



Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter

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This issue is the last for 1997. We enclose a renewal form and ask you to respond promptly so we will not need to send a reminder. Because of higher copying costs, we are raising 1998 subscription rates slightly--U.S., \$10; non-U.S., \$12.

As always, we would be grateful for additional contributions from those readers who are able to give. Our financial breaking-even point continues to be fragile, especially because in 1997 we have had only 121 paying subscribers. Without the extra donations of a considerable number of readers we would not be able to continue.

This issue includes items of interest, a book review, and citations received. Note the recent publication of the *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, described below. We want to mention the extraordinary work of philosopher and executive editor Lester Embree, who has been the major force making sure

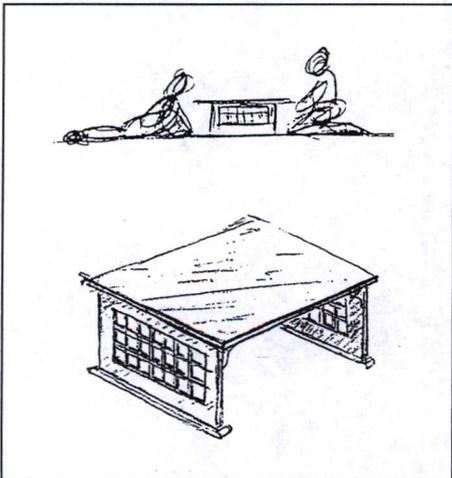
this project would be completed. The result is a wide-ranging and useful volume that demonstrates the vitality of phenomenology throughout the world and in many different disciplines and professions.

Our special section in this issue deals with the "design process" work of architects Christopher Alexander and Hajo Neis. Their focus is furniture making, and we include three essays written by students in a graduate Architecture design studio at the University of California, Berkeley, taught by Neis. The aim of the studio was for students to design and build a piece of furniture that expressed a sense of feeling and wholeness. Our illustrations this issue are student work from Neis's studio.

This issue concludes with an essay by psychologist Matthew Day, who explores the meaning of at-homeness in the postmodern world, drawing in part on interviews with respondents who were asked "to describe a time in which they felt at home."

As always, we ask readers to send material, whether news, reviews, essays, drawings, items of interest, and the like. Currently, we're short on material for upcoming issues and *need your input!*

First sketch for a child's table by Berkeley Architecture student Christopher Gutsche. See p. 7.



ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHENOMENOLOGY

The *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, edited by philosopher Lester Embree and ten other scholars distinguished for their phenomenological writings, was recently published by Kluwer Academic Publishers (Dordrecht & Boston). "This encyclopedia," says the preface, "presents phenomenological thought and the phenomenological movement within philosophy and within more than a score of other disciplines...."

"The 166 entries are about matters of seven sorts: (1) the four broad tendencies and periods within the phenomenological movement; (2) 23 national traditions of phenomenology; (3) 22 philosophical sub-disciplines, including those referred to with the formula 'the philosophy of x'; (4) phenomenological tendencies within 21 non-philosophical disciplines;

(5) 40 major phenomenological topics; (6) 28 leading phenomenological figures; and (7) 27 non-phenomenological figures and movements of interesting similarities and differences with phenomenology."

Some entries that might particularly interest *EAP* readers include: "Aesthetics" (by E. Behnke, E. Casey, and J. Evans), "Architecture" (T. Casey), "Behavioral Geography" (D. Seamon), "Body" (E. Behnke), "Deep Ecology" (M. Zimmerman), "Ecology" (U. Melle), "Existential Phenomenology" (J. Compton), and "Space" (J. Drummond).

ITEMS OF INTEREST

Archeology of Consciousness: Communication and Culture is the title of the 20th annual Jean Gebser Society conference to be held 30 October-1 November, 1997, at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. Gebser was the Swiss philosopher who wrote *Origin and Presence* (1949-53), which has been described as a phenomenology of consciousness and civilization. Contact: Patricia Milford, Dept. of Communication, California Univ. of Pennsylvania, 250 University Ave., California, PA 15419 (412-938-4170).

The **Center for Environmental Art and Humanities** focuses on the relationship between the liberal arts and the environment. The Center sponsors a newsletter, lectures, a journal (*ISLE*), and other activities. Their next annual conference will be held in February, 1998, and focuses on the theme of "Environment and Community." Featured speakers will include Barry Lopez, Carolyn Merchant, Theodore Roszak, and Keith Basso. Contact: Prof. Scott Slovic, CEAH, Mail Stop 098, Univ. of Nevada, Reno, NV 89557-00321 (702-784-8015).

The **Biosphere 2 Center** is a new research program sponsored by Columbia University in the Sonoran Desert outside of Tucson. The original Biosphere 2, now attracting some 200,000 visitors a year, has been "refitted as a venue for climate change research to serve planet Earth." A major aim of the program is improved public understanding of science and the environment. The director is interested in professional specialists, including people in the humanities and human sciences, who might give guest lectures or spend sabbaticals at the Center. Debra Colodner,

Biosphere 2 Center, Dept. of Education, PO Box 689, Oracle, AZ 85623 (520-896-5075).

Environmental History, an interdisciplinary quarterly, publishes articles "that portray human interactions with the natural world over time." Key topics are "how nature enables and sets limits for human actions, how people's activities modify the ecosystems they inhabit, and how different cultural perceptions of the nonhuman world profoundly shape peoples' beliefs, economies, politics, and cultures." EH, 701 Vickers Avenue, Durham, NC 27701.

Environmental Arts and Humanities is a new monograph series sponsored by the University of Nevada Press, which welcomes submissions addressing "the study of the environment or explore the meaning of the natural environment for human culture and the impact that humans exert on the earth." Contact: M. Dalrymple, University of Nevada Press, MS 166, Reno, NV 89557-0076 (702-784-6573).

CITATIONS RECEIVED

Bushman, R. L., 1997. *Making Space for the Mormons: Ideas of Sacred Geography in Joseph Smith's America*. Logan: Utah University Press.

