



# Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology

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**T**his *EAP* starts 22 years. We thank readers renewing subscriptions and include a reminder for “delinquents.” We are grateful to subscribers who contributed more than the base subscription. Thank you!

This issue includes four feature essays. First, naturalist **Paul Krafel** explores the experience of looking at stars in the night sky, and British writer **Christine Rhone** describes the sacred landscape of Painted Rock, California. In turn, historic-preservation planner **Jeremy Wells** considers the need for preservationists to incorporate the lived qualities of historic places in methods of evaluation, and architect **Reza Shirazi** examines architectural phenomenologist Christian Norberg-Schulz’s critique of Japanese architect Tadao Ando’s Vitra Conference Center in Germany.

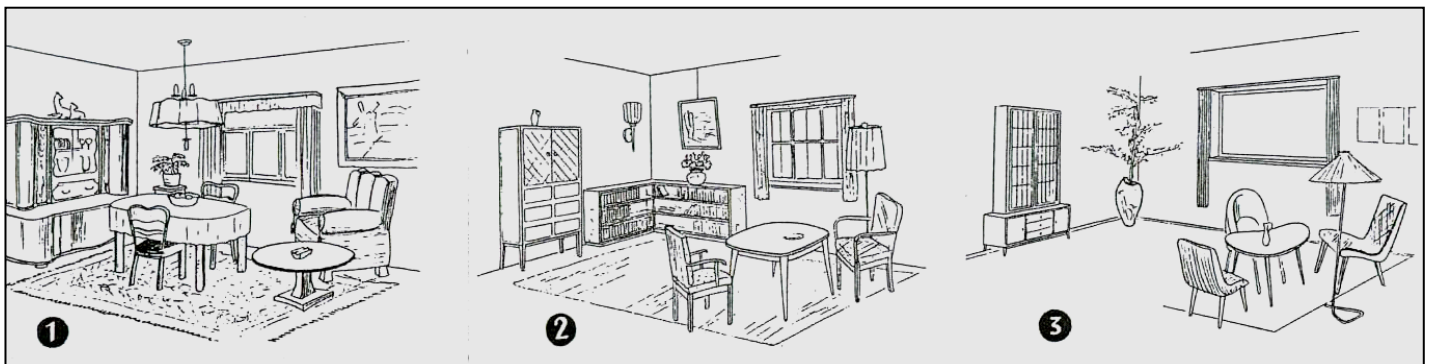
Shirazi’s essay is especially provocative because it demonstrates how different phenomenologists can interpret the same buildings differently in terms of their experiential dimensions. Such variations in phenomenological understanding raise the important matter of interpretive accuracy and trustworthiness—always a difficult issue in phenomenological and hermeneutic research.

## IHSR Conference, Oxford, UK

The 30<sup>th</sup> annual **International Human Science Research** conference will be hosted by the UK’s Open

University and held at St. Catherine’s College, Oxford University, Oxford, July 27–30, 2011. The conference theme is “Intertwining Body-Self-World.” Conference organizers are **Linda Finlay** and **Darren Langdrige**. Tentatively, *EAP* plans to sponsor at least one special session relating to environmental and architectural phenomenology. Conference website: [www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/ihsr2011/](http://www.open.ac.uk/socialsciences/ihsr2011/).

*Below: An illustration from architectural historian Greg Castillo’s Cold War on the Home Front (2010), which explores how, after World War II, domestic design was exploited to promote the superiority of either capitalism or communism. Shown are test images from a 1957 West German public-opinion survey relating to the question, “Which of these rooms would you choose to live in yourself, if you could?” The drawings portray living rooms decorated in: (1) a 1930s Gelsenkirchener Baroque style; (2) a middle-of-the-road contemporary style; and (3) an up-to-the-minute organic-modernist style. The design community, dominated by the International Style, assumed that the West German public would prefer the modernist design but in fact the 1930s interior, with a 51 percent approval rating, was most popular, followed by the contemporary interior at 31 percent. Though it was officially promoted by the West German government and the US Information Agency (USIA), the International-Style interior was chosen by only 13 percent of respondents. Castillo writes that “Modernism turned out to be just one of many paths to consumer seduction [in the West]. There was no need to purge Tudor roses or Florentine filigree from tableware to assure viability in an international marketplace—least of all in Germany, where a predilection for the exotic flourished, perhaps as a reaction to years of Nazi cultural autarky”—see p. 6.*



## Donors, 2011

We are grateful to the following readers contributing more than the base subscription for 2011.

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## Items of Interest

The 3<sup>rd</sup> annual **Architecture, Culture and Spirituality Symposium** will be held June 29–July 1, 2011, at Serenbe, a 1,000-acre community 25 miles from Atlanta’s Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport. There will be no symposium fees; attendees will only need to cover room and board.

[www.acsforum.org/symposium2011/](http://www.acsforum.org/symposium2011/)

The annual conference of the **International Merleau-Ponty Circle** will be held at Concordia College, Moorhead, MN, September 15–17, 2011. The conference theme is “Flesh, Truth, Sacred Life.” Deadline for paper and panel submissions is May 15, 2011. [www.concordiacollege.edu/merleauponty/](http://www.concordiacollege.edu/merleauponty/)

The **Center for Applied Phenomenological Research** at the University of Tennessee in Chattanooga involves scholars from psychology, philosophy, nursing, and literature. The focus is on utilizing phenomenological and other qualitative methods to gain a better understanding of human experience. <http://phenomenology.utk.edu/default.html>

The **Nature Institute**, in Harlemville, New York, will again be hosting summer programs in Goethean science. For information on specific events and schedules, go to: [www.natureinstitute.org](http://www.natureinstitute.org).

The *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* is a peer-reviewed, interdisciplinary, on-line journal intended to provide a venue for phenomenological

work done by scholars in the southern hemisphere. The journal is an initiative of the Phenomenology Research Group based at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia. There are now four issues available. <http://www.ipjp.org/>.

*Ethics and Environment* is a peer-reviewed international journal providing an interdisciplinary forum for thinking and research in environmental philosophy. [www.inscribe.iupress.org/loi/ete](http://www.inscribe.iupress.org/loi/ete).

## EAP Panels, IHSR Conference

At the annual meeting of the **International Human Sciences Research conference** held in August at Seattle University, *EAP* sponsored two panel sessions on phenomenologies of place and environment; and Goethe’s way of science. Panel participants paper titles, and abstracts are as follows.

### Panel 1: Phenomenologies of Place, Environment, and Natural World

#### The Nature of the Heart: The Role of Childhood Experience in Participant Perceptions of Urban Nature and Place

**Angela Loder**, Department of Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

The link between nature, human health, and well-being has a long tradition of scholarship. It is also embedded in popular culture, with much of our storytelling and symbolism based on human experience with other creatures and landscapes of work and play. Researchers have explored the importance of this experience in the formation of our values, attitudes toward nature, and sense of self, particularly in childhood. What has been less studied is how adult perceptions of and expectations of nature, particularly in the city, are influenced by childhood experiences. This is of increasing relevance as cities across North America are implementing urban greening programs, in part to entice suburbanites back to the city.

What are the values and experiences underlying residents’ expectations of nature in the city? How do these narratives impact how residents root in or resist the city as home? Drawing on 55 semi-structured interviews from respondents in Toronto and Chicago, I use a phenomenological approach to explore the role of childhood in participant narratives of nature and place. Specifically, I ask: What is the “place” of nature that adults carry from childhood? How does it shape expectations of nature and a sense of “home” in the city? How do respondents negotiate their childhood experiences of nature against the modern post-industrialist city in which most of them work and live?

The paper concludes with implications for our understanding of urban nature as seen through narratives of childhood experience, memory, and absence.

## **The Insurmountable Problem of Coexisting with Large Carnivores**

**Leon Chartrand**, Department of Ethics, Ecology, and Theology, Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Is it possible to live viably alongside large carnivores without sacrificing predictability or safety or the occasional depredation of our livelihoods? Current wildlife management programs say it is possible and promise measurable progress toward that end. As this paper demonstrates, however, the effort to live viably on the land is beyond the scope and competency of these programs. This is because it is an issue that remains for us, as it always has, an issue of life and death; and, when it comes to life and death, not everything is possible. Concessions have to be made and the possibility of non-being must be faced. Borne out of the possibility of non-being is the self-limitation of human action.

