and perceived that takes place through a continual perceptual unfolding of phenomena. Perceptual experience precedes reflection, and we generally live in an open-ended, unselfconscious state focused on motility and orientation to task. Reflection reconfigures perceptual experience, bringing it into the personal realm and overlaying it with conceptual order.

In perceptual unfolding, "the real" continually manifests at each moment, replacing "what has been and portend[ing] what will be." Thus, things' firm being or determinacy is not their original state, but the end toward which their unfolding tends [1]. In this dynamic unfolding, we as perceivers de-center and intertwine with the perceived world, not intellectually possessing the sensible, but rather "dispossess[ing] ourselves" as "the mind goes out to wander" among perceived things [2].

To Merleau-Ponty, space is dynamic and interactive. In any environmental encounter, we are subsumed in the full-body experiences of moving, hearing, smelling, and feeling. Vision itself is transformed by the changing perspectives experienced through motion. Architecture's spatiality and tactility

exist in excess of vision, and we can examine our visual involvement with nature and architecture only when considering them engulfed within kinaesthetic and synaesthetic experience.

The responsive, ever-changing lived body is in rhythmic motion with stairs, interacting with wider horizons of meaning, architectural enframement, and our grounded axial orientation in space. The awareness of a "body schema" operating "below self-referential intentionality" as a preconscious, sub-personal process is a cognitive perspective supporting the thoughts of Merleau-Ponty. He claims that we do not perceive a neutral orthogonal space but inhabit spaces of meaning.

Merleau-Ponty's notion of depth is a charged intertwining of perceiver and perceived, a thickening of space springing from relationship. As the three following essays illustrate, the experience and expression of depth in a phenomenological context is a key concept for the creation of a perceptually responsive architecture that immerses the body in spatial depth.

Notes

1. M. C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1997), p. 91.

2. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Themes from the Lectures at the Collège de France 1952-1960*, trans. J. O'Neill (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970), p. 130; with translation corrected by R. Visser; *Raw Being and Violent Discourse: Foucault, Merleau-Ponty and the (Dis)Order of Things*, in *Merleau-Ponty in Contemporary Perspectives*, P. Burke & J. van der Veken, eds. (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1993), p. 120.

The Northwestern Basin in the Palace of Minos

Rachel McCann

The island of Crete stretches about 60 x 250 kilometers. Its boundaries are irregular, and mountain ranges divide the land into discrete pockets. To get from one place to another, one must take a circuitous path, following the contours of the land, encountering and responding to both horizontal and vertical shifts, alternating between panoramic vistas and tightly controlled views.

There is none of the grand axiality that characterizes, for example, the landscape of the Nile Valley. But the Cretan landscape is richly articulated with caves, mountains, groves, and rivers—many of them held sacred. A Cretan would navigate among these sacred places, winding through a series of ever-changing perspectives and foci, with memory and anticipation rather than vision as a spatial organizer.

Mythopoetic cultures typically reflect the complex character of their natural environments. Ecological philosopher David Abram writes that:

each place has its own dynamism, its own patterns of movement, and these patterns engage the senses and relate them in particular ways, instilling particular moods and modes of awareness, so that unlettered, oral people will rightly say that each place has its own mind, its own personality, its own intelligence [1].

Crete's personality and intelligence are inspired by its meandering paths, changing grades, and shifting horizons. This landscape speaks more of intricately patterned relationships than of hierarchy and order, more of twisting movement than of unob-



Fresco with springtime landscape, bronze-age excavations at Akrotir, island of Santorini, c. 1600 BC.

structed vision. In response, the Minoans' religion, art, and architecture are all structured around pattern and movement. Their nature religion centered around a kinetic form of epiphany employing dancing, bending trees, jumping bulls, and other dynamic acts in which movement sacralized space. Minoan art is full of movement, with figures caught in mid-gesture as animals twist and bend, plant stalks sway, and objects float freely in the air in charged, patterned interrelationships (photograph, left).

Typical of Minoan architecture with its labyrinthine arrangement and ambiguous spatial boundaries,

the Palace of Minos echoes the qualities of Minoan art and landscape. Unconcerned with frontality, hierarchy, and discernible order, the palace submerges us within a complex set of spatial relationships characterized by twisting movement and changing viewpoints. The art in the palace complex reiterates the forms of the landscape, while the palace itself reiterates the experience of moving through and interacting with that landscape.