A book about how "Joseph Smith configured a new kind of space for his followers unlike any other in the American religious landscape."

Grange, J., 1997. *Nature: An Environmental Cosmology*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

This philosopher draws on the thinking of Whitehead "to construct a set of concrete measures to estimate the value of nature. Application of these standards leads to the formation of the discipline of Foundational Ecology as the most effective educational tool for dealing with the environmental crisis."

Colquhoun, M. & Ewald, A., 1996. *New Eyes for Plants: A Workbook for Observing and Drawing Plants*. London: Hawthorn Press.

This book is "an introduction to Goethe's holistic approach to science, showing how the practice of drawing can enliven the scientist's perception of nature." Includes some 200 illustrations as well as exercises for observing and for drawing plants.

Feld, S. & Basso, K. H., 1997. *Senses of Place*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Essays in which "eight respected ethnographers explore and lyrically evoke the ways in which people experience, express, imagine, and know the places in which they live."

Casey, E., 1997. *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

This book "offers a philosophical history of the evolving conceptualizations of place and space in Western thought."

Harries, K., 1997. *The Ethical Function of Architecture*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

"Can architecture help us find our place and way in today's complex world? Can it return individuals to a whole, to a world, to a community? Developing Giedion's claim that contemporary architecture's main task is to interpret a way of life valid for our

time, this philosopher answers that architecture should serve a common ethos."

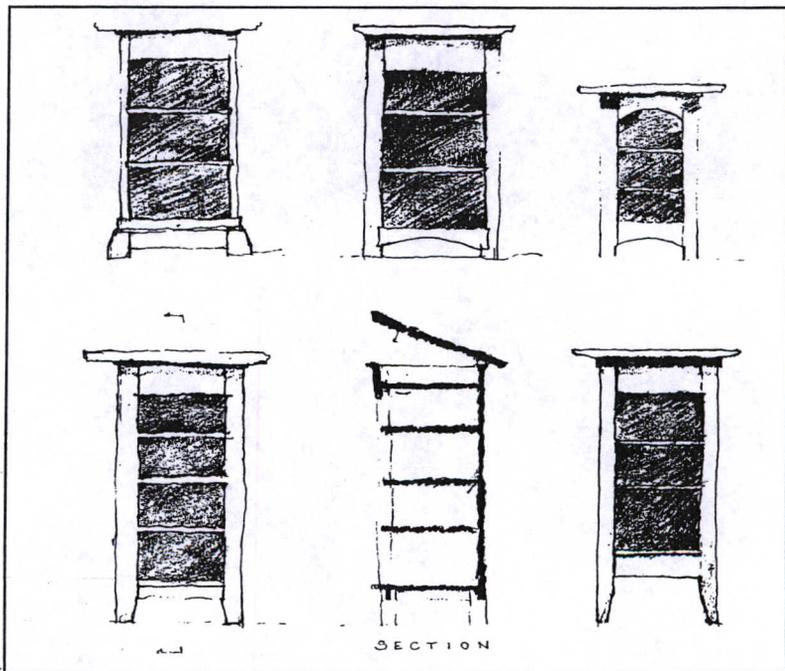
Porteous, D. J., 1996. *Environmental Aesthetics: Ideas, Politics and Planning*. NY: Routledge.

This geographer explores "the concept of landscape, the psychology of human-environmental relations, the influence of literary, artistic and legal activism, and the roles of public policy and of planning."

Rouner, L., ed., 1997. *The Longing for Home*. Notre Dame, In: University of Notre Dame Press.

This collection of essays "explores the spiritual and emotional depths of our human sense of home, mixing intellectual engagement and personal reflection."

Initial sketches for a book shelf by Berkeley Architecture student Henri Mannik for Hajo Neis's "Building Furniture" studio. See p. 5.



BOOK REVIEW

Scott Russell Sanders, 1993. *Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

In *Staying Put*, writer Scott Russell Sanders explores the themes of home, place, and dwelling. His aim is "to find out where I am.... I aspire to become an inhabitant, one who knows and honors the land." The challenge for all of us, he believes, is:

to see one's region as a focus of processes that extend over the earth and out to the edges of the universe; to realize that *this* place is only one of an infinite number of places where the powers of nature show forth.

Sander's home place is a small, two-story brick house in Bloomington, Indiana, where he, his wife, and children have lived for twenty years. In seven chapters, he explores how his home and region have helped him to understand his selfhood and its intimate relationship with the worlds of nature and people.

In chapter 1, for example, Sanders reflects on the place where he grew up, emphasizing that we all "still bear the impression of that first ground." In chapter 2, he moves to the importance of present-day places by asking how the house in which he lives can play such a central part in his life. "By what alchemy," he queries, "does a house become a home?"

Perhaps Sanders' most provocative chapter is chapter 5, in which he defends himself against the standard modernist contention that movement, change, and rootlessness are somehow better than groundedness, continuity, and place. He provides a rousing defense against poet John Berryman's relativist claim that "O really I don't care where I live or have lived/ Wherever I am...I'll cope and make do."

Sanders also argues against writer Salman Rushdie's belief that "people who root themselves in ideas rather than places" would make the world better and safer. Instead, Sanders contends that, only if people know and appreciate their place, can they care for other places and for other people. "How," he asks, "can you value other places if you do not have one of your own? If you wander the world like a sightseer...with no gauge for measuring what you see?"

Unfortunately, this counter is only partly convincing because Sanders does not adequately address the modernist complaint that place too often reduces itself to parochialism, drudgery, and fear of difference. He ignores the fact that localities *do* sometimes contribute to the disintegration of place as is well

demonstrated, for example, in the recent controversy in the Pacific northwest over spotted owls versus regional economy. For the short-term benefit of jobs, many local people would readily destroy their place.