In more specific defense of this conclusion, I turn to the Buffalo Valley, just south of Yellowstone, where the insurmountable problem of coexisting with large carnivores lurks about in the willows. Here, in between the thick cover, bears, wolves and mountain lions reveal death as the most absolute possibility. In that revelation, the self-limiting actions essential for living viably on the land contradict wildlife management, which continues to seek solutions driven by a desire to overcome human vulnerability and mortality.

## **Trauma, Forced Migration, and the Remaking of the Lifeworld**

**Robert Mugerauer**, Professor, College of Built Environment; and **Francine Buckner**, School of Nursing, University of Washington, Seattle

Trauma has been defined by Erich Lindemann as “the sudden and uncontrollable severance of affective ties.” It is a non-normative event or series of events that leads to the fragmentation of the lifeworld and the need to recreate that lifeworld as a meaningful, integral whole able to accommodate these new transformative experiences. The trauma of political conflict often leads to the compounding trauma of forced migration. As people leave behind their communities, livelihoods, and homes in search of safety, they work to recreate meaning and affective context; in other words, they attempt to restructure their lifeworlds within actually existing conditions and limitations, with whatever tools they have at hand. This remaking is performative, often taking the form of (or at least centrally deploying) narrative and ritual. The story of the trauma and its causes and meanings is told to one’s self, to one’s communities, and sometimes in formal settings—for example, to relief workers or justice tribunals.

In this presentation, we use case studies (from both field work and archival accounts) to explore the performative ways, following the traumas of political conflict and forced migration, that people endeavor to enact new lifeworlds. We use phenomenological and hermeneutical methodology to describe the narratives of recovery and to analyze their structure across the tri-dimensional telling and listening to themselves, intimates, neighbors, and strangers.

## **Home and Inhabitation in Alan Ball’s HBO Television Series, *Six Feet Under***

**David Seamon**, Department of Architecture, Kansas State University, Manhattan

In the 1996 edited collection *Not at Home*, Christopher Reed and Sharon Haar argued that, in our postmodern era, domesticity, home, and at-homeness are again gaining prominence but in two contrasting ways: on one hand, as a site of inertia and repression; on the other hand, as a springboard for change and autonomy. To distinguish these two modes of postmodernist challenge to the modernist disfavor of home, Reed and Haar spoke of a postmodernism of *reaction* vs. a postmodernism of *resistance*. The former refers to a *turning back* to nostalgia and tradition, whereas the second refers to a *turning forward* to empowerment, reform, and resistance of the status quo. Ultimately, Reed and Haar saw little positive value in a postmodernism of reaction and instead committed themselves to a postmodernism of resistance in which home is “not a symbol of an idealized past, but... a space in which we enact a better future.”

In this presentation, I draw on Reed and Haar’s postmodernist designations to consider writer and director Alan Ball’s popular Home Box Office cable-television series, *Six Feet Under*, which completed its fifth and final season in 2005. In this comedy-drama, widowed mother Ruth Fisher (played by Frances Conroy); her seventeen-year-old daughter Claire (Laren Ambrose); and her two adult sons, thirty-year-old David (Michael C. Hall) and thirty-seven-year-old Nate (Peter Krause), occupy the upper stories of a Pasadena dwelling that, on ground and basement levels, houses the family mortuary business run by younger son David and his associate, embalmer and restorative artist Rico Diaz (Freddy Rodriguez).

I argue that there is much about the home life of the Fishers that represents a postmodernism of reaction. On the other hand, I suggest that in other ways—including the fact that the presence of death is always calling the world of the living into question—this series’ portrayal of contemporary inhabitation reflects a postmodernism of resistance. Drawing on the phenomenological work of philosopher Kirsten Jacobson, I argue that *Six Feet Under* intimates the need for a lived merge between reaction and resistance if home is to become Reed and Haar’s “space to enact a better future.”

## **Panel 2: Toward a Transpersonal Phenomenology of Nature: Conceptual and Applied Possibilities of Goethean Science**

### **The Adventure of Reason in Goethe's Botanical and Meteorological Work and Its Perceptual and Photographic Prospects**

**Gordon Miller**, Environmental Studies Program, Seattle University, Seattle

Goethe's scientific pursuits are unified by his desire to gain insight into the formative processes of "eternally creative nature." In spite of Kant's argument that human cognition is incapable of apprehending the inward wholeness of living things antecedent to their outward parts, Goethe searched out these supposed secrets of nature by supplementing mere understanding (*Verstand*) with "divine reason" (*Vernunft*). The former is adequate for finished forms, but only the latter can disclose formative process. Goethe's "genetic method" outlines a specific approach for achieving this insight through "exact sensory imagination." The most common example used by commentators to illustrate this method involves sequences of leaf forms. I thus consider Goethe's meteorological work on clouds from this same sequential perspective. Although Goethe saw similar forces working in the metamorphosis of plants and the modification of clouds, his studies of clouds have not been illustrated with sequential images. In this presentation, I supply this illustrative need and explore the epistemological implications with a series of cloud photographs.

### **Toward a Phenomenology of Nature: The Question of Method in Goethe, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty**

**Eva-Maria Simms**, Department of Psychology, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh

Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes phenomenology as a recognizable, practical style of thinking, which existed as a movement even before it became conscious of itself as philosophy. In this paper I want to show how Goethe's natural scientific thinking fits into this recognizable, practical style of thinking about the phenomenological movement, even though he preceded Husserl by almost a century. In this presentation, I offer a systematic presentation of Goethe's phenomenological method and compare it to Husserl's.

The divergence between a Husserlian phenomenology of consciousness and a Goethean phenomenology of nature will be discussed, and the inevitable return of phenomenology to the question of nature after its journey through the phenomenology of consciousness will be briefly illustrated through Merleau-Ponty's late work. This "return to nature" raises the

question: how does a phenomenology of nature fit into the project of a human science psychology?

### **Goethean Science: In Search of an Alternative Discourse**

**Frederick Amrine**, German Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Goethe was a profoundly intuitive thinker, who arrived at insights far ahead of his time but often struggled to find a new language in which to express them. A prime example would be the notion of an *Urphänomen* or "archetypal phenomenon" at the heart of his morphological studies, which was for Goethe an immediate intuition of the ideal within the real. Faced with Kantian skepticism, Goethe was unable to provide the epistemological and methodological bridge that might have led Schiller and others to the experience.

The aforementioned deficiency has plagued the reception of Goethe's scientific work, and it remains a major *desideratum* in the history and philosophy of science. Many sympathetic commentators have sought to supply the intervening steps by clarifying the epistemology implicit in Goethe's scientific practice. One important effort in this regard was Rudolf Steiner's *Outline of a Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World Conception* (1886). In this presentation, I begin by rehearsing the main arguments of Steiner's neglected treatise, but only as a prelude to a more wide-ranging discussion about Goethe's scientific work (and the work of later scientists inspired by him, such as Theodor Schwenk, Wolfgang Schad, and Jochen Bockemühl) as a possible model for rethinking the contours of science as such.

### **Naturalist Paul Krafel's Seeing Nature as a Contribution to Goethean Science**

**David Seamon**, Department of Architecture, Kansas State University, Manhattan

Goethean science can be interpreted as one early effort to facilitate a phenomenology of the natural world. In extending the possibilities for a Goethean phenomenology, it is important to consider work that, although not directly making reference to Goethean science, involves a mode of empathetic openness similar to Goethe's approach. One significant recent work in this regard is naturalist Paul Krafel's 1998 *Seeing Nature*, which points toward a phenomenology of the second law of thermodynamics—i.e., the claim that all activities, left to their own devices, tend toward greater disorder and fewer possibilities. As a way to counter the second law, Krafel aims to see the natural world in new ways by shifting perspectives and actions whereby people increase, rather than decrease, the possibilities of the world through intentional, caring efforts grounded in firsthand awareness and understanding.

In this presentation, I demonstrate links between Goethean science and Krafel's "shifting perspectives." I focus on Krafel's efforts to transform understanding into action by work-

ing to heal an overgrazed field badly eroded by six-foot gullies. By drawing on careful observation of how rain water moves along the field's slopes—a mode of Goethean looking, seeing, and understanding—Krafel constructs a series of shovel-sized, Earthen dams that disperse torrents of rain-fed water and weaken their erosive power.