This complex spatial experience, overlaid with religious symbolism, is evident in a sanctuary type unique to the Minoan culture, the lustral basin. Associated with ceremonies of initiation, the basin sanctuary is a sequence of related spaces: a rectangular anteroom enclosed by polythyron (pier-and-door) systems, a main sanctuary, and a depressed basin contained within the main sanctuary and separated by a screen of columns. The Northwest Basin, the oldest such structure in the Palace of Minos, measures 2.56 x 2.45 x 2.0m deep. Vessels found in the ruins were of the type to be filled with unguent or perfume, and it is likely that visitors entering the sanctuary complex used the basin sanctuary for purification rites.

The spatial experience of the Northwest Basin is layered and rich. From the northwest porch, we enter an anteroom through the polythyron system, in which pivoting doors allow the spaces on either side to be separated or joined [2]. This operable system allows the light level in the rooms to be adjusted from darkness to brilliance. In the opposite wall, two adjacent doors provide an incipient polythyron system leading into the main sanctuary. These permeable boundaries are reiterated between the sanctuary and basin, allowing for a great variety in the spaces' interconnection and shifts in lighting capable of enhancing ritual. The interconnection enhances the potential of the



Top flight of Northwest Basin stairs, looking east (author's photograph).

spaces to host a kinetic epiphany, allowing witnessing of the central ritual by layered groups of spectators.

The main sanctuary of the Northwest Basin is a rectangular room whose perimeter is pierced by a few clerestory windows and anteroom doors. The basin occupies a corner of the main sanctuary, simultaneously contained within and separate from the main space. The Northwest Basin is situated almost at the very entrance to the sanctuary, its steps directly in line with one of the anteroom doors. It is likely, however, that celebrants formed a winding procession, making a complete counterclockwise circuit around the basin before entering it.

From the top landing, we descend 16 wide, shallow steps in a counterclockwise spiral toward the basin floor, enclosed by gypsum walls retaining traces of the original paint (photograph, above). The basin's depth accentuates its associations with death, rebirth, and the axis mundi.

Layers of Experience and Meaning

Meaning develops in the Flesh as an intelligible, embodied response to "the allusive logic of the perceived world" [3]. The inevitable gap between lan-

guage and world gives room for ambiguity and breadth of interpretation as the phenomenon unfolds. Meaning, then, is not "sheer signification," but a fruitful intermingling of body, mind, and world, in which the sense of the world orders the sense of language, which in turn reveals the Flesh's intelligible content [4].

Initiation involves death and rebirth, leaving one realm and entering another. An initiate descends (dies) and ascends to be reborn with a new identity and a new role in the society. Descent connects one to the powerful chthonic region deep in the earth, allowing one to descend the axis mundi to the root of divine power. As we descend the steps of the Northwest Basin, the solid walls on the right enclose us as if in a tomb. The speckled black "stone"

increases the psychological weight of the earth as we descend through it. On the left, in contrast, the otherworldly area of the basin opens up between widely spaced Cretan columns that descend alongside us. The proportions of the basin are close, with room for only one or two celebrants.

In Merleau-Pontyian Flesh, architectural experience is thick with relationship. Surfaces open up and forms realign as we move perceptively through space. From a perceptual viewpoint, descent into the basin gives the feeling that we are passing out of the main sanctuary through a succession of elongated moments. Although the steps are shallow, each perceptually invokes a conscious lowering of one's horizon, stretching out the interval of descent into 16 discrete moments. The tread width requires two steps to descend one tread, causing us to dwell momentarily and fully at each level.

Once in the basin bottom, we occupy a realm almost completely distinct from that of ground level, but light through framed openings in the upper story gives some spatial overlap. The blue "sky" above, with light streaming in beside it, provides a strong contrast to the stone basin, crowning Earth with heaven and weight with lightness, accentuating both the separation and the

relationship of the two realms. During the descent, our focus is on the process of approaching; once we arrive, however, we understand and experience the overlapping presence of both realms.