By emphasizing place over placelessness and rootedness over change, Sanders misses a central existential fact: that a full human life must somehow draw on qualities of *both* dwelling and journey, of *both* the limited, intimate knowledge of the insider and the broad, worldly knowledge of the outsider. Sanders has emphasized home at the expense of horizon, and the result is a stick with only one end. The power of home becomes indefensible because it needs its opposites--movement, change, difference, novelty--to best be what it itself is.

Another of the book's troubling aspects is Sanders' anemic presentation of the region where he lives. He doesn't discuss, for example, his Bloomington neighborhood or the city itself, both of which, he explains early on, are an integral part of any home place.

Nor does his picture of the natural and cultural regions of which Bloomington is part suggest the deep connections that he claims a person grounded in place needs ("you have known the smells, the seasons, the birds and beasts, the human voices, the houses, the ways of working, the lay of the land, and the quality of the light"). His chapter description of the Ohio River, for example, is largely historical and secondhand; he does not examine the qualities that make the Ohio unique and a different river from, say, the Mississippi or Missouri or Hudson.

Ultimately, Sanders' picture of home seems more grounded in philosophical contention and generic description than in a firsthand intimacy known by a person immersed in place. We get a taste of this intimacy when Sanders briefly describes his friend, Richard, a computer programmer by day who, every evening, works to restore forty acres of Ohio farmland destroyed by pesticides and fertilizers.

In his unstinting love for the land, Richard exemplifies the grounded understanding and attachment that Sanders would ask us all to seek for that part of the world we call home. The nagging question is whether Sanders himself has truly found his place. Or has he, instead, erected a poetic pile of words imposed on a world still not fully able to speak?

--David Seamon

SPECIAL SECTION: FURNITURE MAKING AS PROCESS

Twenty years ago, Christopher Alexander and his collaborators at the Center for Environmental Structure in Berkeley, California, published *Pattern Language* (Oxford University Press, 1977), an effort to establish a process whereby designable elements sustaining a sense of place could be identified, integrated, and made the basis for a more beautiful, workable built environment.

Since then Alexander and his colleagues have extended the basic principles and applications of *Pattern Language* in novel, creative ways—for example, establishing a process of self-help housing for the poor (*The Production of Houses*, OUP, 1985), rethinking the nature of cities and their making (*A New Theory of Urban Design*, OUP, 1987), studying the underlying spatial order of early Turkish carpets (*A Foreshadowing of 21st Century Art* (OUP, 1993; see EAP, 6, 1), and developing a new way to think through architectural design (*The Mary Rose Museum*, OUP, 1995).

In this issue of EAP, we are pleased to reprint work produced in a graduate-level design studio taught by Hajo Neis in his and Alexander's "Building Process Area of Emphasis" in the Architecture Department at the University of California, Berkeley. The selections that follow are drawn from *Building Furniture*, volume 2 of *Process Studies: A Journal of Architectural Process*, edited by Neis and describing studio projects for his graduate studio, "Furniture Design and Making." This course is part of an integrated studio sequence in which projects increase in scale and complexity from ornament, furniture, and urban furniture to buildings, urban neighborhoods, and the city as a whole.

In the excerpts below from the introduction of *Building Furniture*, Hajo Neis describes how he and Alexander think about design and process and how this understanding relates to furniture making. The next three selections, by studio students Christopher Gutsche, Robert Walsh, and Eileen Tumlin, describe their efforts to create actual pieces of furniture, using Alexander and Neis's approach.

The central aim of the process studio was "to make a piece of furniture that has a 'sense of feeling'," which, in turn, refers to a situation where "the oneness of the thing is so simple and yet so pronounced that we feel deeply when we are in the presence of the thing.... Try to make something that has a subdued feeling, something soft in spirit, something unpretentious, easy-going but orderly.... We are concerned that you produce something that is not merely a 'nice' piece of furniture that has lots of 'stuff' going on in it or that is powerful or bold or original or 'good' design. What we want is that...you succeed in making something with 'feeling', something that has the capability to touch you and others."

In attempting this effort, clearly no easy task, the students were asked to proceed in four stages: (1) begin with small design sketches that best express "your idea, vision, and promise of quality"; (2) develop small models and more formal drawings and plans; (3) build a full-size mock-up in which the feeling present in the original sketch is transcribed to the mock-up; (4) build the actual piece of furniture.

Building Furniture includes descriptions of 25 student designs that range from a lamp and music stand to a writing desk and table for playing chest. Here we present three projects—a child's table, a chest, and a telephone table.

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PROCESS, DESIGN AND MAKING

Hajo Neis

The work presented in this second volume of *Process Studies* explores new and different processes of design and making than those typical of the latter half of this century. The "Building Process Area of Emphasis" in the Architecture Department at the University of California at Berkeley, with Christopher Alexander and Hajo Neis as core faculty, has at its heart the investigation, development and implementation of a process of design and making that explicitly attempts to create a "living" architecture in the structure of the environment and that creates for us and in us a "sense of belonging."

In the first volume of this series, Christopher

Alexander explains: "We may describe the best situation in the environment as one where we experience emotional possession of the world, or 'belonging.' It is a state in which the fine adaptation between people and their buildings, gardens and streets is so subtle and goes so deeply to the core of human experience that the people who live, work, and play in that environment feel as if they belong there, as if it belongs to them, as if they are part of it, as if—like an old shoe—it is completely and utterly theirs."¹

We must recognize that this sense of belonging came about, historically, as a result of place making, which was carried out gradually in continuous adapta-

tion by people and between people and their places. Such a process based on historical precedent is hardly available in our times. Time itself in the modern world has become much faster and process with it: society evolves faster, people move faster, and buildings and environments change faster.

PROCESS TODAY

Process in design and making in the 20th century has become increasingly fragmented and specialized. Small bits and unrelated parts have become the focus of attention rather than the whole, which begins to dissolve at all levels of scale. In the built environment, the result has been an increasing abstraction and separation of buildings from their larger context. The result has been people's increasing alienation from the environment and from each other.