## **EAP Session, IAEP Conference**

At the annual meeting of the **International Association for Environmental Philosophy** held in October in Montreal, Quebec, *EAP* sponsored a special session, “Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology: From Wildness to the Artifactual.” Presenters’ paper titles and abstracts are as follows.

### **In Search of Wildness in the Natural City**

**Sarah King**, Department of Religion & Culture, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario

This presentation argues that a more thoughtful interpretation of wildness is the very condition of building richer, natural cities. I begin with examples of children’s work that reflects varying degrees of understanding of the meaning of manicured natural environments. I then move on to discuss the ontological importance of “wildness” as a necessary element of natural cities where, to use phenomenologist Wade Sikorski’s words, “we learn of our life’s connections with our Earthly situation.”

I argue, with Sikorski, that it is the very wildness of dwelling that “cultivates difference, includes alterity, nurtures diversity, protects ambiguity, spares multiplicity, frees irony, and makes it possible to understand it all as the world’s worlding.”

### **Exploring Spaces of Possibility and Release in the Modernist City**

**Angela Loder**, Department of Geography and Planning, University of Toronto

In the last decade, there has been a shift in attitudes toward urban aesthetics and ecology with more naturalistic and ecologically functional spaces being integrated into the fabric of the city. While researchers have long established connections between contact with nature and human health and well-being, it is less clear how these “wild” spaces fit into the urban narrative, or how they differ from more traditional green spaces in terms of their human impact.

Drawing on 55 semi-structured interviews with participants in Toronto and Chicago, this presentation explores participant articulations of these “wild” spaces in contrast to the experience of the modernist city. More specifically, this research uses the phenomenological concept of *releasement* and Thoreau’s concept of *wildness* to examine participant narratives of place, emotional balance, and dwelling in the modern-

ist-wild city. The presentation concludes with implications for our understanding of the role of wild, unexpected nature in our sense of place and home.

## **Heidegger and Animals: A Re-thinking of Worldhood and “Self”**

**Tamara Stefanovic**, Philosophy and Classics, University of Toronto

Martin Heidegger’s reflections on animals center around his contention that they are “poor in world.” In this vein, he concludes that “a dog does not exist but merely lives.” While an animal is acknowledged to be “proper to itself,” in the end, this cannot mean that an animal is a “self” because that expression is seen to “characterize the *specifically human peculiarity*” of selfhood.

This presentation takes issue with Heidegger’s description of animals. I argue that Heidegger’s own conception of solicitude, as well as a more responsive approach to human embodiment, allow for the possibility of a deeper relation to be “laid bare” between humans and certain animals. In the end, I suggest Heidegger’s own way of thinking may yet reveal a “world” that includes both human and non-human animals in a more meaningful way than is credited by Heidegger himself.

## **Animating Ecological Change: Visualizing Scenarios**

**Robert Mugerauer**, College of the Built Environment, University of Washington, Seattle

While it is increasingly agreed scenarios are important for public-policy decisions, there is no consensus as to what a successful scenario is. Today in ecological thinking and public policy, there is new appreciation that the complex dynamic of ecosystems must be understood differently from traditional scientific simulations that predict by extrapolating the future from the past.

This presentation identifies several needs for generating successful scenarios that include: (1) incorporation of a story line; (2) visualization of this story line so as to provide rich and useful images; (3) modeling that is non-reductive and non-linear; (4) inclusion of focal questions, uncertainties and relationships; and (5) identification of central environmental, economic, and political issues at stake.

## **Schools My Father Built: Some Phenomenological Reflections**

**Ingrid Leman Stefanovic**, Professor of Philosophy, University of Toronto

In the late 1950s and early 60s, my father, architect Alexander B. Leman, designed a series of elementary schools north of

Toronto. There was a similarity in their design, which followed a modernist aesthetic that includes geometric lines, subdued colors and traditional classroom organization. I propose to return to those schools and to undertake a phenomenological exploration of the sense of place within these modernist structures. While the study is only in its preliminary stages, some interviews have been conducted and observations made with regard to how the organization of space encapsulates social, cultural and ontological moments within the physical school designs.

## Citations Received

**Greg Castillo, 2010. *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.**

This study is said to be “the first in-depth history of how domestic environments were exploited to promote the superiority of either capitalism or socialism on both sides of the Iron Curtain. [The book] reveals both the tactics used by the American government to seduce citizens of the Soviet bloc with state-of-the-art consumer goods and the corresponding reactions of the Communist Party.” Includes excellent photographs and other images—see the drawings for a public-opinion survey, p. 1.

**David A. Gruenewald, 2003. *Foundations of Place: A Multidisciplinary Framework for Place-Conscious Education*. *American Educational Research Journal*, vol. 40, no. 3, pp. 619–54.**

“Drawing on insights from phenomenology, critical geography, bioregionalism, ecofeminism, and other place-conscious traditions, the author gathers diverse perspectives on ‘place’ to demonstrate the profoundly pedagogical nature of human experience with places. Five ‘dimensions of place’ are described that can shape the development of a socio-ecological, place-conscious education: (a) the perceptual; (b) the sociological; (c) the ideological; (d) the political; and (e) the ecological. After discussing these dimensions, the author reframes several place-conscious educational traditions. The article concludes with an analysis of the possibilities for place-conscious education in an era that defines institutional accountability by standards and testing.”

**Peter H. Kahn, Jr., 2010. *Technological Nature: Adaptation and the Future of Human Life*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.**

This psychologist examines “why it matters that our relationship with nature is increasingly mediated and augmented by technology.” Drawing on empirical research dealing with the robotic dog AIBO, on-line ‘telegardening’, and ‘nature win-

dows’ that provide real-time local nature views, Kahn argues that “in terms of human well-being, technological nature is better than no nature, but not as good as actual nature.”

**Simon P. James, 2009. *The Presence of Nature: A Study in Phenomenology and Environmental Philosophy*. London: MacMillan.**

This philosopher argues that “inattention to experience is a bad thing because environmental philosophy that fails to connect with our lived experience of nature is, more often than not, bad philosophy.” Some questions that James addresses are: “What is our place in nature? Do any non-human animals have minds? How are we to conceive our moral relations with the natural world? Does the natural world exist independently of our understanding of it?” James’ sphere of investigation largely involves phenomenological philosophers’ discussions of these questions (especially Heidegger) and incorporates little of the important work beyond philosophy—e.g., Goethean science as a phenomenology of nature; Christopher Alexander’s work on wholeness; or the large literature on a phenomenology of place.

**Stephen R. Kellert, Judith H. Heerwagen, & Martin L. Mador, 2008. *Biophilic Design: The Theory, Science, and Practice of Bringing Buildings to Life*. NY: Wiley.**

This edited collection of 23 chapters “recognizes that the positive experience of natural systems and processes in our buildings and constructed landscapes is critical to human health, performance, and well-being. Biophilic design is about humanity’s place in nature and the natural world’s place in human society, where mutuality, respect, and enriching relationships can and should exist at all levels and should emerge as the norm rather than the exception.” Contributors include Nikos Salingaros, Roger Ulrich, Robin Moore, Clare Cooper Marcus, Kent Bloomer, Grant Hildebrand, Tom Bender, and Bob Berkebile.

**Anna Klingmann, 2007. *Brandscapes: Architecture in the Experience Economy*. Cambridge: MIT Press.**

“Branding in architecture has largely been equated with commodification, with signature architecture and icon making, and/or a wider notion of selling out. I want to explore a different take on the subject by examining and (ultimately redefining) the subject matter of branding, no longer from a formal or didactic viewpoint but from an experiential perspective—by outlining the start of a larger movement in which architecture can play a critical role as a catalyst to generate an authentic identity for people and places. It is a fact that people and places must differentiate themselves in a global economy. Accordingly, the question is how architects might creatively employ branding in order to promote cultural values that respect the

heterogeneity of places and that align city-marketing activities with broader, inclusive objectives of urban development. I strongly believe that architecture can benefit from the communication strategies of well-established brands when used to build a sustainable identity. Unlike the short-lived images of dazzling signature projects, architecture that uses branding strategies can effect lasting, meaningful changes that draw upon the dormant or explicit potential of particular cultures and places.” Klingmann grounds her argument in the neo-Marxist theory of Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey.

