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Special issue in memoriam Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1930–2022)

This issue of *EAP* marks the start of 34 years of publication and begins with conference information and citations received. The last *EAP* issue was an “in memoriam” for architect **Christopher Alexander** and philosopher **Robert Mugerauer**, both of whom died in 2022. Now, in August, 2022, we have lost another eminent figure—geographer **Yi-Fu Tuan**, distinguished for his insightful writings on place, lived space, and modes of environmental understanding and encounter.

To honor Tuan, this issue includes my introduction to his work and tributes by philosopher **Ingrid Leman Stefanovic** and geographers **Edward Relph**, **Stanley Brunn**, and **Xu Huang**. We include excerpts from four of Tuan’s many articles, chapters, and books. Of all geographers of his generation, Tuan was probably the best known because of his clear, compelling writing style that focused on a remarkable range of environmental and geographic phenomena, often spotlighted in their ethical and philosophical dimensions. Along with **Relph**, **Anne Buttimer**, **David Ley**, and **Marwyn Samuels**, Tuan was a founding figure of a research tradition that came to be called “humanistic geography,” though one can readily argue that his method and point of view were implicitly phenomenological, emphasizing human beings’ lived geographies via space, place, and other lived aspects of environmental experience and meaning.

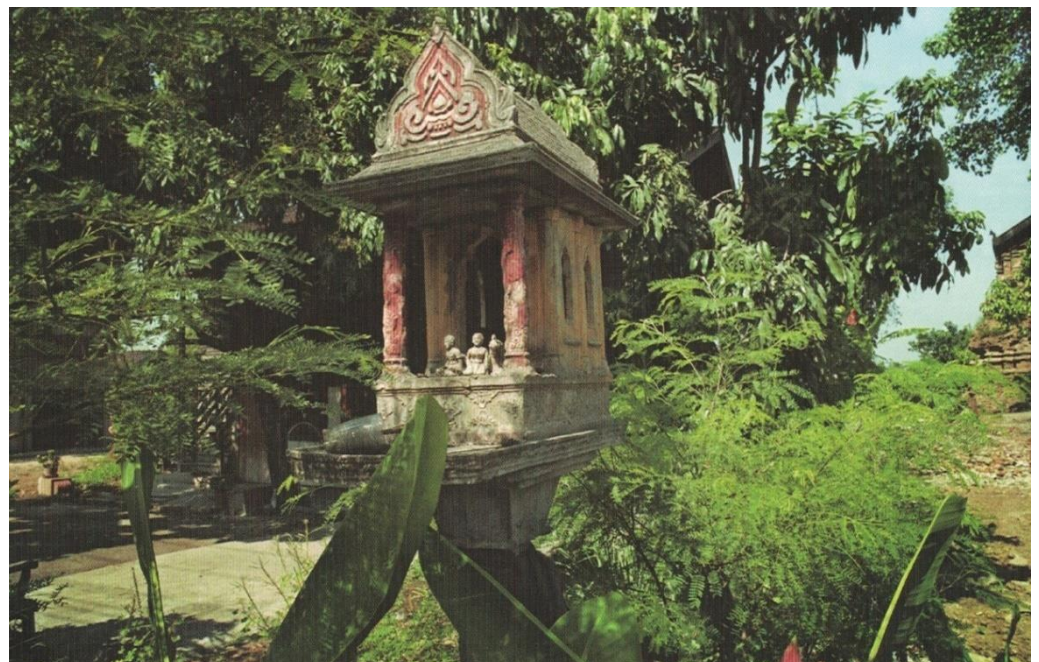
This issue includes one book review and three essays. **Andrea Hiott**

reviews psychiatrist **Iain McGilchrist**’s 2009 *The Master and His Emissary*, a book that provocatively considers the neurological and psychological groundings of holistic understanding. In providing a complement to his essay in the winter/spring 2022 *EAP*, zoologist **Stephen Wood** continues his consideration of becoming familiar with a natural place. His focus is the phenomenon of *noticing* and the question of how directed awareness of the natural world unfolds.

The second essay this issue is anthropologist **Jenny Quillien**’s vivid, first-person ethnography of her recent residence in Alaska. We end with religious-studies scholar **Harry Oldmeadow**’s portrait of the sacredness of deserts, a theme that

complements his earlier *EAP* essay on the holiness of mountains (winter/spring 2022).

*Below: A “house of spirit” (San Pra Pum) outside a home in Thailand and actualizing the Buddhist belief that the land is always owned in concert with land spirits. Inhabiting these miniature houses, the land spirits protect dwellers and keep them safe from outside, harmful forces. The spirit houses are consecrated by Buddhist monks. Photograph by photographer Martha A. Strawn and included as one of several in Yi-Fu Tuan’s 2009 Religion: From Place to Placelessness, p. 132. Tuan died in August 2022; see the “in memoriam” in this *EAP* issue, pp. 8–19.*



Conferences 2023

The conference situation remains fluid in 2023, and readers should check organization webpages for schedules and formats (actual, virtual, or hybrid). In the past, we have regularly covered the following conferences:

Architecture, Culture, and Spirituality Forum (ACSF);

Back to the Things Themselves! (BTTT!);

Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA);

Interdisciplinary Coalition of North American Phenomenologists (ICNAP);

International Association of Environmental Philosophy (IAEP);

International Human Science Research conference (IHSR);

International Making Cities Livable conference;

Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP);

Society for Phenomenology and the Human Sciences (SPHS).

Gernot Böhme (1937–2022)

German philosopher Gernot Böhme died January 20, 2022, at the age of 85. He was one of the major thinkers to develop the interdisciplinary field of atmosphere and ambience studies. He was Professor of Philosophy at the Technical University of Darmstadt, Germany, where, since 2005, he had been the Director of the Institute for Praxis of Philosophy. He wrote over 70 books and more than 400 articles. Recently, two of his books on atmosphere were published in English: *Atmospheric Architectures* (Bloomsbury, 2020); and *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres* (Routledge, 2018). Following, we publish two excerpts from the introduction of *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, edited by Jean-Paul Thibaud.

“They bring a certain mood”

[The] “feeling well or not” in a certain environment clearly is an indicator of its aesthetics. This is the point where aesthetics come into ecology. The elements of the environment are not only causal factors that affect human beings

[physically] but they produce an impression on their feeling (*Befindlichkeit*). And what mediates objective factors of the environment with aesthetic feelings of a human being is what we call *atmosphere*. The atmosphere of a certain environment is responsible for the way we feel about ourselves in that environment.

Atmosphere is what relates objective factors and constellations of the environment with my bodily feeling in that environment. This means: atmosphere is what is in *between*, which mediates the two sides. Two main traits of the theory of atmospheres arise from this. Namely, first, that atmosphere is something in between subject and object and can therefore be approached in two different ways: either from a perception aesthetics or a production aesthetics viewpoint. Atmospheres are quasi-objective, namely they are out there; you can enter an atmosphere and you can be surprisingly caught up by an atmosphere.

But on the other hand, atmospheres are not beings like things; they are nothing without a subject feeling them. They are subjective facts ...: to talk about atmospheres, you must characterize them by the way they affect you. They tend to bring you into a certain mood, and the way you name them is by the character of that mood. The atmosphere of a room may be oppressive, the atmosphere of a valley may be joyful. But on the other side, you can argue about atmospheres, and you even can agree with others about what sort of atmosphere is present in a certain room or landscape. Thus, atmospheres are quasi-objective or something existent intersubjectively.

But ... you can approach the phenomenon of atmospheres not only from the side of perception aesthetics but also from that of production aesthetics. This is why stage design is a kind of paradigm for the whole theory and practice of atmospheres: you can learn from a stage designer what means are necessary to produce a certain climate or atmosphere on the stage: what the

sound should be like, how the stage is illuminated, what materials, colors, objects, signs should be used, and in what way should the space of the stage itself be arranged. The art of stage setting again proves that atmospheres are something quasi-objective. If each member of the audience were to perceive the climate of the stage in a different way, the endeavor of stage setting would be useless (pp. 1–2).

Architecture and atmosphere

One of the main applications of the aesthetic theory of atmospheres is architecture and design, which have always produced atmospheres ... [W]hat interests us here is the shift in thinking both in architecture and design as a consequence of the theory of atmospheres. We said: atmospheres are something spatial and at the same time something emotional. If you are explicitly considering atmospheres in architecture and city planning, the main topic of considerations is space.

Architecture is not just about buildings but essentially about spaces. Architecture is opening and closing spaces. It sets points of concentration and therefore of orientation in space: it determines directions, it frames outlooks. And all this for people visiting or dwelling there. This means that the way people feel in rooms and spaces, and how they move around, how they can follow bodies and lines of buildings is the main point of interest.