Some architects accept the acceleration of process and environmental fragmentation as signs of the times, and see it, if not as a positive development, then at least as a real development that we should use for new opportunities in design and architecture, specifically, the exploration of new forms.

While the exploration of new forms for the purpose of creating new form is one thing, the exploration of new process for the purpose of creating a living architecture is another. The former does not exclude new process, nor does the latter exclude new form. It is the purpose which is different.

PROCESS, BELONGING, AND PLACE

Our purpose is to create a sense of belonging and place. The old process that created a sense of belonging is outdated. If we want to create a sense of belonging today, it must be a new process. We have to investigate new kinds of processes, which may create the connection to place and the earth again in some form. And, we need to investigate the modern means capable of establishing such processes.

Process, its nature and implementation determines the extent to which one can succeed in creating this sense of belonging in the environment. The building process formulates and implements an integrated approach to design and building in which planning, design, construction, and theory are unified. By integrating design and construction as a process of continuous feedback, exchange and evolution, one

can engage in a deeper and more intensive exchange with the local and global environment, thus creating an intimate connection of a building within a city, a gate within a wall, a piece of furniture within a room, and so forth.

BUILDING FURNITURE AND PROCESS

This studio, "Building Furniture," is not only about furniture making but is also about architecture and the building process--the process of design and making by which a city, a building, a room, an artifact, or a piece of furniture comes to life.

Architects, especially in the 20th century, have often been known to design pieces of furniture. These works, far from frivolous, express at an intimately human scale what the architect holds to be the essence of art, architecture, and making--a fundamental process of design at all levels of scale, from the very small and personal--a jewelry box, a table, a chair, a window, a room--to the very large structures of the environment that we share collectively--our homes, streets, buildings, and cities.

At the scale of building furniture, one can make solid contact with the reality of material and form, directly explore the subtle impact of texture and color on the whole, and investigate light and shadow in an emerging face with its richness and vulnerability. In building furniture, one can develop and investigate new processes that create a sense of place and belonging at an intimate scale of architecture.

ORCHESTRATING THE EMERGING WHOLE

Any new kind of architectural process needs to investigate the intricate relationship between design and construction as well as the construction process itself. The main focus is orchestrating the development of an emerging whole. To do so one must manipulate critical elements such as the construction method, the construction system, construction techniques and procedures, engineering, design and construction contracts, cost estimates and cost control, and new forms of construction management....

New process needs to investigate the potential of new technologies, new materials and machinery to speed up the process of design and construction without losing the essence of process qualities--the direct experience, which creates quality.... New

process also needs to investigate new roles for architects and builders--for example, the architect as builder and the role of the architect as a design and construction manager who understands the needs and

dynamics of the project's emerging quality.

Note

1. C. Alexander, *Process Studies*, 1 (Fall, 1994):1.

CHILD'S TABLE

Christopher Gutsché

This small table emerged from a process I had never tried before. I had done many projects over the years, doing woodworking since a child, studying architecture for four years, and working as a carpenter.

This project, however, was the first in which I began explicitly with the idea of feeling. Intuitively, some feeling permeated past projects but to begin with this idea as the focus of effort brings forth a different result. Feeling here is a quality of the whole, something that evokes a reaction from the heart and mind together, something personal to me as an individual but also relating to humanity.

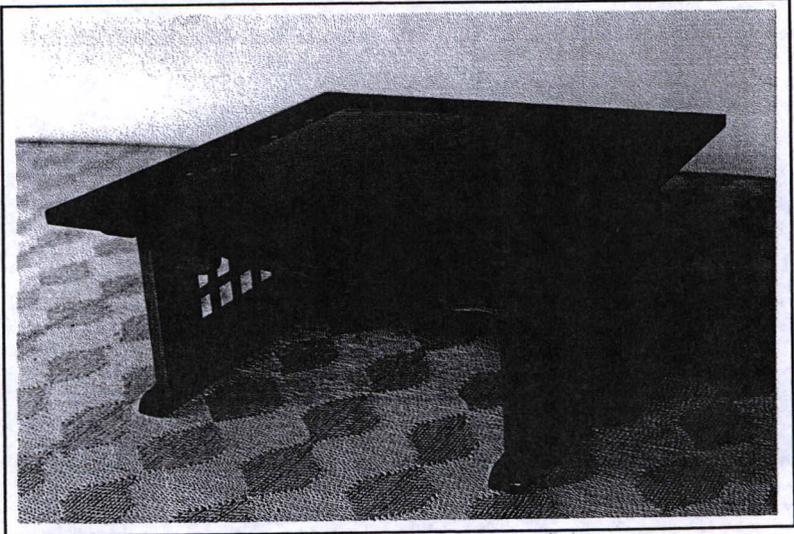
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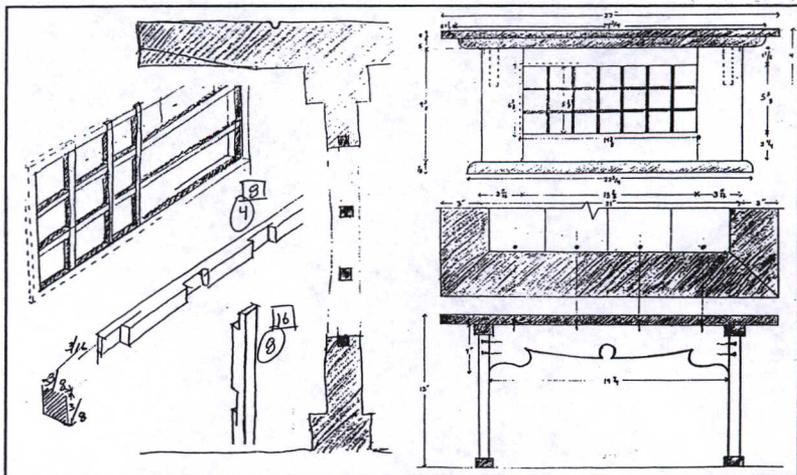
I began with a vision--a small table that a small child could inhabit as a "secret" room, a table for playing games, a table of many uses. As I tried to ground

this vision graphically, I produced a thumbnail sketch, one of a dozen or so sketches I made [see front page]. I kept returning to this sketch as I was groping for what to build, attracted by a rich and simple harmony that I bypassed at first because it did not seem clever or intellectual enough.