**J. D. McClatchy, 2004. *American Writers at Home*. New York: Vendome Press.**

Including many exceptional photographs by Erica Lennard, this book presents the homes of 21 American writers, including Emily Dickinson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Robert Frost, Ernest Hemmingway, Robinson Jeffers, and Flannery O’Connor. One criterion for selection was “homes where books—many of them now our classics, the touchstones of our national greatness—were actually written, to visit the rooms where *Moby Dick*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Light in August*, or *Long Day’s Journey into Night* were... put together.”

McClatchy explains: “...writing is a ritual and requires its ceremonies. A certain time of day, a certain chair, a certain brand of paper and type of pen, a pipe and cup of tea—writers can be like the dog circling and circling a specific spot on the hEarth rug before he’ll finally lie down on it. The rites guarantee a kind of continuity, and are meant to invoke the weary muse. But above all, they must be enacted in and devoted to a necessary privacy.” See sidebars, right and next page.

**Serena Parekh, 2008. *Hannah Arendt and the Challenge of Modernity: A Phenomenology of Human Rights*. London: Routledge.**

In this perceptive phenomenological exploration of the meaning of human rights for German-Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt, Parekh argues that “in order to secure human dignity in the modern world, and hence human rights, there needs to be a meaningful common realm and a shared reality among people. I read Arendt as attempting this rehabilitation throughout her career and therefore as grounding human rights through a rehabilitation of the ontological significance of the common world in a way that is neither based on self-interest nor divorced from it.

“Her methodology is phenomenological—she is interested in uncovering the structure of our existence by understanding the world as it appears to us and our being in the world. Because of her phenomenological basis, the common world must be understood as thoroughly intersubjective. It is created through our actions and judgments and in turn the common world conditions us. For Arendt, human rights emerge from the condition of plurality and the fact that we must live together with others. She writes that, [t]he only given condition for

the establishment of rights is the plurality of men; rights exist because we inhabit the Earth together with other men.’ But because human rights must be sustained through our effort, a sense of the common is a necessary condition. Without a sense that the world outside of us depends on our action, there is no possibility of upholding human rights.”

Though neither Parekh nor Arendt make the connection, one could argue that it is a short move from “living together” to “place” as it both arises from and contributes to this “togetherness.” See sidebar, next page.

**from *American Writers at Home***

Until the early decades of the twentieth century, nearly every middle-class home had servants, though houses were often fuller of family. The result, for the writer, was less privacy but more freedom. Modern writers are more likely to have quiet rooms of their own, but have to dry the dishes. Modern writers have halogen lamps and computers, while older writers had flickering wicks and sputtering nibs—and it is hard to say which arrangement offers more frustrations.

Unheated rooms, bad light and foul air, a bawling baby downstairs—everywhere lurk distractions. This is what... rituals for concentration are meant to guard against. Robert Frost liked to write in an upright wooden chair with a wooden board on his lap. Other authors wrote in bed—Edith Wharton because she preferred it, Sarah Orne Jewett because of illness. Bed or chair, the place of dreams or daydreams... each author’s “study” is a private arrangement. It is not surprising that when an author—Nathaniel Hawthorne, say, or Robinson Jeffers—had an alluring view out the window of his writing room, he turns his desk to the wall. That way, the view is inward.

Likewise, it should not surprise readers that *home* is so often the writer’s subject. This has been true from the very beginning: Homer’s Odysseus is driven in his wandering adventures by “nostalgia,” a term that has grown sentimental in English but in ancient Greek was more primitive and means an ache-for-home.

From Huck Finn fleeing home to Faulkner’s heroes building their mansions, from Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* to Robert Frost’s “Home Burial,” American literature has returned again and again to the idea of home—as a place that obsesses or frightens us, shelters or suffocates us.

Behind such feelings, in part, has been the very precariousness of living in America. Good intentions have been thwarted by harsh climates or a scarcity of materials. If cupboard and homespun are the rule, then out of everyday necessities extraordinary books have been fabricated.

And if we watch for secret signs, it is possible to see how a writer’s room is projected onto the story being written. While writing *Moby-Dick*, for instance, Melville felt his room had become a ship’s cabin.

—J.D. McClatchy, 2004, p. 9

**Robert Mugerauer, 2010. Toward a Theory of Integrated Urban Ecology.” *Ecology and Society*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 31–43.**

One aim of this article is to introduce analytic researchers to “disciplines and theories which successfully deploy modes of thinking, research procedures, and practices more adequate to the phenomena [of cities and urban life] at all scales and levels of particularity, i.e., micro, phenomenal, macro, to fill in some of the empirical gaps in the middle, specifically those having to do with human values and the richness of the everyday lifeworld. In addition to what is available within complexity theory itself, chief among the approaches to be utilized are phenomenology, ethnographic thick description, and actor network theory.”

**Faulkner’s Rowan Oak, Oxford Mississippi**

It was in the library across the entrance hall from the parlor where, at a small writing table, Faulkner wrote most of the novels and stories that created the saga of Yoknapatawpha, from *Light in August* (1932) to *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), along with many later works as well, including the Snopes trilogy.

Together they constitute a dramatic—at times scandalous—rendering of “the passions of the hope, the beauty, the tragedy, the comedy of man, weak and frail but unconquerable.” Neither money-making stints as a scriptwriter in Hollywood nor his frequent and near fatal drinking binges could deter Faulkner from his work.

Debts sometimes threatened his hold on Rowan Oak; in 1940, he wrote, “It’s probably vanity as much as anything else which makes me hold onto it. I own a larger parcel of [property] than anybody else in town and nobody gave me any of it or loaned me a nickel to buy any of it with and all my relations and fellow townsmen including the borrowers and frank spongers, all prophesied I’d never be more than a bum.”

When sales of his books were discouraging or... his work went out of print, still he pressed on. The bookshelves that circle the room are crammed with volumes, including editions of the books that he once told a class at the University of Mississippi had most influenced him: the Old Testament, Melville, Dostoevsky, and Conrad.

In 1952, Faulkner enclosed the rear porch and made a new study across the side hallway from his library. He used it to write in, but also as a business office and, toward the end of his life when he found it difficult to climb stairs, as a bedroom. He guarded this lair ferociously. In his library, he was too close to the front door, and it was like Faulkner to keep moving back—into his house, as into his history—to find the stillness he required. Once when he returned from a trip to discover the room had been “straightened up,” he resolved to take the doorknob with him on future trips to foil “busybodies.”

—J. D. McClatchy, 2004, p. 78

**Human rights & belonging to community**

Arendt’s biggest contribution to the philosophy of human rights is in showing that belonging to a community is a precondition for human rights.

For Arendt, the right to belong to a political community is primary for two reasons. First, it means that one’s human rights can be protected by a government. Even though they may exist in theory without government protection, Arendt’s experience as a stateless person taught her that their protection is no small part of the meaning of human rights.

Second, belonging to a political community means that you have a place in the world where you can speak and act meaningfully. This means that life in both its biological and existential senses can be protected.

This view of human rights has a number of implications. First and foremost, it forces us to rethink our policies concerning people who are outside of a political body: stateless people, internally displaced people, migrant workers, refugees, and asylum seekers.

If we agree with Arendt that the right to belong to a political community is the most basic right, then this belief ought to be reflected in our policies towards these groups. Her position makes it clear that it is not enough to proclaim that people in these groups have human rights without also granting the conditions under which these rights can be made real.

Another implication of Arendt’s view is that there is an existential side of human rights—that our concern should not only be with protecting life in its purely biological sense but also about life in its most human sense.

Arendt’s understanding of modernity and the origins of totalitarianism taught her that alienation and the loss of meaning as mass phenomena have grave political consequences (namely they prepare people for totalitarianism) and need to be protected against. This gives a deeper dimension to the term “human dignity” that is so often used in human rights discourse.

I think for Arendt, a life of dignity is a life protected against from alienation, where our opinions are meaningful and our actions effective. To be sure, Arendt leaves open precisely what constitutes meaningful speech and action. But debating this, either here, in China, India, or South Africa, would be the kind of action she encourages.