The situation is comparable in the art of design. Here a shift of consideration took place that again is determined by the perspective of [users]. Whereas in traditional design theory, one discussed shape and the properties of things, the focus is now about “ecstasies.” I use the Greek word *ecstasies* to indicate the way things are radiating into space and thus contributing to the formation of an atmosphere. *Ecstatics* is the way things make a certain impression on us and thus modifying our mood, the way we feel... (p. 5).

Citations received

Seda Arikan, 2022. Establishing the Places of Care for the Older People in *The Diaries of Jane Somers* by Doris Lessing. *Journal of Aging Studies*, Vol. 63, pp. 1–5.

This literature scholar considers the meaning of care as portrayed in Nobel-prize novelist Doris Lessing's *The Diaries of Jane Somers* (1984). Arikan argues that the novel "reveals that human flourishing is based on responsibility." The article's aim is "to create awareness through literature about caring for older, sick, and dying people by establishing or sharing the places of care, such as older people's homes, rooms, beds, bathrooms, and even deathbeds." Arikan explains that the novel is "both a moral and a hopeful understanding of how the needs of elders should be responded to in society."

Tara Coleman and Janine Wiles, 2018. Being With Objects of Meaning: Cherished Possession sand Opportunities to Maintain Aging in Place. *The Gerontologist*, Vol. 60, pp.41–49.

These health researchers examine the importance of cherished possessions for older persons. Drawing conclusions from in-depth interviews, the authors conclude that "Cherished possessions... play a significant role in opportunities to maintain aging in place."

Vikas Mehta, 2023. *Public Space: Notes on Why It Matters, What We Should Know, and How to Realize Its Potential*. London: Routledge.

This planner integrates "the key ideas that encompass the social, political, and physical issues in the making and experiencing of public space." Vikas is the author of *The Street* (Routledge, 2008).

Edward S. Casey, 2011. Strangers at the Edge of Hospitality. In Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch, eds., *Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality*, pp. 39–48. NY: Fordam Univ. Press.

This philosopher of place argues that, at base, hospitality is "the enactment of a unique and often urgent edge-game in which strangers present themselves at gates and in which gates are there to open or keep shut" (p. 48).

Miguel Guitart, 2022. *Behind Architectural Filters: Phenomena of Interference*. London: Routledge.

This architect considers building envelopes, examining the edges of a building and suggesting they are integral to the essence of architecture. How do envelopes work? Are they skins, shields, porous connections, or something else? What do building edges become if they are no longer structural? The focus is how buildings articulate, mediate, and intensify lived relationships with places and world.

Branko Mitrović, 2022. *Architectural Principles in the Age of Fraud: Why so Many Architects Pretend to be Philosophers and Don't Care about how Buildings Looks*. Novato, California: Oro Editions.

This architectural theorist argues that most architectural theory today is incomprehensible and largely useless for real-world design. He identifies six major ways in which architectural theory misrepresents architectural design and architectural experience: (1) *obfuscation plain and simple* ("incomprehensible sentences by using terms that readers are supposed to recognize ... and thus indicative of profound thoughts"); (2) *profound banality* ("a fairly

simple and banal through is dressed up in a terminology that makes it appear profound"); (3) *pretentious falsity* ("making obviously false statements that pretend to say something profound"); (4) *Jargon of profundity* ("value-laden dismissal or approval in situations where the author has no arguments to present"); (5) "salads" ("clusters of unrelated ... obfuscatory claims, statements, or citations placed together to achieve a cumulative obfuscatory effect"); (6) *cumulative banalities* ("a large number of banal observations are clustered together to give the impression of profound insights").

Mitrović's two major literatures of criticism are architectural deconstruction and architectural phenomenology. In regard to the latter, his examples include Christian Norberg-Schulz and Alberto Pérez-Gómez. Puzzlingly, Mitrović appears to be unaware of phenomenological thinkers who have sought to make their writings accessible, clear, and practical, for example, the writings of Karsten Harries, Robert Mugerauer, and Thomas Thiis-Evensen.

Edward Relph, 2021. *Electronically Mediated Sense of Place. In Changing Senses of Place: Navigating Global Challenges*. Edited by Christopher M. Raymond, Lynne C. Manzo, Daniel R. Williams, Andrés Di Masso, and Timo von Wirth. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, pp. 247–258.

Relph considers how digital technologies and social media affect human experience and life, arguing that these developments have impacted sense of place but, they have "not affected all aspects of sense of place equally. Neurological and ontological aspects appear to have been relatively unaffected by electronic media, whereas person, social, and public aspects have been influenced in diverse ways, especially by the dramatic developments since 1990 in digital devices and related applications" (p. 249). See sidebar, next page.

A freedom of the world directly

The fact that so many substantial innovations in electronic media are so recent and continuing to happen means that conclusions about broader consequences for sense of place have to be regarded as tentative.

In some ways, it seems that sense of place is historically contingent, because it is related to technological developments that change both the nature of places and how people related to them. In other ways, sense of place appears to be immune to technological innovations ... This in turn suggests that sense of place, although it is unified in our experiences of the world, has plural aspects, some rooted, others malleable.

From the practical perspective of everyday life, it is these malleable aspects that are causes for concern because misinformation, manipulation, and surveillance have become prevalent on the Internet, and these undermine those aspects of sense of place that involve a freedom of the world directly, whether by ourselves or in association with others.

We may not always be explicitly aware of sense of place, but it is necessarily parts of our memories, intentions, and encounters with the particular realities of the world. As social media, search engines, and smartphones have made electronic media increasingly popular and participatory, they also appear to have become unwitting agents of political and corporate power that indirectly treat sense of place as a resource that can be exploited and thus erode its freedom (p. 256).

John Stanislaw Sadar, 2016.
Through the Healing Glass: Shaping the Modern Body through Glass Architecture, 1925–35. NY: Routledge.

This architect tells the story of “Vita glass,” an effort by glass companies in the mid-1920s to market the health and medical benefits of a new kind of glass that

LET IN THE HEALTH RAYS OF

DAYLIGHT PERMANENTLY THROUGH

“VITA” GLASS WINDOWS

Ordinary window glass shuts out the ultra-violet health rays of daylight. “Vita” Glass admits them permanently. The properties of “Vita” Glass do not fade away in a year or two; they are guaranteed permanent, and that guarantee has been confirmed by tests made by the Building Research Station. (Write for copy of report 62/B.R.S. 36/12/4—Nov. 1933.) Two views are shown above of the “Vita” Sun Balconies at Harrogate Infirmary. Roof glazing in $\frac{1}{8}$ inch.

“Vita” cathedral by Mellows & Co. Ltd., Sheffield. Side glazing in $\frac{1}{8}$ inch plate “Vita” Glass. “Vita” Glass is obtainable from local glass merchants, plumbers, glaziers and builders. “Vita” is the registered trade mark of Pilkington Brothers, Limited, St. Helens, Lancs, whose Technical Department is available for consultation regarding properties and uses of glass.

would “admit the beneficial, therapeutic ultraviolet spectrum of sunlight into buildings.” Sadar reviews the development and eventual failure of Vita glass. He argues that the Vita glass promoters portrayed the human body as needy, “appealing to a body that had been deprived of a healthy carefree childhood in the past.” The aim was to offer that body a “promise of a healthy future” through the beneficence of

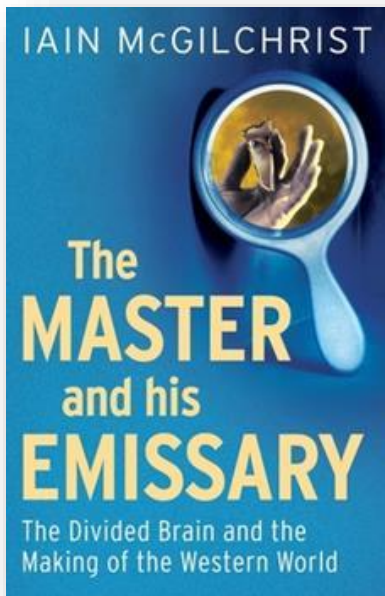
ultraviolet light. Above is a Vita glass advertisement from *Architectural Review*, January 1935.

Book Review

Beyond Dichotomy

Andrea Hiott

Iain McGilchrist, 2009. *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press [new expanded edition, 2019].



In 2021, psychotherapist Iain McGilchrist published his second book, *The Matter with Things*, a two-volume encyclopedic publication in which the author aims to awaken readers from an increasingly mechanized, reductionist mode of thinking. In this review, I discuss his earlier *The Master and His Emissary*, published in 2009.