This process of making from the heart and mind together was something I grappled with throughout the design and making. It is something with which I still grapple. At least in me, the mind does not want to trust the heart or relinquish power.

Once I succumbed to the attraction of the sketch and recognized that my attraction indicated something richer than intellect, I could proceed and at each stage of development--from sketch to mock-up to real material to actual table--return to this quality as a measure of how the project was proceeding.





Structural sketches and measured drawings developed from mock-up.

MOCK-UP

From the thumbnail sketch, I made a full-scale cardboard mock-up as a way to work quickly and fluidly in three dimensions. I experimented with real thickness of material, along with notions of connection and structure. My main effort, however, was to bring forth the same quality and attraction that the sketch possessed. Getting the three-dimensional proportions and relationships of the side lattice, top, overhang, and so forth was a process of discovery and iteration, of cutting out and recutting out, of taping on and pulling off.

I applied colored paper on top of the cardboard to experiment with color and variations of material, ultimately a combination of mahogany and birch. These color experiments also determined some dimensions, such as the width of the border of the top, which became much wider than I had imagined in sketches. In the end, the mock-up was an unsteady patchwork of cardboard and masking tape but also a new thing carrying forth some of the spirit of the original thumbnail sketch.

THE REAL THING

I took the cardboard table seriously, paying close

attention to proportions. The top and side panels, for instance, measured one inch in the mock-up; the standard three-quarter-inch lumber would have been my likely choice if I'd not worked with the mock-up. This one-quarter-inch difference, however, greatly affected the quality and feeling of the table-- the three-quarter thickness felt too thin and insubstantial.

As a result, I purchased a thick piece of wood and resawed it into one-inch pieces. This possibility only occurred, however, because my focus was on feeling and I was not distracted by predetermined notions of availability or economy.

REFLECTIONS

Looking back on my original thumbnail sketch, I realize that my finished table lost some of the original ease and simplicity. Perhaps the final result got a little cute in some of its details--the curves of the cross bridging a bit ornate, the red-white contrasting plugs on the top a little trite. All in all, however, I believe the table has a quality I have not achieved in previous works, and I owe this completely to process. The vision of a child's table has yet to be tested, maybe in a couple years. For now my wife and I enjoy it as our living room coffee table.

MAKING A RED CHEST

Robert M Walsh

When I tell people I made this piece of furniture, a common reply is, "Did you design it or did you build it?" Was it my idea that made the chest or was it my sweat and effort that made the box? This is very much like asking, "Do you drive a car with the steering wheel or with the brake and gas pedals?" All the parts are aspects of a single integrated process.

Making this box involved continuous design decisions throughout the building process. There was a continual need for adjustment and improvement that brought me slowly closer to the objective of making a thing with its own intense life.

At the same time—and this is the key—I had to become comfortable with the fact that I did not know what the final chest would look like—that the outcome at all times was highly uncertain.

How is this possible? It implies that the thing I was making was not clearly defined even as I was making it. I had a rough sense of what was needed and an awareness of this chest as a sort of emerging being. But at no time in the process did I know precisely what the finished product would be. At

each step I simply did tests and experiments until I found something which would reliably improve the chest. I then enacted these improvements and began searching once again.

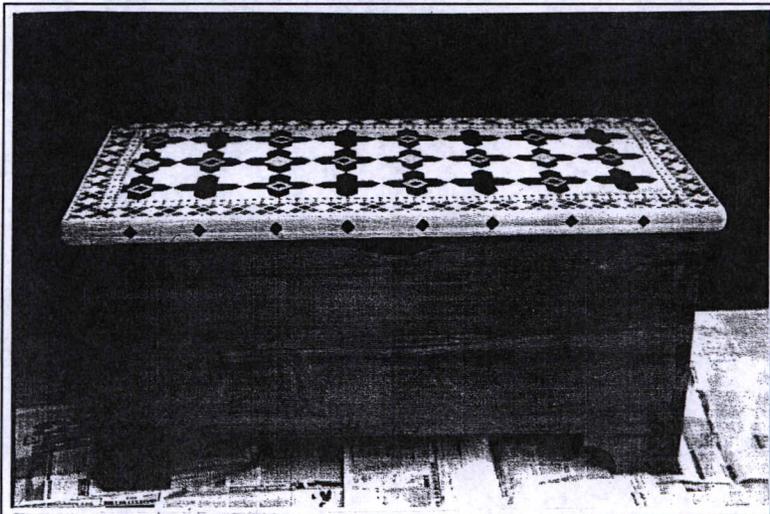
Some improvements (e.g., developing the dovetail joints) may seem to be structural, while others (e.g., color) would seem to be purely cosmetic, but this distinction hardly matters. As one problem was solved, the next one became clear and in this way the chest continually improved through a simple step-by-step process where some steps took seconds while others took weeks or even months.

Only by accepting the uncertainty that I did not know what the finished box would be was I able to make something which became better and better throughout the entire process.

THE SEQUENCE OF STEPS

The following outline of the actual process is intended to convey some sense of how the project emerged. One aspect of this process is that subsequent steps were unknown until prior steps were completed.

Red chest. 21 in. high, 43 in. long, 21 in. deep. White igum. Aniline dye. Acrylic paints.



First, I discuss steps 1-8, which deal with the overall form of the chest, then steps 9-16, which illustrate my work with color.

- Step 1. Identify a real need in my life that was not being met.
- Step 2. First mockup.
- Step 3. Second mockup.
- Step 4. Purchase wood.
- Step 5. Construct basic chest.
- Step 6. Appearance of the handhold cutout.
- Step 7. Thickening the lid.
- Step 8. Curving the lid edge.