Movement through the basin sequence is characterized by turns, changing focal points, complex lighting situations, and horizon changes. The spiraling descent into the basin is unparalleled in other sanctuary types, although it reiterates more ancient spiral tomb carvings symbolizing a journey inward toward death and then outward toward rebirth. A natural precedent for this type of movement was the twisting natural paths found inside Crete's abundant sacred caves.

Opening to the World

Merleau-Ponty asserts that the space of the body is unlike the rest of space. Although it is unknowable, it is never neutral; rather, the space of the body is the "primary here from which all the there's will come." The body is the origin point of spatiality, irretrievably altering space by its location and movement within it, and the carnal echo of architectural space reiterates the way space plays out in relationship to the origin point of our bodies [5].

Given the Minoans' artistic and religious preoccupation with their island's natural features, it is likely the spiraling approaches to the basins were conceived as a series of changing perspectives and focal points resonant with the curving movements necessary to navigate around mountainous contours. And movement through the basin sequence puts us in an ever-changing relationship to the religious truths contained within the lustral basin.

A perceived thing unfolds erratically, in "reflections, mirages, noises and fleeting tactile impressions" that interlace fruitfully with dreaming, imagining, and religious experience [6]. Layered on our own inner dimensions, perceived qualities of a thing become imperatives for interaction and help us to discover the shape of our own inner carnal terrain as our perception activates desires and resonances within us [7]. Perception does not grasp a stable object. Our perception always includes an "horizon" of the unperceived, including latent spatial supports such as light, shadows, and the tem-

poral horizon of reiteration, memory, and anticipation.

With its ambiguous spatial boundaries and the turning and descending movement necessary to enter, the lustral basin sanctuary reiterates the qualities of the entire palace. The boundaries—a combination of solid walls, punched windows, polythyron systems, and columned parapets—are ambiguous and transformable, resulting in a spatial complexity impossible to sum up conceptually. Axis and vista are continually denied in favor of changing viewpoints and multiple foci.

To be understood, the spatial amalgam must be experienced not as a unified object presented to the gaze, but through time and movement. The lack of frontality, the complex organization, the subtle manipulations of light all invite participatory and ambiguous spatial experience. The basin sanctuary's dialectic between separation and containment resonates with the subtle, complex Minoan cosmos, where nature, too vast, immediate, and complicated to conceptualize, formed the basis of religion.

The complex spatial interrelationships of the basin sequence subvert conceptual hierarchy and heighten corporeal experience, echoing the kinetic nature of Minoan art. Turns, level changes, layers of enclosure, and multiple foci parallel qualities in Minoan art, as we take the place of depicted figures "caught... in the center of an intricate design,... caught in the web of a living world that has indefinite orientation and indefinite multiple relations" [8].

Notes

1. Abram, D., 1996. *The Spell of the Sensuous* (NY: Pantheon).
2. We enter the sanctuary sequence through the northwest porch and exit through a turning corridor with ramps and steps leading upward to the central court.
3. M. C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1997), p. 200.
4. M. Merleau-Ponty, in D. Taylor, *Phantasmic Genealogy, in Merleau-Ponty, Hermeneutics, and Postmodernism*, T. W. Busch & S. Gallagher, eds. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 158.
5. M. Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, G. A. Johnson, ed. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1993), p. 136, p. 138.
6. A. Lingis, "Phantom Equator," in Busch and Gallagher, p. 230.
7. Lingis, p. 238.
8. H.-A. Groenewegen-Frankfort, "Arrest and Movement," in *Representational Art of the Ancient Near East* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), p. 196, p. 201.

The Spanish Steps: Rhythm and the Body in Space

Lena Hopsch

The concept of rhythm is basic in all forms of art, including music, poetry, sculpture and painting. Here, I explore spatial rhythm as a tool for better understanding architecture. I apprehend rhythm as a form of perception that governs the experience as well as the production of artifacts.

In a work of art, rhythm might stand for the expressive contrast between points of balance in relation to an inner movement. Rhythmical movement might be defined as a balanced form with an inner movement. Rhythm is an organizing power as well as a producer of meaning. Both aspects relate to the fact that rhythm activates internalized bodily experiences. Thus follows that rhythmical “meaning” comes out of ideated sensations—the memory of bodily movements and their emotional counterparts.