On the surface, this book is a deep dive into the left and right brain hemispheres and a compendium of research about their differences. McGilchrist's more resonant message, however, has little to do with the left and right hemispheres but with *getting beyond* such dichotomies. Focusing on hemispheres as if they were opposites is a left-brain trap that, as McGilchrist, warns, could take over as master if one isn't aware.

As others have noted, however (see Rupert Read's 2010 review in *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*), McGilchrist ultimately falls into this same error, using a left-brain approach to describe the right and—as the book's awkward title makes clear—giving the brain a masculinist cast. Even so, the book is an honest attempt to move beyond this tricky, sticky proclivity to dichotomize. At its best, the book indicates that there is no reason to pit left against right, whether physically or symbolically. Just as the left and right hemispheres can be viewed as somewhat autonomous systems operating toward a cohesive, embodied life, so too can we begin to view traditional dichotomies of “reason” and “belief” as distinct approaches nested within one life. Taking “spirituality” broadly—not as religion or rules but as intuition and belief—one recognizes that it is often considered as an opposite to experiment-based science and linearity. McGilchrist's book is a step toward getting beyond this dichotomy.

For many Western people today, an either/or mentality has come to scaffold the way the world is experienced. In fact, that same scaffolding is the reason it took me over a decade to read McGilchrist. As a student of neuroscience, I was told to avoid his work because it was not a serious explication of hemispheric differences. These instructions came from well-meaning individuals who had not read the book but expressed a common visceral reaction among neuroscientists to ignore and censor any mention of the hemispheres as personalities—for example, McGilchrist's parable-like framing of brain hemispheres as “master” and “emissary.”

This knee-jerk reaction arose partly because of self-help programs of the 1980s and 1990s that often drew on left-brain versus right-brain personalities and offered

ways of personal balance through hemispheric awareness—i.e., the right brain sees the big picture, connects, and believes, while the left brain focuses only on details, walks its own predefined path, and remains skeptical. Though these self-help programs were often diluted and exaggerated, they nonetheless sprang from legitimate, groundbreaking brain studies showing a seeming split personality arising in people whose hemispheres had been separated.

These famous experiments, partly because of which neuropsychologist Roger Sperry received a Nobel Prize in 1981, are extraordinary in that they demonstrate how one and the same body can express widely divergent behaviors when the hemispheres have been severed and so operate independently.

This research began in the 1960s, when Sperry and colleague Michael Gazzaniga conducted experiments with people whose corpus callosums had been clipped as treatment for severe epilepsy. The corpus callosum is the part of the brain that connects the two hemispheres, so when it was clipped, the brain operated more like two separate units. In a 1967 issue of *Scientific American*, Sperry and Gazzaniga published “The Split Brain in Man,” which discussed how the two halves of the human brain could function independently, and how they might be responsible for different abilities that manifest in the human body.

Experiments like this had never been done before. These researchers learned that, when the hemispheres were disconnected and only one hemisphere was in play, the person acted differently and even contradictorily to the way she acted when the other hemisphere predominated. Even more remarkably, the person seemed not to notice or register this difference and was unable to access the activity taking place by way of the other hemisphere. In other

words, when the hemispheres were severed, the body seemed to become a stage that could only be taken by one hemisphere at a time and that could no longer cross-reference its actions.

The more generalized notion that the hemispheres have opposing personalities was not entirely correct but did provide a simplified way to understand these experiments. This version of split-brain science assumed that *left* and *right* were opposites and largely ignored the fact that most humans do not actually have split brains but healthy intact corpus collosums and two connected hemispheres that communicate.

Until recently, most neuroscientists ignored hemispheric differences, and many still recoil from the topic because of the “self-help” angle. The most meaningful message in McGilchrist’s book is its illustrating that we must respect both hemispheres if we want a shift in mental and environmental health. He writes:

The right hemisphere, the one that believes, but does not know, has to depend on the other, the left hemisphere, that knows, but doesn't believe. It is as though a power that has an infinite, and therefore intrinsically uncertain, potential Being needs nonetheless to submit to be delimited—needs stasis, certainty, fixity—in order to Be. The greater purpose demands the submission. The Master needs to trust, to believe in, his emissary, knowing all the while that that trust may be abused. The emissary knows, but knows wrongly, that he is invulnerable. If the relationship holds, they are invincible; but if it is abused, it is not just the Master that suffers, but both of them, since the emissary owes his existence to the Master (McGilchrist, 428).

This “greater purpose” and “relationship” is, of course, the whole body, but this wholeness sometimes gets lost in the text. Near the middle of the book, McGilchrist reiterates his main point, namely that there is a “degree of specialization” in the brain that leads the left hemisphere “to focus more narrowly on detail” with “the right hemisphere supporting sustained attention across a broad field.” He uses a Darwinian argument grounded in the “survival advantages” of a brain that can focus narrowly and widely. He presents many studies that illustrate how this focusing ability

has “consequences at the phenomenological level of experience,” such that, by examining the various tasks associated with the different hemispheres, we can learn something important about these two modes of being in the world.

It is obvious that McGilchrist is still working in a binary manner—seeing the modes as two rather than a wide, nested spectrum of potentials—though, in an updated preface added in 2019, he states that the hypothesis at the heart of his book is not about such binaries:

The hemisphere hypothesis transcends and replaces, and is not a perpetuation of, the old dichotomies: reason v. feeling, rationality v. intuition, ‘system I v. system II’, male brain v. female brain. Each hemisphere plays its part on either side of each of those dichotomies (McGilchrist, xii).

He also makes it clear that neither hemisphere incorporates a monopoly on any one trait:

It is ... just not true that the left hemisphere is unemotional, perhaps a bit boring, but at least down- to-earth and reliable: in fact, the left hemisphere is more likely than the right hemisphere to get angry, or dismissive, jump to conclusions, become deluded, or get stuck in denial. Equally it's not true that the right hemisphere has no language (it usually has no speech, a different matter): it understands many of the subtlest and most important elements of language better than the left (McGilchrist, xii).

Still, McGilchrist cannot skirt his own left-brain pattern simply by awareness of it. Though he talks about embodied phenomenology, what he too often forgets is that these two hemispheres do not have their own phenomenology but rather operate through the phenomenology of a common body—that they operate as one multifaceted phenomenology, not two.

No doubt this story of our need for awareness of possible perspectives is easier understood when presented in a dichotomous language, so it is no wonder that McGilchrist falls into the same trap he points out. He aims to move beyond the dichotomy of making opposites of the hemispheres, but he makes this move by casting them as separate bodies rather than parts of

a shared body, thus dismissing what is crucial for phenomenology—for what the whole sensory body experiences due to its collective systems. Instead, throughout the book, McGilchrist discusses the phenomenological world as if it is the world of a brain hemisphere. He often uses terms like “right hemisphere phenomenology” and discusses “the phenomenology of the hemispheres.” For example:

At the end of Part I, I spoke of the progress of the sleepwalking left hemisphere, always going further in the same direction, “ambling toward the abyss.” The tendency to keep on progressing, inflexibly, always in the one direction may have to do with a subtle feature of the “shape” of the world as seen by the left hemisphere, compared with that experienced by the right hemisphere. It has often been said that the left hemisphere is the hemisphere of “linear processing”; its cognitive style is sequential, hence its propensity to linear analysis, or to mechanical construction, taking the bits apart, or putting them together, one by one. This is in keeping with its phenomenological world being one of getting, of utility—of always having an end in view ... (McGilchrist, 446).

This is well said but still assumes a dichotomous model of either/or that takes attention away from the wholeness of the embodied, emplaced awareness that McGilchrist champions elsewhere. As he makes clear, we do not have to choose hemispheres but *awaken* to them—the body can become aware of its patterns, and must, if we want to find a dynamic harmony between our differing potentials. To truly change our patterns will require change at the level of the body’s phenomenological encounter with itself, with other beings, and with the places we are part of in our most essential sense.

Tagging the phenomenological experience to a brain hemisphere misses the chance of revealing the necessity of a whole-body shift in phenomenology. It is this shift that offers a way of balance and agency over future mental and environmental paths. Really grasping this shift means expanding our mindset by way of that awareness so that left and right, or science and spirituality, are understood as autonomous positions without being opposites, as connected without being the same.

No wonder McGilchrist could find no magic formula for writing in such a way, as few if anyone has. It is extremely difficult and nearly impossible to use current language, built up through binaries, to go beyond dichotomy. One is reminded of writer F. Scott Fitzgerald, who suggested that the “test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.” Holding opposites means understanding that what you are holding are not really opposites at all, but nested positions in a shared space that you needed to cast as opposites to awaken to. In that sense, McGilchrist’s book *shows* us this new space, even if he cannot describe it.