In this first part of the process, there was a tendency for each step to be smaller and more refined than previous steps as I zeroed in on the form of the chest. While I might consider a number of possibilities at any given step, there was no backtracking--no need to undo previous decisions.

This way of working is quite different from contemporary mainstream practice, which assumes that the architect has worked everything out, down to the smallest details, from the beginning. In this standard approach there tends to be considerable backtracking and additional expense because of the problems which only become visible as a project is constructed.

What is different in the two methods relates to that upon which one relies. In the standard approach, one is dependent on the certainty of the drawings and documents to keep the situation moving properly. The assumption is that the unknown is dangerous.

In contrast, I relied upon my ability to solve problems as they arose, which allowed some control of potential problems without closing the door to potential improvements. Consequently, the ability to handle uncertainty made it possible to make something that seems inspired as a finished object, when in reality it is an accumulation of numerous small improvements.

COLOR DECISIONS

In deciding color, the process highlighted above was in some ways repeated. First, an awareness of the life of this thing had to be found. I had to under-

stand it on its own terms rather than as what I wanted it to be.

As I began applying color to the box, I dealt with the largest decisions first, followed by successive experimentation and refinement. Like an object first seen a hundred feet away in its roughest basic form, then gradually getting clearer and more detailed as one moves closer, the color of the chest began as a few large, simple "moves" that were then developed and transformed through a succession of smaller and smaller evolving, intensifying "moves" closer in.

- Step 9. Several hundred sketches.
- Step 10. Red base.
- Step 11. Red border part 1.
- Step 12. Red border part 2.
- Step 13. Cross and octagon field.
- Step 14. Black crosses.
- Step 15. Blue diamonds and orange diamonds.
- Step 16. Black edge diamonds.

Only after the black diamonds were painted did I realize that this red chest was finished. I was unable to find any other way to improve it.

AN IMMERSION IN EVERY TASK

The fact that I was making the thing at each step with my own hands gave me the capability to include design in the construction process. Instead of restricting my actions to design prior to building, I was able to make something far better that improved continually as it moved towards completion.

Had I begun with a preconceived image of the thing, it is doubtful that the result would have been as successful, since the only creative part would have been the arriving at the initial image. Instead, I was challenged to immerse myself fully into every single task because each success or failure would be present in the finished product.

I was able to take pleasure in and to challenge my creativity at every step of the process. In this way I was able to put more into the project because the ability to stomach the uncertainty of not knowing the outcome freed me to do my best at all times. In other words, the process became intensely focused on the present moment, where every move counts.

A TELEPHONE TABLE

Eileen Tumlin

I knew very little about building a piece of furniture. Full of excitement and fear, I began the endeavor with expectations much larger than my capabilities. In the end what I learned about cutting, joining, and finishing wood is almost insignificant compared to what I learned about making a thing with feeling.

This is not to say I succeeded in making something I would want to live with the rest of my life. Rather, I learned about a process that is directed towards this goal. I experienced a way of building so different from my previous design studios that it truly changed the way I see the world. The experience of building my telephone table introduced me to a process I could use at any scale of making or building things—from the very small to the very large.

THE VISION

The process began with a period of pondering about what I wanted to build. Ideally, the piece should be something for a specific place and need so that I could go about making the thing while considering its relative contribution to its environment.

Because my life was so transient at the time, a decision was hard. I was living "out of my suitcase" and found it difficult to imagine anything as permanent as a piece of furniture. Nevertheless, I saw in my mind a table to hold a telephone and a few books.

SKETCHES AND MODELS

Next I did a series of small sketches, trying to grasp its essence when I envisioned the table. In these sketches, I was seduced by an image that had a big curve like that of a big full belly. I also imagined a black, rubber tabletop surface.

When I built a small one-inch-to-one-foot scale model, the curve still seemed alluring. At this stage, I had not thought about the materials and building techniques I would use, so the model had a certain unreal quality.

FULL-SCALE EXPLORATION

The turning point was in making the full-scale model. It was at this point that the curve became less attractive. I remember Hajo asking me if I would want this thing with me for the next thirty years. This was a simple yet profound question, which

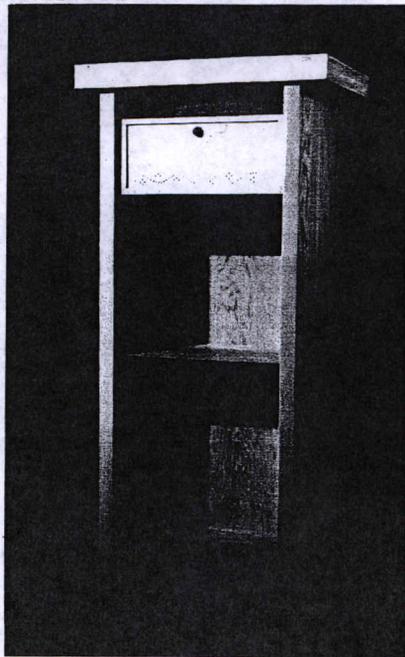
propelled me to look for something deeper in the table. Seeing it at full scale made it a real thing that I could react to and make decisions about. I could stand next to it or place things in its shelves and have an immediate response.

Over the next several days, I spent a good deal of time manipulating the full-scale model by changing its size and the location of the various members. In time, I found a configuration with which I felt comfortable.

During this stage, we did a number of tests in the studio to help make decisions. This was a moving experience for me because, for the first time as an architecture student, I was asked to look at something and make a decision based on my reaction to it. In other words, I was exploring my physical and emotional response as a human being to the thing.

Previous design studios had taught me that I could

Telephone table. Fir. Punched metal door. Acrylic paint.



trust only my intellectual reaction to a concept or idea of the thing. For the first time I was told that my human experience was a valuable and valid tool to use in the process of designing and making.

THE METAL DOOR

The final mock-up was quite different from my initial sketches. While some students seemed to stay true to an inspired initial sketch, my piece went through a major revision during the modeling stage.