—Serena Parekh, 2008, pp. 148–49



# Seeing Space

Paul Krafel

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*Krafel is a naturalist and educator who is Administrator of the Chrysalis Charter School in Palo Cedro, California. He is the author of Seeing Nature (Chelsea Green, 1998), which points toward a phenomenology of the two laws of thermodynamics, particularly the second law stating that all activities, left to their own devices, tend toward greater disorder and fewer possibilities. Can human beings, he asks in his book, do nothing but consume and destroy the Earth? "I despair," he writes "at not being able to do more than live at the expense of the world." The following essay is reprinted, with permission, from Krafel's latest Cairns of Hope newsletter, available at: [www.chrysalischarter-school.com/Paul/Paul/Cairns/Cairns63.html](http://www.chrysalischarter-school.com/Paul/Paul/Cairns/Cairns63.html). One can regularly receive a digital copy of the newsletter by making a request at: [paul@chrysalischarter-school.com](mailto:paul@chrysalischarter-school.com). © 2011 Paul Krafel.*

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I went up to "my meadow" for two days in early September. Long after sunset, I trod slowly into the dark midst. From an elevation of 8000 feet, the stars were brilliant. No moon. The Milky Way bannered overhead, north to south. The meadow's headwall ridge rose high in the east so that, as the Earth turned, stars crisply appeared. No rising above a low horizon of thickened atmosphere but a sudden winking on, high in the sky.

I found myself wrestling again with how to explain what we see with rising stars. Most of the profound paradigm changes in astronomy (the Earth rotates, the explanation for seasons, the Earth as part of the solar system, our position within the Milky Way Galaxy) are explained by using diagrams drawn from a somewhere far away from Earth's point of view. To understand what is really going on by being able to shift our visual understanding away from our Earth-bound perspective to a cosmic view is a fantastic intellectual triumph.

Many of us, however, have not learned to see the nighttime sky in this way. We come to accept the assumption taught in grade school of "what we see seems to appear as such and such, but in reality astronomers have discovered that it is actually so and so." Science has changed the way we think of this universe, but often we have not changed the way we see it. We see space with the eyes of tradition, while thinking of it with the mind of science. So we end up supposing that what we see is not the way the universe really is.

This disconnect divorces us from an experience

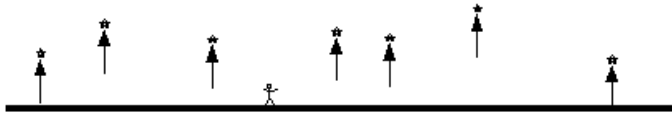
of understanding. But if the astronomers are right, and if all these appearance-shifting things are actually what's going on, then that is what we should be seeing with our own eyes. And when we do see it truly, mind and eyes unite in an intellectually emotional awareness of who we actually are. So let me share the explanation I worked out in my star-studded meadow for what we see as the stars rise through the night.

Two things confuse our vision and understanding. The first is that we are more familiar with the movement of the sun than of the other stars. We know the sun appears higher in the sky during the summer and that we see different constellations at different seasons. Thus, we tend to assume, without verifying visually, that the stars' daily apparent motions somehow vary through the seasons. Not so.

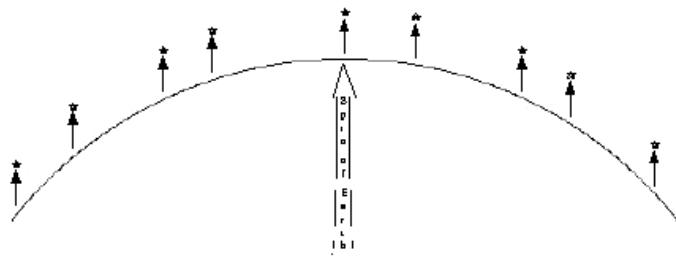
The greater confusion, however, relates to the perspective of our specific location. Our planet spins. The direction of the Earth's spin is named "east." But the Earth does not turn to the east. Rather, it is the Earth's rotation that has given us our fundamental direction from which has arisen the cardinal directions of north, south, east, and west. In short, east is the fundamental direction—not north as many people assume. North is secondary. The fact that Polaris happens temporarily (for a few thousand years) to be above the North Pole has given the Northern Hemisphere a North Star.

But east is the primary direction. We are spun directly, constantly, steadily without any seasonal or latitudinal or any kind of variation whatsoever, al-

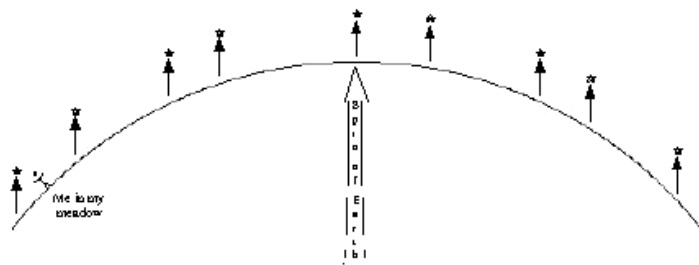
ways to the east. Always we are turned to the east and so always the stars appear to rise up from the eastern horizon. What we see, looking straight east as the result of our placement on a spinning Earth, looks like this:



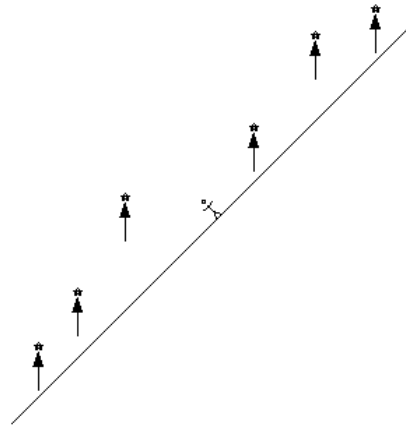
This diagram is accurate but with two clarifications. First, though it is drawn here as a straight line, the horizon in reality is an expression and result of the curve of the Earth—in all directions. The Earth stretching out ahead of us curves “down” and out of sight beyond the “horizon.” The horizon also curves to both right and left (to the north and south in this case). But with eyes only a few feet above the ground, we aren’t able to notice this curve. The line, however, does curve and if we were able to pull back farther, the diagram would become like this [center arrow reads “spin of Earth”].



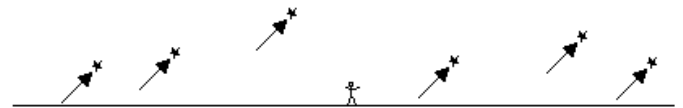
From this vantage point, one notes a second important clarification: that the view above is what one sees standing on the equator. Many of us, however, are standing somewhere else [label at lower left reads “me in my meadow”].



Zooming in on me in my meadow, we can redraw the situation as in this diagram:



However, this is not the way I see the sky in my meadow. For me, up is the direction perpendicular to *my* local horizon. My local perspective rotates the picture above so that I experience the sky as in this drawing:



Similarly, an Alaskan’s perspective would be something like the following,



while an Australian’s view shifts in the opposite direction:



These variations have nothing to do with what’s happening “out there” in the sky but relate to variations in the local sense of what is straight “up” on a spherical planet. The confusion arises not in the actual movement of the stars but from the perspective of our particular location.

# Painted Rock: Carrizo Plain National Monument, California

Christine Rhone

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**T**he power and the peace of the vast Carrizo Plain extend like the surface of a sacred drum. The largest single native grassland remaining in California, it stretches 50 miles in the southern San Joaquin Valley between the Caliente and the Tremblor Mountains, rising to 5,000 and 4,000 feet, respectively. Clearly visible in some places, the San Andreas Fault bisects the plain lengthwise and is home to the reintroduced, ancient Pronghorn antelope, the swiftest land mammal in the New World, running soundlessly up to 60 miles per hour with the brilliant freedom of the wind.

Geographically, Carrizo Plain is an internal drainage basin feeding Soda Lake, the remains of a prehistoric sea, which evaporates during the dry season, turning white and salt-encrusted. Migratory birds winter in its wetlands. Standing sentinel along the San Andreas Fault, the wall of the Tremblors unfolds rhythmically. Millennia of activity along the fault lines formed the fertile plain, one of the sunniest places in all California. Living there are many sensitive species, such as miniature kit foxes and snub-nosed leopard lizards. Reintroductions of native breeds include the tule elk and the California condor. The profusion of rare wildflowers, nesting raptors, and other protected resources make Painted Rock closed to casual visitors for part of the year.