As the anthropologist Gregory Bateson famously put it, this understanding means that “it takes two to know one.” The brain is built in two hemispheres because this structure allows it to operate at levels of complexity that evolve its ability to *navigate as that body* and open a path beyond dichotomy. In this way, both science and spirituality offer help toward awakening to our ecological, emplaced position in a larger whole. The ecological is not a right-

brained trait. Rather, it is a phenomenological awareness of the body in conversation with its encounter that, in the words of psychologist J.J. Gibson, “cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us understand its inadequacy” (Gibson, 1979, 129).

To live ecologically, we do not need to choose between hemispheres, and indeed we cannot—as embodied beings, we are both. In a similar sense, science and spirituality can be cast as trajectories toward understanding the lifeworlds of living beings and the larger ecological movement we are positions within.

This may be too radical or too direct a statement for the McGilchrist that wrote *The Master and His Emissary*, but I wonder if it is for the man who has, more than a decade later, written *The Matter with Things*. I look forward to finding out.

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In Memoriam: Yi-Fu Tuan (1930–2022)

David Seamon, Editor, *EAP*

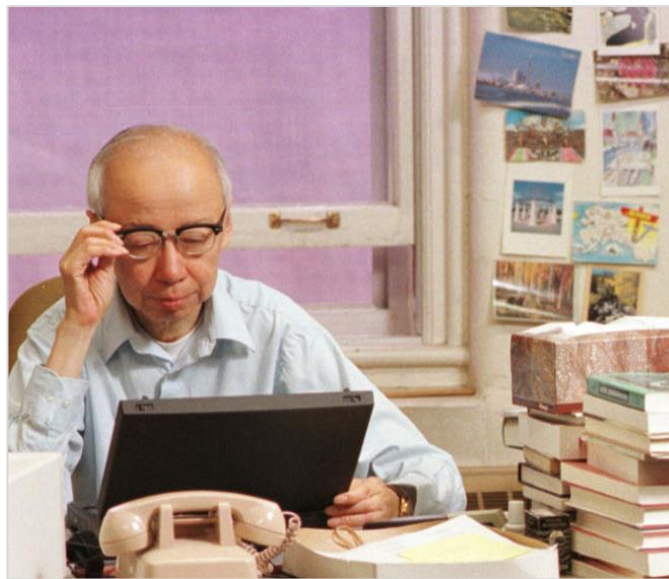
Geographer **Yi-Fu Tuan** died in Madison, Wisconsin, on August 10, 2022. He was 92 years old and defined his discipline as “the study of the earth as the home of people” (Tuan 1991, p. 99). This simple definition provides a clear picture of his central research interest: the interrelationships among human beings, their homes, and the Earth.

Tuan was born in Tientsin, China in 1930 and educated in China, Australia, the Philippines, and England, where he received a BA and MA from Oxford University. He moved to the United States in 1951 and completed his PhD in Geography at the University of California at Berkeley in 1957. From 1984 until his retirement in 1998, he taught Geography at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

As one of the founders of a research tradition that came to be called “humanistic geography,” Tuan gave primary attention to human beings’ lived relationships with all aspects of the geographical world, including nature, space, and place. His focus was human action, awareness, and meaning as they both sustain and are sustained by such environmental, spatial, and place phenomena as home, mobility, landscape, region, and the natural and human-made environments.

In a 1976 article in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Tuan first formally coined the term “humanistic geography” which he described as “an understanding of the human world by studying people’s relationship with nature, their geographical behavior as well as their feelings and ideas in regard to space and place” (Tuan 1976, p. 266).

Though he generally avoided conceptual designations like “phenomenological,” “hermeneutic,” or “existential,” these philosophical traditions clearly informed his work, and he



can readily be called an environmental and place phenomenologist. In most of his writings, however, he did not discuss conceptual and methodological matters explicitly but instead moved directly to the specific real-world topic at hand.

One of his few explicit discussions of phenomenology was a 1971 *Canadian Geographer* article that he summarized as “An attempt to apply the phenomenological method to a few general types of geographical experience, namely ‘front and back regions’ and ‘home and journey’” (Tuan 1971, p. 192). He concluded that “The phenomenologist studies neither [people] in the abstract nor the ‘world’ in the abstract, but “[people]-in-the-world This perspective is no less important to geographers, for their quest—broadly conceived—is also the understanding of “[people]-in-the-world” (Tuan 1971, p. 191).

In many of Tuan’s writings, a favorite thematic device is environmental and place dialectics, for instance, space vs. place; home vs. journey; hearth vs. cosmos; individual vs. group, localism vs. cosmopolitanism, and so forth. As he wrote, “The human mind appears to be disposed to organize phenomena not only

into segments but to arrange them in opposite pairs” (Tuan 1974, p. 16).

One example is his last book, *Romantic Geography* (Tuan 2013), a title referring to the human desire to encounter environments and places that are remote, exotic, or dangerous. To interpret these “romantic geographies,” Tuan drew on a dialectic that he called “polarized binaries”—lived opposites that included darkness and light; chaos and form; low and high; house and city; and brain and brawn. He claimed that these binaries are useful because they highlight lived extremes rather than a middle range of human experience.

These binaries “affect our feelings and judgments toward objects and people in the ordinary encounters of life, but also—and more central to romantic geography—in the envisioning and experiencing of large, challenging environments ...” (Tuan 2013, p. 10).

Beyond his home discipline, Tuan was perhaps the best-known geographer of his generation because of his clear writing style and eclectic research interests, solidified in over twenty books with titles like *Space and Place* (1977), *Landscapes of Fear* (1979), *Segmented Worlds and Self* (1982), and *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Pets* (1984). His best-known work (partly because of its alluring title) is probably *Topophilia* (Tuan 1974b), subtitled “A study of environmental perception, attitudes, and values.” Tuan defined topophilia as attachment to and love of place; the book’s central aim was awakening readers’ environmental awareness:

Without self-understanding we cannot hope for enduring solutions to environmental problems, which are fundamentally human problems. And human problems ... hinge on the psychological pole of motivation, on the values and attitudes

that direct energies to goals (Tuan 1974b, p. 1).

I only met Tuan a few times at national meetings of the Association of the American Geographers in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The one encounter I remember clearly was having dinner at an International House of Pancakes. I believe that meeting was in Minneapolis, and I think we dined there because Tuan at the time was a professor at the University of Minnesota and happened to like this particular IHOP. Whatever the reason, we had an intense discussion on the significance of place in geographical studies. He said to me, “David, your work will be remembered because you’ve coined a concept—“place ballet”—that all sorts of people can readily understand. It’s a structure embedded in human life, and people readily see this.”

I was flattered by what he said, though Tuan, of course, can be given the same compliment, since a good number of concepts that he developed in his work—e.g., topophilia, public symbols, places of care—continue to be used by both academics and the lay public. I particularly

admire public symbols and places of care with the former referring to places readily known because of their striking visibility; and the latter marking ordinary, often humdrum environments mostly known only by their users (Tuan 1974a; see the excerpt, p.17).

To honor Tuan’s trailblazing work, we include tributes from **Edward Relph, Ingrid Leman Stefanovic, Stanley Brunn,** and **Xu Huang**. These tributes are followed by excerpts from four of Yi-Fu’s writings, including his exceptional description of public symbols vs. places of care. The first excerpt, written in 1965 for the journal, *The Professional Geographer*, is prescient in its early explication of how Martin Heidegger’s phenomenological understanding of human-being-in-the-world might have crucial significance for geographical thinking (Tuan 1965).

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A Transformative Encounter

Edward Relph

Relph is Emeritus Professor at the University of Toronto and a key founder of research that has come to be identified as “phenomenologies of place.” His books include *Place and Placelessness* (1976; reprinted 2008); *Rational Landscapes and Humanistic Geography* (1981; reprinted 2016); and *Toronto: Transformations in a City and its Region* (2013). Ted.relph@gmail.com. © 2023 Edward Relph.

My life overlapped with Yi-Fu Tuan in very significant ways. Apart from some brief encounters at conferences, however, we met only once, at the University of Toronto in 1967, where I was a graduate student in a class he was co-teaching (with colleague Joe May) about the philosophy of geography. That class redirected my academic interests and changed how I look at the world.

I am no longer certain about which particular discussion triggered this shift, but I think it probably had something to do with the fact that Yi-Fu talked about a book he had just finished writing—*The Hydrologic Cycle and the Wisdom of God* (1968). The title alone suggested an original way of thinking about environments that stepped well beyond the research into floods and natural hazards that I had planned.