The changes in my table during the mock-up stage were proof for me that I had learned to put less emphasis on my sketches and more value in the reality of the thing, which became more important than its idea or concept. In the end, I feel that this reality is the key to successful making, since I must live with the physical thing itself and not its idea.

MATERIALS

The full-scale model led to the stage of considering the materials and method of construction. I made an estimate for the wood and purchased it from the hardware store. I used fir, which was neither terribly expensive nor cheap. I knew at this point that I would also be making a small punched metal door with a handle. By this point, I had discarded the idea of a rubber tabletop.

COLOR

I studied the different color possibilities on the full-scale model. In addition, I made color tests on scrap pieces of wood to see what the final result would be. I have to admit that the multitude of possibilities was overwhelming and the decisions difficult. Hajo helped me during this phase and kept me focused on making continuous tests at every point to evaluate and make decisions. "Let's make a test!" became Hajo's slogan.

In the end, testing on the model was a useful exercise, but I am not pleased with the quality of the acrylic paint. At the last moment, I used acrylic rather than gouache to save money. The result is that the color seems dead.

CONSTRUCTION

The construction phase was perhaps the most daunting. I had very little experience with power tools or woodcraft techniques, and in hindsight I realize my lack of expertise led to a deficiency in the final result, which is not a table that shows a knowledge of joinery.

In addition, the table suffers from a boxy quality that I think came about as a result of my lack of comprehension and experience. Nevertheless, it was only my first piece of furniture. I have much to learn even though I gathered a great deal of knowledge from the hours I spent in the woodworking shop.

EVALUATION

Today my table sits in use with a telephone and an answering machine on top and phone books and sketch books in the shelves beneath. I have yet to resolve a problem with the metal door, and so the door is not attached, a situation that changes the feeling of the table. I use my table and feel somewhat ambivalent about it because of the imperfections I see. It still waits for a final finish or protective coating and the top is still unattached. Perhaps it is easier for me to look at it as an unfinished piece rather than as an imperfect finished piece.

I realize the shortcomings but value the table as a living reminder of the process I learned in Hajo's studio. I love my table. It is like me: imperfect and bearing the scars of an internal struggle to create something with depth and feeling.

HOME IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD

Matthew D. Day

Day is completing his dissertation on home in the Psychology Department at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. The original version of this essay was presented at the 1996 International Human Science Research Conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The conference version is considerably longer and includes sections on the history, psychology, and philosophy of home as well as many more references. Readers interested in the complete paper should contact Day. Address: PO Box 1249, Southwest Harbor, ME 04679.

We live in a time when one can be away from home and at home at the same time. Our global culture has vastly expanded the boundaries and definitions of home. We are beckoned to be "at home" most everywhere, provided we have the inclination and cash. The old towns and homesteads of the past have given way to new frontiers in space and cyberspace. While generations were once born and buried in the same community, many of us, particularly in industrial/technological societies, find ourselves in a global, postmodern society where our identity with *home* has become increasingly blurred.

From pre-fabricated modulars to Ralph Lauren interiors, home is now packaged and promoted as a readily available commodity. The telephone, television, and home computer join the world at large with our most private rooms and break down the boundaries between home, work and public realm. We can "log on" to the World Wide Web, visit "home pages" anywhere, "home shop," and "tele-commute" from our "virtual offices" without stepping out the door.

Yet despite the many commercial and technological possibilities available, there is evidence that all is not well on the home front. Rampant homesickness persists. If we look closely at our experience of home, even when we are among the most "well off," we are apt to find a mixed blessing. We may have all the material comforts yet still be in domestic turmoil, depressed, lonely, or anxious. Critics of postmodern society warn we are heading into a placeless "hyper-space" characterized by hyperactivity and depression (Bergman, 1992; Leslie, 1993, Romanyshyn, 1989).

HOME AND PHENOMENOLOGY

But what is home? Most everyone can relate to feeling "at home" at some particular time and place; as such, the phenomenon appears to be universal. In our postmodern age, however, the *experience* of home has become increasingly complex and enigmatic. While we agree on its common taken-for-granted meaning, it is also an experience uniquely subjective

to each of us. It is both universally sought after, yet by virtue of its private, mundane and interior nature, resists "objective" scientific study (Tuan; 1977; Wright, 1991, p. 214). Home deflects from view the private everyday experience of its occupants.

Phenomenology goes directly "inside" the home by listening attentively to how individuals describe their experience of at-homeness. Phenomenology is especially suited to the study of home because its "data" are descriptions of everyday experience, the lifeworld of human existence. Central to this lifeworld, I argue, is the human concern with being at home.

This essay focuses on the existential meaning of at-homeness as revealed by my own phenomenological research. I center on the idea that all meaning is an interpretation of phenomena, and this meaning begins and ends in the context of one's "home." What has value to us--what "strikes home"--is connected to what we value in our home life. I propose a hermeneutic theory based on an existential geographical understanding of the at-home experience.

A STRUCTURE OF AT-HOMENESS

My research method was developed largely through Duquesne University's Psychology Department (Colaizzi, 1973, Georgi, 1970, Wertz, 1984). The aim of this research is to describe a particular phenomena as accurately as possible, as it shows itself on its own terms. Procedurally, I asked five respondents, male and female and of various ages, to describe a time in which they felt at home. They were further instructed to describe what occasioned the experience, how it unfolded, and how it came to a close. They were asked to describe this in a way that most anyone could understand.

Apart from these guidelines, the respondents were free to choose any experience that first came to mind. Each protocol was followed by a brief interview in which I asked for further elaboration on details that were unclear. I then read and reread the protocols in order to explicate common general themes. I then

compiled those themes in order to present a general structure of the experience of at-homeness.

WHAT BEING AT HOME MEANS

One theme common to all the respondents's experiences was that at-homeness involved a suspension of time--home had a timeless quality to it. One respondent said she "felt a peaceful sense of timelessness" while another "lost track of time." A third said that "somehow time stopped" while another felt "infinity." The last felt "all-of-a-sudden at home."