A walk to Painted Rock from some distance on the plain slowly brings into view an isolated, conical monolith. Of Miocene marine sandstone 20 to 25 million years old, it forms a horseshoe about 45 feet high. Its position on the plain is striking, distinctly detached from the Caliente foothills, yet harmoniously related to them. Its shape is evoca-

tive, resembling a pair of recumbent animals in some places, a giant bird in others, and elsewhere, a vulva. A small, rounded hill nearby, of barrow-like shape, enhances the “motherly” quality.

The natural amphitheatre of Painted Rock can contain 100s of people, successive generations having left behind a wealth of bedrock mortars and superimposed pictographs. Set amid a plain of great abundance, near water, the easily defended, single entrance faces the Tremblors and the San Andreas Fault. Its height gives a clear vista to the horizons. Overhanging rock provides some roof shelter and shallow caves. Returning after an absence of ten years, I find Painted Rock overwhelming once again, like falling into an old dream.

On recessed, overhanging rock faces, the most densely painted surfaces survive. These have suffered great damage by vandalism, the traditional red, black, and white pictographs defaced by deliberate gunshot when the land was in private ownership. Many others, on exposed rock face, have faded through the effects of erosion.

Although the local Chumash Indians have always maintained their sacred connection with Painted Rock, the site has more lately re-emerged as a visible focus of ceremonies. Soon after Winter Solstice, a few fruits and vegetables arranged in the amphitheatre remain as offerings, either from the Chumash or from other people. The thick layer of soot in one low cave is evidence of long fireside hours by persons unknown. Although mapped and signposted, the site still gets relatively few visitors.

The Chumash people have lived in the region near Painted Rock for millennia—along the coast

from Malibu in the south to Estero Bay in the north, including the northern Channel Islands off Santa Barbara. From one of these islands, tradition says, the first Chumash emerged. Inhabiting 100s of towns and villages and speaking eight different dialects said to descend from Hokan, the state's oldest language family, the Chumash ranked among the most influential peoples of ancient California. They held the datura plant sacred, using carrizo, a type of cane, to make arrows and tobacco tubes.

Unique to their culture were plank canoes of redwood or pine, sewn together with milkweed, and made watertight with the natural asphaltum found in places like Pismo Beach, whose name means "tar" in the Chumash language. These canoes, painted red ochre, often sported abalone shell decorations.

The Chumash invented many other uses for "pismu"—for example, to attach arrowheads to shafts and to stabilize their acorn-grinders. They perfected the art of basketry, using baskets for virtually everything—drinking, cooking, storage, shelter, clothing, gaming, and ceremony. Some baskets doubled as hats and as measuring cups for trade.

The richness of their lands in game, fish, and edible plants meant that the Chumash did not plant beans, corn, and squash, as other tribes did. One island was a source of valuable Olivella shells, supplying most of the shell bead money used by ancient peoples in southern California. With a wide trading network, they imported items they lacked. Painted Rock was probably a gathering place for religious ceremony and trade among the Chumash, Yokut, Kitanemuk, Salinian, and Mohave nations. Today, although greatly damaged, it counts among the most significant pictograph sites in the US.

Carrizo Plain and Painted Rock were not always under the control of a single tribe. main pictograph styles are, however, Chumash and Yokut. Attempts to date the pictographs diverge wildly—between 200 and 2,000 years old—but they do pre-date the Mission period, which began around 1770, first contact with the Spanish dating from 1542.

Chumash pictograph motifs include abstract designs that, to modern eyes, suggest sunbursts, Maltese crosses, centipedes, deer, and anthropomorphic figures. A black disc, repeated in other Chumash pictograph sites, apparently depicts a so-

lar eclipse, identified by some researchers as that of 24 November 1677.

The Chumash had a highly stratified society with three social classes led by the prestigious 'antap cult shamans, who used datura to induce an altered state of consciousness. In the high country northeast of Santa Barbara stands the holy mountain symbolizing the center of the Chumash world, Mount Pinos, 8,847 feet high. Today, although various bands of Chumash have members, only one has federal recognition and a small reservation at Santa Ynez. The overall Chumash population has sprung back into the thousands from a low of a few dozen.

The Carrizo Plain is the largest native grassland left in California, but change is coming. Spearheaded by the Wilderness Society, a passionate battle to have it nominated for World Heritage Site status has been waged and lost. Some recognition of the importance of the site did come, nevertheless, in that President Clinton declared it a National Monument in 2001, upgrading its status from Natural Area. Its first manager, Marlene Braun, deeply engaged in the issue of grazing rights versus preservation, committed suicide in 2005 in the face of the defeat of her propositions. The area of protection in Carrizo Plain has grown to some 250,000 acres.

Today, the Bureau of Land Management, the California Department of Fish and Game, and The Nature Conservancy have a hand in managing the area. In addition, many other organizations are active. Most agree that a main priority is restoration of native ecosystems and species protection. These agencies face a challenging balancing act.

Recent years have seen plans proposed and applications filed for the construction of three solar energy farms capable of producing major amounts of renewable energy. One would use Fresnel mirrors, and two would be the largest photovoltaic plants in the world. Carrizo Plain, after all, is one of the sunniest places in California, a state that consumes more power, and more of many things, than most places do in the world. Although—with its mild climate and its strict building codes and environmental laws—California has the next-to-lowest per-household energy consumption of all the states, the US remains—by far—the largest energy consumer in terms of total use on the Earth today.

# Historic Preservation, Significance, and Phenomenology

Jeremy C. Wells

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*Wells is an historic preservation planner who completed his Ph.D. in Environmental Design and Planning from Clemson University in 2009. His dissertation, "Attachment to the Physical Age of Urban Residential Neighborhoods," explored how the appearance of decay (or patina) in built environments catalyzes an emotional attachment to place. [jeremy@heritagestudies.org](mailto:jeremy@heritagestudies.org). © 2011 Jeremy C. Wells.*

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Most current efforts in American historic preservation differentiate “valuable” from “non-valuable” places. This approach is referred to as “significance” and leads to designations such as the U.S. National Register of Historical Places—a list of buildings, structures, and landscapes with purported historical significance. Four National Register criteria—(1) events from the past, (2) people from the past, (3) architectural merit, and (4) archaeological significance—are used at the federal, state, and local levels to distinguish so-called “important” from “unimportant” places.

This designation process relies on ambiguous principles established through an empiricist-positivist paradigm assuming as real only phenomena directly observable by the senses (Tainter & Lucas, 1983). Ignored in the designation process are dimensions of significance derived from experience and socio-cultural values (Wells 2010a; Waterton, Smith & Campbell, 2006, 349). As a result, preservation practitioners routinely overlook the values of local populations and instead exert their profession’s expert judgments in determining which places have historical significance (Mason, 2003). As Hudson and James (2007, 258) charge, preservationists too often focus on “explaining why places have been designated, and the consequences of this, rather than finding out why people value places.”

Legal frameworks, which discourage subjective meanings because they are difficult to defend in a court of law, exacerbate this reliance on professional values to determine significance. For instance, the primary reason for the 1977 Secretary of the In-

terior’s Standards was to provide objective, defensible criteria for the new federal historic-preservation tax credit. Municipalities established local historic preservation ordinances based on the Standards, even though there was no federal requirement to do so.

Today, almost every aspect of historic preservation in the United States is interpreted through the Standards’ ten directives addressing the rehabilitation of historic properties. The criteria for these directives can be traced to the Venice Charter (ICOMOS, 1964), the Athens Charter (Congress in Athens, 1931), the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings Manifesto (Morris, 1996/1877), and the writings of John Ruskin (1989/1849). Whether intentional or not, historic preservation has done a remarkably good job at preserving the preservation views assumed by a white, British, upper-class, male, nineteenth-century value system.

But ask most people not inculcated in this expert value system why they appreciate historic places and inevitably their response relates to an emotional attachment to place. Such experiences have a basis in the lifeworld and, as Elliott (2002, 54) advocates, lend themselves to phenomenological interpretation:

The phenomenological approach is of particular relevance when dealing with the questions of significance for preservation. ... If a historical place is such a phenomenon, then the term ‘significant’ should be used in preservation to describe places whose physical character and matrices of historical, mythical, and social associations can and do evoke experiences of awe, wonder, beauty, and identity, among others.