The experience of being a moving body in space is basic for apprehending rhythm. Performing a dance may be seen as prototype of a rhythmical lapse. A dancing body moves in time as well as in space—the very word “rhythm” is used in regard to temporal as well as spatial courses. The evident example here is the *mousiké* of ancient Greece—an art form where dance, music, and poetry were performed simultaneously [1]. The rhythms of music, poetry and picture have a common root in the experience of our motions [2].



To read a spatial rhythmic configuration, we need to perceive it as wholeness, a gestalt. Merleau-Ponty talks of “figurative space” and discusses the experience of our own bodies as gestalt [3]. He claims that space perception is related to a corporeal schema, or “body schema,” with “schema” etymologically referring to Greek “shape.” The notion of a body schema can be found within psychology and cognitive science; Merleau-Ponty defines it as “no longer the basic result of associations that build up during experience but a global consciousness of my position in the intersensory

world, a gestalt in the sense of Gestalt psychology” [4]. The body schema, or “image” as he calls it, also plays a central role within the cognitive theory of Mark Johnson [5], although he tries to make the body image operational within language, while Merleau-Ponty considers it in more discursive terms [6]. In the theory of embodiment, all aspects of cognition, such as ideas, thoughts, concepts, and categories are shaped by aspects of the body.

From a cognitive perspective, the body image involves self-awareness—for example, our posture in space. According to philosopher Shaun Gallagher, the body schema is used when interacting with the environment [7]. The human ability to evoke rhythm is another cognitive structure needed for interpretation and for orientation in space. The notion of a gestalt, or spatial figure—for example, stair patterns—

plays an important role in our consciousness of spatiality and the way we perceive space with all senses. Gestalt psychologists point out how the perception of a gestalt is brought together by “a perceptual field.” Like our body, a gestalt is more than the sum of its parts.

The meeting between body and world is natural as well as culturally and conventionally produced. The rhythmic experience is likely to be found somewhere in the tension between universal, cognitive experience and culturally determined aesthetic conventions. The cognitive factors are specifically the experience of balance, direction, and movement. The conventional factors consist of adequate, historically determined, gestalt patterns—for example the Baroque style of architect Francesco De Sanctis’s Spanish Steps in Rome (1723) with their attraction and retardation of movements (drawing, preceding page).

In Tune with Stairs

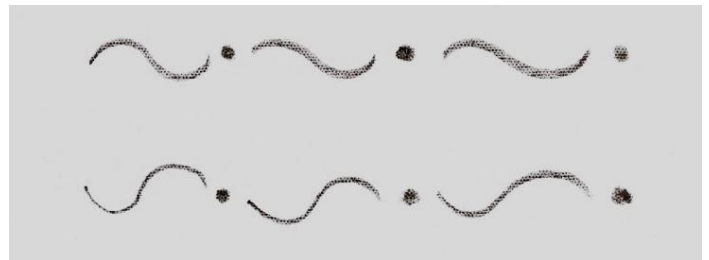
In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002) discusses movement as part of the sensorimotor experience of the body. He emphasizes that human understanding of the world is based upon bodily perception. According to Merleau-Ponty, we do not understand a room, for example, just by our intellect but also by our bodily presence. The body is not just part of a perceptual field; it is also itself a perceptual field. The body schema explains how we relate our sense for visual balance, for example, to the experience of bodily balance. Body comes before perception, and even vision is born out of the body: “...it is born ‘as occasioned’ by the body by what happens in the body; it is ‘invited’ to think by the body” [8].

Rhythm is multisensory and appeals to our tactile, kinaesthetic, visual, and auditory senses. The stair is an architectural gestalt that appeals to all the senses. The stair meets us as a passage and a sequence experienced over time. Its here-and-now experience coordinates with memories of past experience and what is present. As a mental image, the verticality of the stair is as central in the building as the spine in our body [9]. The movement of the stair leads up and down, symbolically a movement both toward aspects of light as well as down into the unconscious. Physically, the stair is the part of the building that interacts most palpably with our bodies.