A second theme related to a positive attunement to the present moment. One respondent explained that he was "completely comfortable," while another "savored each moment." A third explained that "I felt perfectly fine" while a fourth said that "I could feel my breath part the oceans."

A third theme involved an interplay between the familiar and the strange. One respondent felt "secure and protected" but was in an "unpredictable country." Another felt "by myself, but with a sense of danger." Another felt "spacious and calm" though "strange." The last feared "intrusions from the everyday world" but was able to somehow "suspend that reality."

A fourth theme related to the fact that at-homeness involves a sharing or disclosure with one's self or others. One respondent spoke of "a flow or silent rhythm with my partner" while another felt "at home with myself as I realized I needn't be afraid." Another said her partner "shared with me his secret passion," while yet another felt he had a "behind-the-scenes look" at his friend.

A last major theme related to the fact that being at home meant one felt healed or relieved in some way. One respondent felt "completely without stress" and "very relaxed." Another "felt peaceful... and at one with the world." Another said her home experience made her "feel much better" while another said "it was medicinal." The last respondent said she "was able to touch deeply into her own reservoir of hope."

A STRUCTURE OF BEING AT HOME

For the respondents in my research, the experience of being at home meant that time had somehow stopped. There was an attunement to the present but not without a concurrent sense of danger or something strange. What appears threatening or unfamiliar

has been deferred, but remains present none-the-less. One is moved closer to oneself and others. Something emerges, which is generally viewed positively. One is more relaxed, attuned, hopeful and healed.

Some of the themes in this general structure are familiar in light of the wider literature on home. The idea of home as being "attuned" to one's environment is found in Buckley (1971), Grange (1977), and Heidegger (1977) in his theory of dwelling. The healing quality of home is discussed by Connelly (1986) and Romanyshyn (1989).

On the other hand, the theme of timelessness is less evident in the literature. While phenomenology makes temporality central to an understanding of the world, the idea of timelessness is often reduced to the abstract concepts of "presence" or "Being."

My research also confirms the inherent tension between the home/not-at-home and the familiar/strange--themes about which Freud (1959), Heidegger (1962) and Dovey (1985) also speak.

Our postmodern society neglects that true home involves a dialectical interplay between comfort and anxiety, the familiar and the strange. We have developed the habit of erecting fortresses, building barriers, and medicating ourselves to fashion a buffer from anxiety and depression. Conceptual abstractions, dogmas, reductionisms, and medications can all be flights from anxiety and the uncanniness of existence. We fail to see that the real threat comes from within, from the uncomfortable realization that our true Being has been lost and neglected.

While at homeness is an attunement to what is, it is also a realization of what is not. What isn't includes those things out of our control: our moods, time constraints, noise and other uncontrollable intrusions. On the existential level, coming home means recognizing that we lack that which is most our own--our Being.

It is only through an openness to ourselves and to others, to the strange and uncanny, that we are able to hear and follow the call of conscience. How or if we take up this call is related directly to how we make our home--whether it is an enclosed fortress or a clearing in which we are attuned to our selves and the world. We must welcome home the outcasts, the strange, uncanny, the prodigal sons in our lives.

Home is more than comfort and privacy--it is an

active encounter with the world, a struggle to come to terms with our own limits and possibilities. Most phenomenologically oriented writers emphasize the more positive, poetic writings of the later Heidegger, while overlooking the more rigorous view of at-homeness discussed in *Being and Time*. (Heidegger, 1962). The darker, uncanny side of home is its most overlooked aspect, a situation that subsequently cuts us off from experiencing home's deeper meaning.¹

AN ECO-HERMENEUTIC OF PLACE

The experience of at-homeness serves as a grounding point from which we come to understand the world. We apprehend the world from our situatedness. Recent work in the field of humanistic geography has begun to explore the territory of home from a phenomenological-geographical perspective. Seamon defines home as a person's "natural place" or "zero point" of one's "reference system" (1982, p. 129) while Relph (1985, p. 22) finds that "the world is structured into regions of lived-meaning around the place where one lives;" the most important place being "home." Tuan finds that "human groups nearly everywhere tend to regard their own homeland as the center of the world," (1977, p. 149). Rowles (1980, p. 59) calls home the "fulcrum of the life-world."

The experiential structure of home is important for the field of hermeneutics because meaning begins and ends at the place in which one feels at home. Our word home, from the Greek word *oikos*, is also the root of our word ecology. Whereas mainstream ecology is interested in the home life of plant and animal species, what I call "eco-hermeneutics" is the study of the human habitat as experienced in the everyday world and the meanings that flow to and from that habitat.

Eco-hermeneutics explicates the existential ground on which "truth" statements are made. Understanding requires more than logic, linguistics, or psychological inferences; it requires an attunement to that from which a phenomena springs. Eco-hermeneutics grounds itself by explicating the at home experience of both researcher and respondent. It is existential in that it requires self-understanding and an openness to what is. "Truth" is ultimately homecoming and learning to dwell authentically.

The eco-hermeneutic offers a corrective to both the constrictive forces of the positive sciences and the entropic effects of postmodernism. It explores the everyday ecology of human experience, the home of

meaning. The one constancy that postmodern society affords us is the possibility of existential at-homeness, which comes only through a struggle with anxiety and depression, the two major symptoms of postmodernism. While our present age is about the commodification and politicalization of what home should mean, it is more possible now than ever to authentically dwell anywhere, even though we may live in no particular place at all.

NOTE

1. In "The Uncanny," Freud (1959) focuses on the strange and repressed aspects of home. He points out that the German word for home, *heimlich*, is the opposite of the word uncanny, or *unheimlich*. The reality of home, Freud noted, includes both the familiar and the strange. Where *heimlich* is to be "homey and of the house," *unheimlich* is to be of a strange "haunted house" (*ibid.*, p. 220).

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