Indeed, the book went beyond all the established conventions of human and physical geography. Yi-Fu's interests had nothing to do with the then-current enthusiasm about transforming geography into a spatial science with methodological foundation of statistics and quantification. Instead, Yi-Fu's work showed me an intellectual approach based on wide reading and careful thinking that could reveal the rich variety of ways people relate to the world.

In fact, Yi-Fu's contributions to that class were limited to just a few sessions because he moved to the University of Minnesota in the middle of the academic year. Nevertheless, his point of view made me realize that my intellectual inclinations did

not lean toward spatial science. The remaining sessions, taught by Joe May, reinforced this recognition by showing me that phenomenology offered a philosophical foundation and method for explicating the older notion of geography as the study of places.

A few years later, the outcome was my doctoral thesis on *The Phenomenon of Place* (published in 1976 as *Place and Placelessness*). Yi-Fu agreed to be the thesis's external examiner, but, unfortunately, he was unable to attend the oral and submitted his assessment in writing.

For the next few years my writing about phenomenology, place, and humanistic geography followed a roughly parallel track to Yi-Fu's publications, though his always had a quality of scholarship and an optimistic view of people and culture that mine seemed to lack. In 1976, I accepted his offer to teach his courses on space and place at the University of Minnesota while he was away on academic leave. I had the privilege of using his office, but again we had no opportunity to meet because our time in Minneapolis did not overlap.

Apart from the short yet transformative encounter in Toronto, it was through his writing that I came to know Yi-Fu Tuan. I find his writing consistently remarkable, filled with original insights about how we encounter the diversity of the world around us. He drew on a wealth of reading in diverse fields and always leant toward the better aspects of human nature.

I may have missed something but, to the best of my knowledge, he never discussed models or speculated about theory; he

made no policy recommendations. Nor did he write much about methodology, though I think his books and articles were all informed by an implicit phenomenology that offers a rich, descriptive commentary on various aspects of place, space, environment, and landscape. And he always recognized that there were ambiguities in how these phenomena are experienced because human beings are regularly inconsistent.

Indeed, I suspect that, in much of his writing, Yi-Fu aimed to reconcile a tension in his own mind between the delight he took in community and place on one hand, and his work as a cosmopolitan scholar on the other hand. Being rooted in a place, he suggested (“In Place Out of Place,” 1984, p. 9), offers routines and habits necessary for sanity. We need a sense of place because it offers a unique capacity for appreciation of the world around us.

But these features of place can also be constraints. “Plants have roots, human beings have feet and minds” he wrote in *Cosmos and Hearth* (1996, p. 187). And in the same book: “Bonding based on propinquity and kinship is natural to us. By contrast, kindness to strangers who may not reciprocate, and civility in impersonal transactions are a watermark of civilization.” (p. 140).

This is a principle that I wish everybody lived by. Yi-Fu Tuan may be gone, but the deep humanity of his insights endures in everything he wrote.

Remembering Yi-Fu Tuan

Ingrid Leman Stefanovic

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Sense of place? It's all empty nonsense! These were the words of an elderly, well-respected psychologist, as we were riding an elevator together at an environmental design conference many years ago. As we chatted, I quickly concluded that my colleague had never read the works of Yi-Fu Tuan. Had he done so, there is no doubt in my mind that dismissing place research in this way simply would have been unthinkable.

I am not a geographer and yet, I know well that Tuan transformed the landscape of his own discipline, embracing a humanistic element that had not been part of the common discourse. I never met him in person, although I understand that he was well loved by students and colleagues alike. That fact is not surprising to me, given that his writings reveal the heart of a discerning man, one who quietly, though decisively, changed the course of interdisciplinary thinking on place and space.

Tuan was one of the early thinkers who realized that geography was not simply the study of physical landscapes as much as it was better devoted to understanding *relationships*—relations between humans and the environment, between space and place, between intimacy and distance.

His book, *Space and Place*, was one of the first classic texts on the subject I read as a philosophy student in the 1970s. I was fascinated with the ways in which a geographer was able to so meaningfully engage questions about the significance of home and community, place and time, lived experience, and “all the modes by which a person knows and constructs reality.”

Certainly, as many of us know, describing place is not a simpleminded matter of classification and definition: place is fluid, and eludes preconceived boundaries and reductionist categories. But it is precisely its effusive character that gives meaning to these rich words, “space” and “place.”

Tuan was deeply aware that articulating meaningful aspects of a sense of place was no easy job. But he also knew that if “something is of sufficient importance to us, we usually find the means to give it visibility.”

Yi-Fu Tuan's legacy is that he gave visibility to the essential notions of home, place, space, and time. And he did so in a way that transformed the essence of the geographic discipline, while opening the door to meaningful interdisciplinary collaborations.

In the context of place research, there are few in the world who made a more significant contribution. And for such a gift, many of us will always remain deeply grateful.

Legacies Aplenty

A Memorial to Yi-Fu Tuan

Stanley D. Brunn

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Scholarly communities advance through a series of miscellaneous geographies and geometries. These can include individual and group efforts, internal and external kindred spirits, and scholarly communities and individual initiatives. They can progress the theoretical thinking and practical results with financial backing or simply through ongoing efforts of persistence and patience. Regardless of the origins and the networks involved in new directions, the outcomes of these creative efforts are likely the result of a mix of personal attributes and responses by known and unknown friends, scholars, and strangers providing invisible, silent support for what one is seeking.

This framework is particularly fitting when evaluating the lifelong contributions of Yi-Fu Tuan. Tributes to his half-century-plus contributions to geography can and should come from those who knew him well as a friend, a teacher, a colleague, and a research collaborator.

While those tributes will be paid by those who knew him for what they have seen in writing and in presentations, it is impossible for outsiders to know about his upbringing in China and Australia and how these places influenced his lifelong experiences and learning. Too often in writing memorials of solitary scholars, we are unfamiliar with early childhood experiences, elementary and high school teachers, and non-family members who likely played key roles in how they approached learning, doing, and growing in various settings.

In writing about Yi-Fu's impact on geography and other scholar communities, I focus here on his efforts as a professional geographer, knowing that, to answer all the "whys and wheres" of his career fully, one

needs to explore pre-professional life experiences, friendships, students, advisees, and travels.

Some of the depth and breadth of his lifetime contributions can be traced to his graduate days at the University of California, Berkeley, where he had contacts with human, physical and human/physical geography and geographers. His doctoral dissertation on arid land geomorphology was not a major thread of his research career, but it provided a background for exploring human/environmental intersections as a major thread throughout his lifetime. He would probably be among the first to admit that such intersections are important in providing a holistic view of looking at humankind in past and present contexts. That he was comfortable moving beyond a strictly physical-geographical context exhibited early that he wanted to explore new topics and seek ways to move geography ahead in some new directions and dimensions.

His entry into disciplinary history occurred in the mid-1960s and 1970s when the discipline was taking turns into spatial and behavioral directions. These evolutionary directions in focus, language, and methodology in the discipline were welcomed by some but unwelcomed by many others. The spatial tradition was evident in graduate-student training, in hiring priorities, in research funding, and in some research journals. Amidst these "turns," there were a few geographers who were somewhat uncertain about what these new directions meant and where they were taking the discipline.

Among the "non-quantifiers," as they were called, were a few who suggested that the discipline should be more concerned with human experiences, human welfare, and social well-being. Yi-Fu was one of

those pioneers who, along with other geographers like Anne Buttimer, David Ley, David Lowenthal, Ted Relph, and Merwyn Samuels, advocated for a more human geography based on places, landscapes, and emotions rather than spatial analysis and quantitative methods. Tuan's writings during these decades resonated with those advocating for exploring more ties to the humanities and less to numerical analyses in both human and physical geography.

Tuan's slow but effective entries into mainstream geographical research also represented the entry of Chinese and East Asian worlds of thinking into a discipline strongly, and without question, influenced by European thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth century. His early and subsequent articles and books portrayed the importance of imagination, harmony with nature, feelings and emotions that were counter to much of the spatial thinking and quantitative methods supported by a handful of British-trained geographers in the last few decades of the twentieth century. His work also had relationship to the emergence of social theory introduced by a small number of European and North American geographers in the 1980s.

Human geography became more a humane geography because of the contributions of his articles and books. Previous geographic research on religion also took a spiritual turn with his research on studying the self, society, communities, the environment, and landscapes. Some of these themes were integrated by him and subsequent scholars via his term "topophilia"—literally, "love of place."