Visually, the movement is already inscribed as a repetition in construction, which Juhani Pallasmaa describes as “the regular rhythm of the stairs echo[ing] the beating of the heart and the rhythm of breathing” [10].

A stair builds patterns of movements into architecture. A spiral stair calls for a different pattern of movements than a straight stair. Short steps afford a different tempo than long ones that create a strident pace. An open stair makes different sounds than a closed stair, the acoustics of stone and wood differ considerably, and different persons can often be recognized from walking sounds.

The play between stair and floor creates a temporal interchange. One example is De Sanctis’s Spanish Steps, with their sequence of flow—slowing down, flowing, slowing down, and so forth. This series of stair illustrates how a dynamic shape can produce a kinaesthetic experience of motion. Dynamic rhythm—concave form, convex form, concave form—meet kinaesthetic rhythm and motion. When we move on the Spanish Steps, our experience of motility is intensified through the dramaturgy of flow and slowing down that the architect created.



A stairway puts us in motion and makes us aware of our own body’s spatiality through motion. The stair is a point of reference where we really interact with architecture. In *Primacy of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty describes how “the ‘painter [and the architect] takes his body with him... but that body ... is an intertwining of vision and movement” [11].

It is through intentionality that we, as beholders, become a part of the stair’s rhythmic figure. The stair formats directions in space that we can relate to our own bodily direction. As Merleau-Ponty emphasizes, it is only through motion that we can perceive our own body’s spatiality.

Using a stair may give us an experience of beats, a repeated pulse as in music. When a stair meets

landing and then a another stair, there might be a certain swing, as in jazz music—a play with changes of movements and tempo, like the different stairs in the World Culture Museum in Gothenburg, Sweden, by architects Brisac and Gonzales. The experience of an interchange points to the experiential quality of rhythm, where a sequence can be read as a situation and activity where the memory of past sequences plays a large part. Langer claims that “the essence of rhythm is the preparation of a new event by the ending of a previous one” [12].

If we return to the Spanish Steps’ flow/slowing down/flow, we find that “the teasing Baroque plays with the attraction and retardation of movements” [13]. This pattern of tension/relaxation and activity/rest is also found within the rhythm of the sculptural contrapposto. One could compare heavy and light drum beats or a poem’s prominent and non-prominent syllables with the possibilities for exciting a rhythmic stimulation. The stair provides this possibility and can be associated with what sculptor Naum Gabo describes as “our desire for real kinetic rhythms passing in space,” something that he claims is satisfied in the experience of dance and theatre [14].

The architecture of the Spanish Steps is also a pattern that synchronizes its three flights and three landings (representing the Trinity) and the whole movement from the Berninis’ *Fontana della Baraccia* to the church *Santissima Trinità dei Monti*, the end of the pilgrimage.

An Overarching Movement

I have argued here that spatial/visual rhythm can be defined in terms of flow, structure, and gestalt. Flow is a synchronization of tensions and directions in a work of art that creates a movement in the overarching structure.

To experience a gestalt, there has to be a point of balance through which the whole structure is built. A composition’s flow, however, may be experienced very differently depending on whether or not balance is achieved. In the Spanish Steps, there is the sequence of flow/slowing down/flow contributing to an inner rhythm. Balance is achieved but leads to a new movement. A past/new experience is created. Kinaesthetic rhythms—the viewer’s own bodily experience—catch the play between dynamic rhythms,

form relations of the stair, and earlier image memories. These “inner movements” create tensions, aberrations, and exchanges in a perceived gestalt.

Visual/spatial rhythm can be said to signify this experience of balance and motion in an art work. We are aware of architectural qualities like rhythmic, spatial experience because they “awaken an echo in our body and because the body welcomes them” [15].