One could argue that the philosophic origins of historic preservation do, in fact, have a basis in the

lifeworld. For instance, the widely accepted godfather of preservation, John Ruskin (1989/1849, 186) wrote:

For, indeed, the greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, not in its gold. Its glory is in its Age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, of mysterious sympathy, nay, even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity.

Ruskin's "voicefulness" here refers to the emotional impact of an historical place on its experimenter. Alois Riegl (1996/1903, 64) took this idea further by identifying two contrasting sets of preservation values: First, "age value," which "addresses the emotions directly"; and, second, "historical value" which "rests on a scientific basis." Riegl's designation is significant phenomenologically because it distinguishes preservation values grounded in lifeworld experience from those values grounded in expert judgments.

As historic preservation matured in the twentieth century, however, preservation doctrine eviscerated subjectivity from its practice. Any mention of emotional experience was criticized for creating "false images" and romanticizing the past (Cliver, 1992). Creating so-called "truthful" historic environments is traditionally a major emphasis of historic preservation practice to this day (Wells 2010b).

In my research in Charleston, South Carolina, where the first U.S. historic district was created in 1931, I discovered that historical meaning is regularly related to residents' lifeworld experiences (Wells, 2009). I found that Charleston residents defined an authentic place through how their environment evoked what I call *spontaneous fantasy*—the power of a place to catalyze imagined memories about the past. My informants described how their presence in certain neighborhood places would trigger a vignette of the past to materialize in their mind's eye. Through phenomenological interpretation of these accounts, I found that, often, this experience related to the environmental appearance of patina and decay. Where there was no obvious sign of age through decay, there was no spontaneous fantasy. The decay was essential for the resulting sense of mystery and discovery (see photographs, following).



*An informant in the author's dissertation research took this Charleston photograph in the moment he saw, in his mind's eye, Civil War soldiers marching up these steps.*

The argument here is that, far from being a tangential pursuit, phenomenology should form a core methodology for understanding how people are attached to older built environments. The discoveries of phenomenological investigation could then be used to identify what is and is not significant preservation-wise. In addition, one could better determine how preservation practitioners should engage in interventions to preserve people's attachments to historic environments.

There are several reasons, however, for why the integration of phenomenological research in historic preservation is difficult to achieve presently. Preservation practitioners typically have little social-science background, and social scientists, geographers, and environment-behavior researchers have shown limited interest in historic-preservation research. In addition, American graduate programs in historic preservation seem currently disinterested in educating historic-preservation practitioners in environment-behavior and phenomenological methods.

One driver of change may be the increasing interest of non-Western countries in historic preservation. In China, for instance, cultural differences have helped trigger a flexibility in interpreting environmental authenticity through local cultural values (Agnew & Demas, 2004). Driven by a need to recognize aboriginal values, the Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS, 1999) and the Nara Document on Authenticity (ICOMOS, 1994) have opened the door to cultural pluralism, though still embedded in the positivistic framework of traditional preservation practice.

While the importance of contemporary social, cultural, and experiential values in historic preservation has enjoyed an increasingly wider debate over the past decade, there is a concern that this movement has already been eclipsed by the desire of the field to be associated with environmental sustainability.

In this sense, one positivistic paradigm is substituted for another as historic preservation remains staunchly associated with technological solutions and unwilling to grapple with fundamental, subjective issues regarding the valuation of place. If, ostensibly, we are preserving older places for the benefit of *people*, then why does historic preservation regularly ignore or reject their experiences and values?



For the informant who took this Charleston photograph, the ruts in the flagstone helped catalyze an image of cotton wagons delivering goods to a distant warehouse.

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# Norberg-Schulz's Interpretation of Tadao Ando's Vitra Conference Center: A Critique

M. Reza Shirazi

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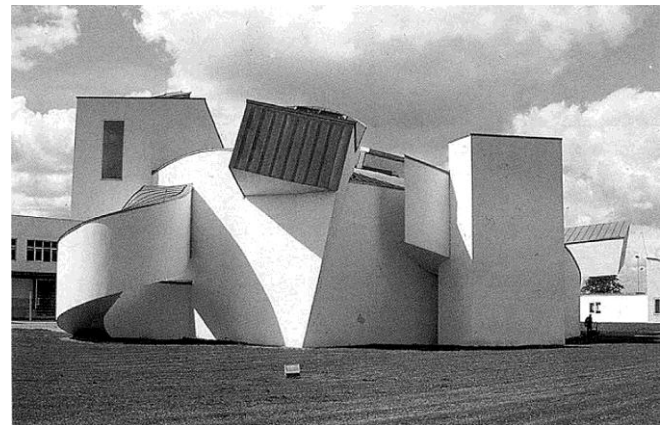
Norwegian architectural theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz (1926–2000) is a central figure in the phenomenological discourse on architecture (e.g., Norberg-Schulz 1971, 1980, 1985, 1988, 2000). In his interpretations of buildings and places, phenomenology has always been the main point of departure—an interpretive journey largely fueled by the phenomenological philosophy of Martin Heidegger (Norberg-Schulz 1988, 39–48).

In spite of the central importance of his work to architectural theory, one can argue that Norberg-Schulz's manner of interpretation sometimes suffers from both conceptual and applied shortcomings (Shirazi 2008). Here, I examine some of these shortcomings by focusing on his interpretation of Japanese architect Tadao Ando's Vitra Conference Center. I consider to what extent Norberg-Schulz is successful in applying his phenomenological thought to one realized building.

## Ando's Vitra Conference Center

In the last chapter of his posthumously-published *Architecture: Presence, Language, Place*, Norberg-Schulz (2000) presents a critical analysis of two buildings—the Vitra Museum by American architect Frank Gehry (photograph, right) and the Vitra Conference Center by Ando (photograph, next page). Both buildings are part of the Vitra complex,

which includes furniture factories and related corporate buildings in Weil am Rhein, Germany. Vitra is the Swiss manufacturer and retailer of the works of many internationally-admired furniture designers such as George Nelson and Charles and Ray Eames. In addition to the buildings by Gehry and Ando, the Vitra complex includes work by other major architects—e.g., a fire station by Zaha Hadid and factory buildings by Alvaro Siza and Nicholas Grimshaw.



Criticizing contemporary architects' frequent failure to design buildings evoking the art of place, Norberg-Schulz (*ibid.*, 229) writes:

Sadly what dominates the world of building nowadays is gimmick and novelty. It also happens that many architects allow themselves to be swept away by self-expression instead of interpretations of place, and so confusion takes the place of interaction.



This passage suggests that much of current architecture is not essential, original, or authentic but superficial, artificial, and fashion-based. Norberg-Schulz indicates that many new buildings fail in generating a thorough connection with place and evoking *genius loci*. Instead of fostering an experience grounded in genuine architectural elements, these designs project a sense of “confusion.” Norberg-Schulz continues in a more hopeful vein:

Fortunately, there are also [architects] capable of developing [a] “new tradition,” but their contribution disappears among the exhibition of symbolic figures of well being and sensational forms. In other words, the lack of quiet predominates and this probably depends on the lack of comprehension of the very nature of architecture (ibid.).

Norberg-Schulz’s dissatisfaction with the current state of architecture is partly expressed in his interpretation of Ando’s conference center. He begins with a “tour” of the Vitra complex. Note that he places the word “tour” in quotation marks, an odd designation intimating a discussion that might not be as thorough as it could be. He points out that Ando’s conference center expresses itself much differently from Gehry’s museum, which he claims has no sense of centeredness or spatial regularity but instead evokes a “restless indifference” (ibid., 348).

Norberg-Schulz argues that, in considerable contrast, Ando’s conference center incorporates a “well defined and clear” appearance expressing a “static composition in which nothing is accidental” (ibid., 349). The building includes “known” architectural elements such as directional walls, defined spaces, and obvious roofs; its *parti* is organized around an “elementary geometry” grounded in the square, rectangle, and circle.