One can argue that Tuan's research contributions were a foundation of humanistic geography and extended the thinking of human/environmental geography beyond abstract, ivory tower worlds to the worlds

A Geography that Opens the Memory of the Mind

Xu Huang

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Perhaps the most fascinating terrae incognitae of all are those that lie within the hearts and minds of men.

—John Kirtland Wright

Yi-Fi Tuan was not the only humanist geographer to emphasize experience, yet he explained how he differed from colleagues Anne Buttimer, David Ley, or Edward Relph, calling his writings merely personal correspondence (Tuan 2015).

But perhaps it is Tuan's spirituality that his interests were cosmopolitan and cross-cutting across the humanities, for he wonderfully weaved together quotations and observations from fiction, essays, poetry, scientific studies, historical accounts, biographies, and religions. Tuan navigated through a multitude of texts without adhering to formal theory. He was more willing to forge ahead than to formalize theory; he subtly and strategically takes the reader between text and experience. This art was not only unprecedented in the 1970s but remains unique in current-day times. Tuan never felt his way of working to be a paradigm but merely descriptive psychological geography (Tuan 2013).

In Tuanian geography, half of human experience is characterized by rootedness, security, and certainty, while the other half is characterized by extensiveness, expansion, and imagination. One pole symbolizes stillness and the other, movement. But the two interpenetrate, as reflected in such entries as *Topophilia* (1974), *Place and Space* (1977), *Segmented Worlds and Self* (1982), *Cosmos and Hearth* (1996), *Human Goodness* (2008), *Humanist Geography* (2012), and *Romantic Geography* (2013).

The geographical encounter between these two poles involves continuities and discontinuities. Through these contrasts and penetrations, Tuan revealed the many ways of being in the world and provided a prism to see through the ambiguities and contradictions of human experience and

how they subtly and differentially mix and intermingle: Within reach but not far away; at the end of the world but close to the heart (Tuan 2012).

Since he looked for a mixture of interpretation and experience, one might wonder how Tuan positioned himself between the two poles of experience of space and place. He made it clear, in a self-reflexive gesture, that he was neither rooted nor driven to encounter the world. He not only understood, however, but felt the pull of both positions (Tuan 2004). He also articulated his personal topophilia: in his first encounter with the desert of Death Valley, he seemed to experience the geographical counterpart of the self, without the trappings of human society; beauty might be impersonal—even inanimate—to be a solace for Tuan's soul (1999, 2004). It was in the vast desolation and silence of stone, light, wind, and sand that he felt comforted, nurtured, and sheltered.

In the landscape of the mind, Tuan repeatedly explored what it meant to be lost, fractured, scattered, and adrift; or claustrophobic, swollen, confined, and trapped. While *Segmented Worlds and Self* (1982), *Morality and Imagination* (1989), and *Escapism* (1998) all touch upon these heavy, tragic themes, *Landscapes of Fear* (1979) focuses on them almost entirely. Tuan admitted to being a pessimist, fascinated by the rupture of connections between people and places, but the integrity of the rebridged self was even a more magical appeal (Tuan, 1999).

I am captivated by the mental landscape created by Tuanian geography. Instead of delineating a perfectly clear path, he waved his hand and summoned, "There it is," inspiring me to explore my own psychological geography. Born in the early 1980s, my early childhood was spent in a crumbling apartment building in an economically underdeveloped county in central China. Many young people from my hometown fled from there by various

means, either to go to college, join the military, or enter factories to work in more developed places on the eastern coast of China. I was one of them. In the 20 years since I left home, I have lived in several big Chinese cities and even had a study abroad experience in the Netherlands. But I always seemed to have no home to which I might return. China's rapid, brutal urbanization destroyed all the architectural landscapes of my childhood; the apartments I lived in as a child were long gone; the old buildings that remain are now ruins of broken walls.

Because of Tuanian geography, however, I can open my mind to the landscape in the ruins. As I walk among them, the fragments of the past remain in place, presenting themselves to me, replacing the city life of the present. As I touch each public building and residential building in the ruins, the coarseness of my skin immediately evokes memories of my early childhood.

Although the cold, crumbling stones do not bring me into direct contact with the past, they act as a medium for memory repair, creating a facilitative space. I experience multiple spatial and temporal orders: the real fragments, the geographical imagery of ruins, and the renewed architecture together produce a complex relationship between present and past.

Overlapping this spatial and temporal order are the themes of my psychological geography: depth and surface, hidden and revealed meanings, latent and manifest content. I began to visit, describe, and perceive the ruined landscapes of every city I have visited through more phenomenological and psycho-geographical methods, including drifting, participatory observation, tracking photography and poetry writing, especially for the old, abandoned neighborhoods that preserved the architectural landscape of the 1980s.

The ruins create my psychological geography: the sense of the ruins as an archive of the past integrates my memory, allowing

the self to have a continuous, temporal vein, where time is layered in the soil rather than discarded on the horizon. In the structure of my mind, the ruins are not erased with the accumulation of new experiences but pushed deeper into the ground, strengthening the relationship between self and place, becoming a fossil of time. The ruins disturb the notion of linear time and space: the ruins emerge from spatial and temporal dislocation and enter my life-world through the wounds of the city.

At the same time, the creativity of memory bursts forth in the ruins and in all the past that provides a passage for my journey into the ruins. The passage of life and the crystallization of silent existence become frozen fragments as I delve into the ruins: a broken window of a residential building crashes through a moment of my childhood. I grab a fence and see the train below, imagining a world far away. With this crystallization, the ruins converge into a separate, safe field of memory. I feel warmth in the associative environment of my childhood memories and the sheltered feeling of inhabiting the world. I find my geographical counterpart in the bare ruins of the old neighborhood.

This counterpart soothes me by reinforcing memories already existing, albeit potentially. The presence of my childhood home as a subconscious archetype means that I can find an identity with each new encounter with the old buildings. By experiencing the pathway from germination to extinction, the ruins dramatically reenact the epochal structure of my life's journey: from modernity's intervention in the traditional settlement, to its successive setbacks, to its gradually dying spatial forms. I have seen the relationship between modernity and urbanization give way to disintegration, decay, and erosion. The final stage of the memory movement is a kind of rebirth: the ruins, as a mapping of a former home, end up stubbornly existing as a landscape of death, illuminating the self as I approach rootlessness and homelessness. Ultimately, in the process of internalizing the landscape of ruins, I feel the potential landscape of mind that ruins create for me, the motivational mechanism that helps me realize my self-integrity.

My personal nostalgia for ruins is related to Tuan's topophilia for the desert, both experiences trying to cure a certain anxiety of

modernity. The decaying, desolate aesthetics of the desert or ruins suggest that the process of desolation and decay is a deconstruction of the illusion of rationality—that one might inhabit the place of desolation or ruins, whereby the anxiety of modernity dissipates. Although only briefly, space and time remain misaligned, and one encounters a temporary relief from Martin Heidegger's homelessness. The journey of memory into the ruins is like a dream, trying to capture images and meanings no longer existing in the present.

Psychological geography becomes a way to understand the dreamlike, spatial qualities of the ruins: its scenes and associations, its juxtapositions and simultaneities, the compatibility between past and present. Walking through the ruins allows a combination of temporal and spatial fragments, pieced together, given a sequence and narrative by the journey itself. The experience alters time and space so that neither is its original self but has the potential to create the integrity of the self in the place of the mind. My ruin experiences are surprising encounters between self and world, like Tuan's geographical encounter one morning waking up, young and vibrant, in a desert called Death Valley.

Although Tuan said goodbye to the world this August, he revealed with astonishing grace the ambiguity and contradiction of the human experience of "dwelling-in-the-world" and the inseparability of self, place, and world. Tuan opened himself to the world and used his individual place experience to travel through the wormhole of life and light up the landscape of the mind. If the fire of life experience were left behind, I would feel that all the theoretical interpretations of humanistic geography were just empty shells, leaving only ashes.

Tuanian geography can be entered in two ways. On one hand, Tuan's descriptive psychological geography wonderfully weaves together materials and artworks from the various humanities to interpret the psychic experience of all human beings inhabiting the earth. On the other hand, Tuan's geo-poetics uses his own narrative of experience to illuminate the poles of geographical experience and to navigate between them with the fire of life, forming a unique stream-of-consciousness style of geographical prose poetry.

Inspired by Tuan's *Coming Home to China* (2007), I would like to express my sorrow and high respect for Yi-Fi Tuan, in a poem.