Notes

1. S. H. Lonsdale, *Dance and Ritual Play in Greek Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1993), p. 6.
2. M. Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 247; M. Johnson, *The Body in the Mind* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987).
3. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 114. Merleau-Ponty also discusses “a total awareness of my posture in the intersensory world, a ‘form’ in the sense used by Gestalt psychology.”
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 112-115
5. Johnson, *Body in the Mind*.
6. Researchers who study embodied cognition and the embodied mind contend that the nature of the human mind is largely determined by the form of the human body. They argue that all aspects of cognition, such as ideas, thoughts, concepts and categories are shaped by aspects of the body. These aspects include the perceptual system; the intuitions that underlie the ability to move; activities and interactions with our environment; and the naive understanding of the world that is built into the body and the brain.
7. S. Gallagher & J. Cole, “Body Schema and Body Image in a Deafferented Subject,” *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader*, D. Welton, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 131-134.
8. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” in *The Primacy of Perception*, J. M. Edie, ed. (Evanston. IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964), p. 175.
9. J. Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema*. (Helsinki: Raukennustieto, 2001), p. 33; J. Pallasmaa, *Rapport från Rytmsymposiet* [Report from Symposium on Rhythm], 2006, p. 44.
10. Juhani Pallasmaa, *Architecture of Image*, p. 33.
11. Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” p. 162.
12. Susan K. Langer, *Feeling and Form* (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1953), p. 126.
13. Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1979), p. 159.
14. N. Gabo, “The Realistic Manifesto,” in Read, H. & Martin, L. eds., *Naum Gabo Constructions, Sculpture, Paintings, Drawings, Engraving* (Cambridge:Harvard Univ. Press, 1957), p. 169.
15. Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” p. 164.

Drawing, p. 11: Giovanni Paolo Pannini, ca 1756-58, “View of the Spanish Steps.”

The Stairs at Säynätsalo Town Hall: The Perception of Depth and the Experience of Space

Roy Malcolm Porter, Jr.

Both the sense of corporeality and repetitive sensation contribute to the perception of depth and experience of spatiality. By examining Finnish architect Alvar Aalto's pair of stairs at Säynätsalo Town Hall (photograph, right), we can offer one perspective on that experience and affirm some primary relationships between ourselves as the beings who simultaneously enclose and occupy space and our cosmos.

Spatiality-as-experienced becomes possible with the full engagement of ourselves in its exploration. As Merleau-Ponty observes, we provide the point of origin for our perception of depth and recognize that space not only radiates outward from us frontally but also surrounds us completely [1]. Space is there. How do we engage it? How does space engage us?

While our eyes view space and inform us about depth, only through motion do we fully engage in the experience of space. As we move, we realize ourselves as beings in motion, material bodies sensing a variety of rhythms—the pace of our stride, our arm swing, our breathing. We find our attention drawn toward the front of our bodies. We perceive depth because it awakens something within us [2].

This connection between the perception of depth and the organization of our bodies is evident. We find ourselves fully engaged because we perceive space with several senses. Our touch establishes a boundary, expanded with a glance as we visually project ourselves. As we stretch our arms, a sense of horizontality emerges. Our glance falls, and we trace a line perpendicular to the plane of the earth, echoing the vertical axis marked by our posture [3].

Our experience of space thus emerges during the simultaneous interaction of several phenomena. We supply the axes required for its creation because our posture presents a vertical axis, while the span of our arms provides a horizontal axis, which designates a minimum width. Implicit in the creation of space is



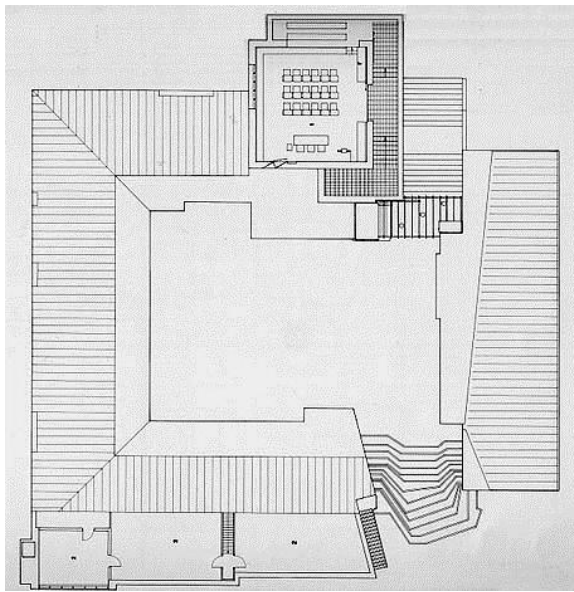
our performance of the dual role of creator and spectator [4]. As the historian August Schmarsow notes,

every spatial creation is first and foremost the enclosing of a subject; and thus architecture as a human art differs fundamentally from all endeavors in the applied arts. At the outset, the creative and the appreciative subjects are one and the same [5].