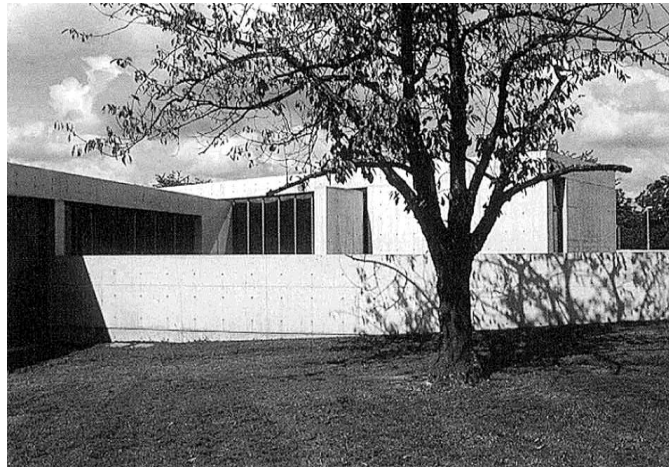
In spite of its architectural clarity, however, Norberg-Schulz describes his first encounter with the conference center as “disappointing” (ibid., 349). He claims that, in Ando’s building, any ex-

pression of freedom and movement originally underlying the modernist tradition has stiffened into static perfection devoid of any dynamic sense. The conference center entails a remote formalism that stymies inspiration and says little about “what a conference centre should be.” The building is devoid of any “*Stimmung*,” or atmosphere.

On the other hand, Norberg-Schulz argues that the building’s extreme formalism moves beyond Mies van der Rohe’s dictum that “less is more,” since Mies’s “less” was not a “nothing” but an “almost nothing” as originally expressed in the German “*beinahe nichts*.” But Norberg-Schulz argues that this “almost nothing” becomes “nothing” in the conference center—a “boring” entity as in the sense of Robert Venturi’s “less is a bore.” Because of this “nothingness,” Norberg-Schulz claims that the conference center is an “expression of modern-day nihilism” and a common theme in Ando’s conference center and Gehry’s museum. The two buildings are the “same” though not “identical,” with the difference that “Gehry hides the void, while Ando displays it” (ibid., 350).

Norberg-Schulz also claims that Gehry and Ando’s designs evoke the “same sort of solution” for any building site, no matter where. The buildings are fundamentally the “same” response to economic power and “have become representatives of a global consumer society” (ibid.). He reads these buildings as the dying splendor of two architectural-media stars and as largely devoid of any architectural depth or importance.

Norberg-Schulz contrasts this superficiality with Rome buildings by Bramante and Michelangelo, both invited to that city as the creative stars of their time “to solve tasks... intrinsically bound up with the place” (ibid.). These men became architects for Rome even though they were not natives. Norberg-Schulz draws the same parallel with Mies van der Rohe in Chicago and Jørn Utzon in Kuwait. In short, Norberg-Schulz claims that neither Gehry nor



Ando's Vitra buildings are successful in evoking the particularity of place and *genius loci*.

## An Evaluation

To present my critical reading of Norberg-Schulz's analysis of Ando's Vitra conference center, I challenge his conclusions in two ways: first by referring to Ando's architectural ideas as presented in his writings; second, by pointing out shortcomings in Norberg-Schulz's own architectural understanding.

As explained above, Norberg-Schulz claims that "everything appears well-defined and clear" in Ando's conference center. He writes that the building's configuration comprises "known architectural elements," using the simple geometry of square, rectangle, and circle. He concludes that the building's geometric regularity evokes a "static" character much different from the formal restlessness of Gehry's museum.

In his architectural writings, Ando acknowledges much of what Norberg-Schulz describes in his critique. For example, Ando believes that the "pure geometry" of the Platonic solids plays an important role in architectural design (Ando 1995a, 456). He has pointed to the importance of the circle and square in designing Japan's Naoshima Museum, for which he toured Naoshima Island to find a suitable building form, which eventually incorporated a cylinder and rectangular solid (Ando 1993a, 25).

In regard to the Vitra conference center, Ando has stated directly the importance of an elementary geometry in the design of the building: "I created a composition of volumes and voids from pure geometrical forms such as squares and circles and enclosed within that composition spaces characterized alternately by tension and the relaxation of tension" (Ando 2002, 166). In this sense, Ando's design inspiration and Norberg-Schulz's architectural interpretation involve similar understandings.

As already emphasized, however, Norberg-Schulz finds Ando's conference center "disappointing" because of a distancing formalism that cannot answer the question of "what a conference center should be." The result, Norberg-Schulz contends, is a placeless, nihilist "nothing" representing global capitalism. But when one examines Ando's com-

ments on the relationship between architecture and the world economy, one finds that he is highly critical, contending that global standardization threatens good design in that economic rationality requires a pure functionality devoid of aesthetic power. As he writes, "The principle of simple economic rationality does away with the rich, cultural aspect of architecture" (Ando 1995b, 450).

Ando suggests that, if economic rationalism supersedes cultural values, "Cities worldwide will be full of uniform buildings" (Ando 1990, 15). In this sense, Ando resists global-capitalist society and aims to express design difference and uniqueness rather than similarity and uniformity. As a result, he is deeply interested in "place" and its singular "requests" and "forces." He uses such descriptions as the "construction of place," the site as a "field of forces," and architects responding to the "demands of the land." These phrasings all confirm Ando's concern for a given place and its particularities.

Ando's account of designing the Vitra conference center acknowledges the site and its unique qualities, especially in placing the building: "The principal focus was the positioning of the building and its path of approach on the site, which is extremely flat" (Ando 1993b, 130). In addition, he worked to carefully harmonize the building with Gehry's museum and a nearby Claus Oldenburg sculpture "without disturbing the trees on the site." (ibid.). He writes: "Gehry's building, with a design based on the free manipulation of form, and my simple restrained building confront each other across a space featuring [the Oldenburg] sculpture... My idea was to have two buildings with contrasting forms of expression enter into a stimulating dialogue" (Ando 2002, 166). This explication suggests a careful attention to place and its forces and particularities.

Ando's statements suggest, on one hand, that Norberg-Schulz was unaware of the design process through which Ando created the Vitra conference center. On the other hand, one might argue that an architect's written claims in regard to a building's design are less important than the impact of the realized building. Architecture is what is built, and we should be able to encounter through direct architectural experience the architect's vision and aim.

Unfortunately, Norberg-Schulz provides only minimal secondhand evidence—one exterior photograph of the conference center [see p. 17]—to provide the reader with a vicarious sense of Norberg-Schulz’s own firsthand experience. A series of photographs illustrating each point in his interpretation would allow readers some independent confirmation of interpretive claims that, as things stand, seem arbitrary and potentially out of touch with Ando’s stated design aims.

## Shortcomings in Understanding?

One might also argue there are problems in Norberg-Schulz’s architectural thought itself. Remember that Norberg-Schulz begins his analysis with a “tour” of the site. If “tour” here means “looking around” in a quick, superficial way, like a tourist, then how can one grasp *genius loci* or recognize how a building might be the architectural expression of that *genius loci*? On one hand, “touring,” in its lifeworld meaning, denies phenomenological understanding. On the other hand, if by “touring,” Norberg-Schulz means the importance of “moving” around and through a building, there is still a problem in that his interpretation involves fixed perspectives and no discussion of movement from outside into the building’s interior.

All that Norberg-Schulz offers is a partial architectural interpretation from outside the conference center. The result is selective and limited in the sense that he seems apart from the architectural work and never moves inside. His only image of the building is the one exterior photograph that he never refers to directly in laying out his interpretation. He does not consider walls, roofs, apertures, courtyard, and other building elements in a thorough, organized way.

In contrast to his other architectural interpretations that typically begin with a careful reading of the natural and human-made particularities of a building site, Norberg-Schulz largely ignores these qualities in his analysis of Ando’s conference center.

He does not refer to the special character of the site or suggest how Ando’s design is out of touch with that character. Rather, all he offers is the arbitrary claim that Ando’s building is a “nothing” and a “scheme devoid of localization.” For this writer at least, Norberg-Schulz’s interpretation of Ando’s Vitra conference center is questionable and unconvincing.

## A Critical Dialogue

Norberg-Schulz is a central figure in architectural phenomenology. My critique here is not intended to undermine the significance of his interpretive work but to point to its shortcomings as a means toward betterment. What is needed is a generative but critical dialogue that advances phenomenological description and clarification (Shirazi 2008).

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# Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology

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## Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology

Published three times a year, *EAP* is a forum and clearing house for research and design that incorporate a qualitative approach to environmental and architectural experience.

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