*Here, no need to answer who I am
The sublime vastness romanticized in the heart
Sadness in spring, new beginnings or abandoned pets?
Life in death, death in life, fire in the tomb
Water in the womb or mere man?
With all the world, trying to make a gift of sentiment
Casting the drifting bottle to attachment and longing
That invisible self, silenced for fear
You can finally close the gaze of escape
Into a place of complete disarming
You're home, in this millennium of divinity*

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“Environment” and “World”

Yi-Fu Tuan

This excerpt was originally published in The Professional Geographer, Vol. 17, No. 5, September 1965, pp. 6–8.

The words “environment” and “world” are part of the basic vocabulary of geographical discourse. Their shades of meaning and, in particular, the dialectical relation of the underlying concepts have not always been explicitly recognized by geographers, although they have been so recognized by certain philosophers and theologians. It is the aim of this note to distinguish the meaning of these two words and to adumbrate the philosophical implication of the distinction

[The] basic difference in meaning [of these two words] is recognized by the fact that, when we speak of “environment,” we tend to assume a “hard” scientific pose, whereas when we speak of “world,” we speak as humanists. The dialectical relation of these two words has not been systematically explored ..., although it is a theme in the system of philosophical theologians like Josef Pieper and Paul Tillich. To Pieper, a “world” is a field of relations (Pieper 1963, p. 84). Only a being capable of having relations, only a being of whom “inner” as well as “outer” may be predicated has a world

Protestant theologian Paul Tillich (1957, pp. 69-72) takes a similar view, arguing that the basic structure of finite being is the polarity of self and world. Only human beings, however, have a completely centered self and structured universe to which they belong and at which they are able to look at the same time. The human being’s determining center is liable to suffer disintegration. To the degree in which this happens, his or her *world* also disintegrates. Things no longer speak with humans; they act on them. Humans become limited selves, in dependence on a limited environment. They have lost their world; they have only their environment

Besides philosophical theologians like Pieper and Tillich, philosophers with a bent toward phenomenology also show an interest in the concepts behind the words “environment” and “world.” Martin Heidegger, for instance, distinguishes between “surroundings” ... and the “world.” “Surroundings” or “environment” is for Heidegger a mode of the world, but an inauthentic mode which we enter through our unselfconscious commerce with implements and things. The world, on the other

hand, is not a thing, nor a framework for things. It is, as Vycinas (1961, p. 38) explains, “the realm wherein our history occurs, wherein we encounter things and encounter ourselves. A stone ... is a worldless being because it lacks openness (it is statically enclosed in itself). Only a being which stands to the openness of Being, has a world.”

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Public Symbols and Fields of Care

Yi-Fu Tuan

This excerpt was originally published in "Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective," a chapter in Progress in Geography, Vol. 6, edited by Christopher Board, Richard J. Chorley, Peter Haggett, and David R. Stoddart (London: Edward Arnold, 1974, pp. 213–252).

Public Symbols

Public symbols create places by giving prominence and an air of significance to localities. Monument building is a characteristic of all high civilizations. Since the nineteenth century, however, monument building has declined and with it the effort to generate foci of interest (places) that promote local and national pride.

Most monuments of modern times commemorate heroes, but there are important exceptions. St. Louis' Gateway Arch, for example, commemorates a pregnant period in the city's and nation's history. Public squares often display monuments and they are also a type of "sacred area" in the sense that they may be dedicated to heroic figures and transcend purely utilitarian ends. Certain public buildings are also symbols: the Houses of Parliament, Chartres Cathedral, the Empire State Building

Monuments, artworks, buildings, and cities are places because they can organize space into centers of meaning What happens is that a large monument like Stonehenge carries both general and specific import: the specific import changes in time whereas the general import remains. The Gateway Arch in St. Louis, for example, has the general import of "heavenly dome" and "gate" that transcends Ameri-

can history, but it also has the specific import of a unique period in American history, namely the opening of the West to settlement.

Enduring places, of which there are few in the world, speak to humanity. Most public symbols cannot survive the decay of their particular cultural matrix: with the departure of Britain from Egypt, the statues of Queen Victoria no longer command worlds but merely stand in the way of traffic. In the course of time, most public symbols lose their status as places and merely clutter up space.

Fields of Care

Public symbols can be seen and known from the outside; indeed, with monuments there is no inside view. Fields of care, by contrast, carry few signs that declare their nature; they can be known in essence only from within. Human beings establish fields of care, networks of interpersonal concern in a physical setting.

From the viewpoint that they are places, two questions arise: One is, to what degree is the field of care emotionally tied to the physical setting? The other is, are the people aware of the identity and limit of their world? The field of care is indubitably also a place if the people are emotionally bound

to their material environment, and if, further, they are conscious of its identity and spatial limits

Unlike public symbols, fields of care lack visual identity. Outsiders find it difficult to recognize and delimit, for example, neighborhoods that are a type of the field of care. Planners may believe an area to be a neighborhood, and label it as such on the ground that it is the same kind of physical environment and people come from a similar socio-economic class, only to discover that the local residents do not recognize the area as a neighborhood: the parts within which they identify may be much smaller, for instance, a single street or intersection.

Moreover, though residents of an area may have a strong sense of place, this sense is not necessarily self-conscious. Awareness is not self-awareness. Total immersion in an environment means to open one's pores, as it were, to all its qualities, but it also means ignorance of the fact that one's place as a whole has a personality distinct from that of all other places (pp. 237-244).

Geopiety

Yi-Fu Tuan

This excerpt was originally published in "Geopiety: A Theme in Man's Attachment to Nature and to Place," Chapter 1 in Geographies of the Mind: Essays in Historical Geosophy in Honor of John Kirkland Wright, edited by David Lowenthal and Martyn J. Bowden (NY: Oxford University Press, 1975, pp. 11–39).

Piety is a word no longer normally used in discourse concerning relations among [humans] or between [humans] and nature. The term is rapidly becoming obsolete, though some of the ideas and feelings behind it are still meaningful; it can be argued that people would live more in harmony with nature could the sentiment be restored.

Piety is a feeling and an ethos characteristic of closed systems: parents give birth to and succor their offspring, who in turn honor their parents and care for them in their old age; nature nurtures [humans] and [humans] owe it reverence. The ecological doctrine that we should return to nature what we have extracted and the land ethos of a conservationist like Aldo Leopold are modern expressions of geopiety. Ideals of reciprocity and caring, of gratitude and respect, are not quite dead, but they have lost urgency since [people] learned to control the present and future.

Piety is the compassionate urge to protect the fragile beauty and goodness of life against its enemies, not the least of which is time. Hence, care for old people as well as old buildings and the preservation of the past are acts of piety. Patriotism is geopiety; remove its exogenous imperial cloak, and patriotism is compassion for the vulnerability of one's native soil. Roman patriotism was eloquent less in its pride of empire than when, in the third century before Christ, the Carthaginian threat aroused in the Romans a jealous love of their world.

The British Empire was too large and abstract an entity to be the object of genuine

affection and piety. England is more embraceable: England is this "happy breed of men," as Shakespeare's Richard II envisaged it, "this little world," "this blessed plot," guarded by the silver sea "against the envy of less happier lands"

Piety toward one's kin and native land is a commendable sentiment; but it has an ungenerous side—exclusiveness and intolerance. Those who do not belong are beyond the law; foreigners and strangers, with their unassimilable ways, are viewed with suspicion and contempt

The form of geopiety called patriotism is easily distorted by abstractions. From an attachment to place based on intimate knowledge and memories, it is a short step to pride of empire or national state that is no part of one's direct experience. Pride of mighty empire (Rome or the thousand-year Reich) takes the place of compassion for one's native city, which is vulnerable to enemies

Practice often falls far short of the ideal, and geopiety is no exception. But defects in geo-pious practice are human weaknesses and not inherent in the sentiment. The self-regarding *quid pro quo* attitude of the Romans toward their nature divinities was at odds with their own high ideal of *pietas*. Generosity that closes the circle need not be a mere matter of *do ut des* (I give so that you will give), a frequent formula in Roman prayers.

Likewise, it is unnecessary for modern conservationists to argue their case solely on the ground of enlightened selfishness.

Virtue can be its own reward, and intense loyalty to one's homeland does not necessarily lead to bigotry. The groups could mourn the Trojan Hector with Homer and participate with Aeschylus in the agony of the Persians whom they had just defeated.

If the study of geopiety has any ethical lessons for us, they may well be these: (1) the fragility of goodness; (2) piety considered as reciprocity applies to relations between [humans] and nature as well as between [humans]; (3) piety toward a people and place can lead to intolerance and narrow pride, unless we remember that piety is also compassion.

Compassion for our native soil does not preclude love for other lands. Compassion is for the frail and the circumscribed. It is incompatible with pride of empire, yet it does not conflict with our love of the earth itself, for the whole earth seen from a sufficient height is our native soil and only home—it is that "precious stone set in the silver sea," a fertile speck floating in the ocean of space (pp. 33–36).