When we are present, the vertical axis is visible; when we are absent, the enclosure of space defines that axis: the construction of space emanates from our self, “a projection from within the subject, irrespective of whether we physically place ourselves inside the space or mentally project ourselves into it” [6].

Yet our experience of spatiality is incomplete without the engagement of another dimension—depth. This dimension coincides with the path of our movement. Our attention focuses on those phenomena most closely tied to our own existence, and we are drawn to that which is enclosed, rather than the means of enclosure. Were we to do otherwise—“to articulate the structure and the exterior of the building, completely neglecting the invention of space” [7]—we would “lose sight of the inner aspect of architectural creation and of the perennial motive that supplies its psychological explanation” [8].

Investigations of the human experience of spatiality must give attention to the participation of the body in that process. Whether as a graceful extension of the arms, a casual turn of the head, or a purposeful stride toward a destination, physical activity serves as a means for engagement. Another aspect of this engagement is important, however, for it is fundamental:



The ground under our feet is the precondition for our corporeal sensation and our orientation to the general arena of the earth. However, it is also a precondition for our naturally developing sense of space, as it must develop in beings standing and walking erect [9].

Thus, the ground provides “the essential foundation for the living human being... as well as the common basis for our buildings” [10]. Nowhere are these phenomena more apparent than in architecture, and nowhere within architecture are these phenomena more apparent than in transition, as in the experience of stairs. The pair of stairs for the Säynätsalo Town Hall proposes their ascents as their preferred routes. In fact, several hierarchies have been established with the presentation of these stairs, but their competition is benign, lending itself to the creation of several unique experiences.

As the building’s plan illustrates (above), the paths have their own orientations and lead us to their own destinations. At one corner lies a set of stairs with an irregular outline, cascading from the plaza like the slope of a hillside in the nearby forest.

When climbed, these stairs lead us to a point of entry to a plaza created by the enclosure of space by several elements. Situated opposite these stairs is a set of stairs more regularly organized with a typical arrangement of risers and treads that leads us upward to the same plaza. Yet the procession does not end there. Rather, the axis shifts and our path becomes extended, leading to the chamber of the town council.

While the stair processions are similar, they differ experientially. As we ascend, we are presented with increasingly full views of the plaza. Depth unfolds

gradually as we climb. Only when we reach the plaza is its scale fully known and its spatiality fully grasped as its identity as a separate landscape is revealed. In these two processions, more and less formal, we are led to the same destination, although different experiences are provided during those processions.

There is another relationship introduced in the ascent and descent of the stairs and accented by different stair materials,

whose textures provide their own sensations upon contact with our feet. We become more aware of site—the earth itself—as the very basis for our sense of our own corporeality and our uniquely human orientation [11].

Other relationships soon become evident, as we ponder the identity of this plane. Earth provides the counterpoint to motion, for Earth seems static, while we are mobile. It endures, while we yield [12]. Site soon reveals its own sense of spatiality, enhanced in the creation of landscapes unexpectedly discovered and fully embraced. We are flesh bound by space and disposed toward its rhythmic engagement.

Notes

1. M. Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” in *The Primacy of Perception*, J. M. Edie, ed. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 172-73, p. 178.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
3. A. Schmarsow, *Grundbegriffe der Kunstwissenschaft am Übergang vom Altertum zum Mittelalter kritisch erörtert und im systematischem Zusammenhange dargestellt* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1905), p. 41.
4. A. Schmarsow, *Das Wesen der architektonischen Schöpfung* (Leipzig: K. W. Hiersemann, 1896), p. 17.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-15.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.
9. Schmarsow, *Grundbegriffe*, p. 182.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
12. H. Mallgrave & E. Ikonou, eds. *Empathy, Form, and Space* (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center, 1994), pp. 65-66, p. 85.

Drawing above: Plan, Säynätsalo Town Hall (from Richard Weston, *Town Hall, Säynätsalo*. London: Phaidon Press, 1993).