Apartness, Wholeness, and Completion

Yi-Fu Tuan

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Apartness

Religion is typically concerned with the “sacred.” But what is sacred? What does it mean? The word’s etymology sheds some light. “Sacred” is from the Latin *sacer*, which carries the general sense of restriction, but whose specific meaning is an area that stands apart and has limited access, because it caters to the gods. The Hebrew root of *k-d-sh*, which is usually translated as “holy,” is also based on the idea of separation. A peculiar feeling of dread marks off the holy from the ordinary.

Ronald Knox, in his version of the Old Testament, chooses to emphasize this idea of separation in the meaning of *k-d-sh*. Thus, the stirring lines from God that “... ye shall be holy; for I am holy” (Leviticus 11: 44) turn into the rather pallid: “I am set apart and you must be set apart from me.” As a thing becomes “holy,” it is cut off from the surrounding space. A temple is a sacred template. The Latin *templum* is derived from the Greek *templos*, and the root term means “to cut out”

Among the oldest of the known forms of human-made sanctuary was a simple enclosure of stone. It outlined an area of concentrated divine power and warned profane man of the danger to which he would be exposed if he were to enter without undergoing purificatory rites.

City walls were enclosures of a larger scale, and what they enclosed was a place occupied by both humans and their deities. Walls protected against human enemies but also demons and other forces of chaos. During a siege or epidemic, the whole population—people and effigies of the gods—might gather and parade around city walls for the purpose of strengthening their magico-religious potency (pp. 16–17).



Wholeness and completion

In addition to “separateness,” The word “sacred” connotes the whole and the complete. Everything presented at the temple, including people, must show physical perfection. Sacrificial animals should be without blemish. A priest, according to Leviticus, cannot be a mutilated being; he must be a whole or holy man.

In action or work, wholeness implies that any task, once begun, must not be left unfinished: “... What man is there that hath built a new house, and hath not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in battle and another man dedicate

it” (Deuteronomy 20: 5). Several biblical passages urge us not to put our hands to the plow and then turn back.

These ideas apply to the city and wilderness as types of sacred space. A city that symbolized cosmic order also projected an image of wholeness and completeness. The principal components of an ancient city—walls, streets, and important buildings—might take only a year or so to construct. By building rapidly with an army of workmen, a ruler could believe that his capital had “descended from heaven” complete. In contrast, wild nature beyond the walls looked unkempt, unfinished.

Our age has reversed these perceptions. To us, it is the city that looks raw and protean. Buildings are constantly being torn down and raised again, suburbs grow and decay, so that it is hard for anyone to associate “wholeness and completion” with the modern metropolis.

On the other hand, people see stability and permanence in wilderness areas Since the 1950s, more and more people in the affluent West have come to regard

nature (idealized as wilderness) not as something raw but as an achieved work complete, whole, and even holy (p. 20).

Photograph: A “house of spirit” (San Pra Pum) outside a home in Thailand (see another image on p. 1). Inhabiting these miniature houses, kindly spirits protect dwellers and keep them safe from outside harmful forces. Photograph by photographer Martha A. Strawn and included as one of several in Tuan’s Religion: From Place to Placelessness; photograph, p. 133.

The Changing Qualities of Nature Encounters

Taking a Walk Around the Lake at Lunchtime—2

Stephen Wood

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In this essay, I continue my examination of plant and animal encounters in place. In a previous essay, I showed how my experiences of the lake at my workplace shifted from year to year (Wood 2022). I explained how, now alert to the natural rhythms of the place, I could perceive with greater depth and notice novel, surprising elements. Here, I explore the theme of noticing in more detail.

Phenomenological geographer David Seamon identified noticing as one mode of place encounter. He located the modes of obliviousness, watching, noticing, and heightened contact on a spectrum running from greater separateness to greater oneness between human experiencers and their surroundings (Seamon 2015, Part 4, figure below). My focus is the shift from obliviousness to noticing and the oneness with nature marked by moments of heightened contact.

Noticing

In the first year of my association with the lake, I noticed general features of the place's animal inhabitants. In the second

year, my skill at noticing sharpened. I was able to recognize birds' qualities I had not realized before. I recognized mallards in flight by their compact body and short, rapidly flapping wings. Jackdaws on the wing distinguished themselves from crows. I saw how crow flight was straighter and more measured, while jackdaw flight was more agitated and wheeling.

Because of their small size and busy flight, songbirds had eluded me. Then one day I saw a flock of small birds alight on the olive trees next to the canteen walkway. A black head, with a hint of red and the fluttering flight, all said "goldfinch." A few days later, I saw chaffinches at the same spot, hopping from tree to tree. In these different ways, I became more able to notice different birds' characteristic movements.

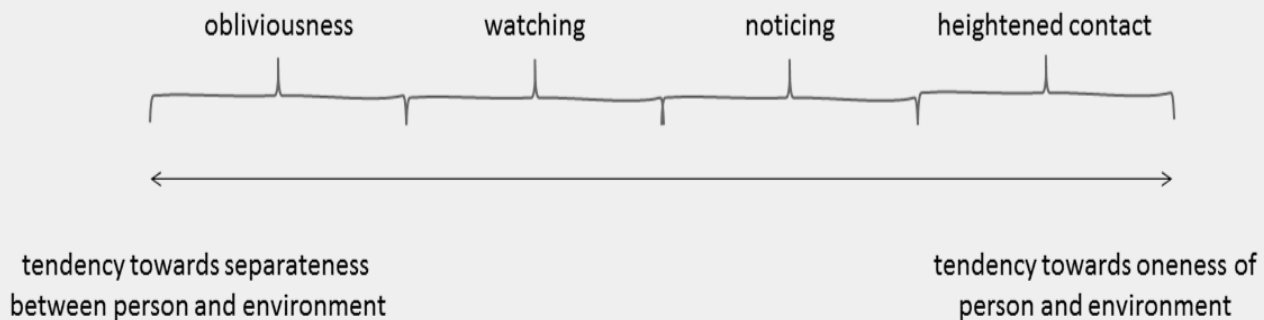
As time went on, I noticed the act of noticing itself. I remember catching myself about to complete a tour of the lake without having paid any attention, oblivious to what was happening before me. I had turned my attention inward, preoccupied. I stopped myself but could not settle down

to look with any concentration. Another time I became aware of the chatter of my thoughts, and they stilled as a moorhen came into focus before me. My gaze had not shifted, but my inner state had changed, and the bird was there where it was not a moment ago.

In his discussion of noticing, philosopher J. G. Bennett explained that it "is not something we do. It is something that happens to us. Something happens and our state changes. What was not there is there. Sounds that were not there for us are there. A person that was not there is there" (Bennett 1976, p. 19). He went on to say that from "living in a small world ... in blinkers, in a fragment of something," we notice and "we see the whole, not just a little part."

Several times in my lake encounters, I experienced coming out of a blinkered state of obliviousness. Sometimes I needed to stop, to allow myself to find an inner quiet, and then I was able to notice the activity on the lake. Other times, a movement brought me out of myself, such as the nodding head of a moorhen making steady pro-

The spectrum of modes of encounter, or awareness continuum, after Seamon (2015, fig. 16.1).



gress across the water or a bird's precipitate flight into the lily pads. When I tried to see the group of ducklings that my colleague told me about, spotting one allowed me to notice the others, to which all I had hitherto been oblivious. Each of these experiences involved a shift from obliviousness to noticing. The quality of my encounter changed in a flash. I was suddenly more available to my surroundings.

A shared experience

While going for walks, I was able to compare experiences of noticing with my wife. On one walk along the canal in Villeneuve-lez-Avignon, I noticed kingfishers at three different spots along the bank. I am fond of this bird and alert for the iridescent flash that announces its presence. My wife, however, saw nothing, each time unable to spot the bird as it flew away. Only I was able to see the very same events unfolding.

On our next walk, however, I was able to help her. I pointed out one bird flying back and forth across the canal. My wife caught sight of it as it flew toward us. Another kingfisher dropped from a branch and flew off, its short whirring wings kept close to the surface of the water. This time my wife saw the bird, and we followed its trajectory together as it flew down the canal.

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote about shared experiences in his journals. Walking with a friend, he noticed the "[g]reen-white tufts of long bleached grass," observing that "I saw the inscape freshly, as if my mind were still growing, though with a companion, the eye and the ear are for the most part shut and instress cannot come" (Hopkins, 1959, p. 228) [1].

For Hopkins, a companion's presence was too often an obstacle to noticing. My experience of walking with my wife points to another possibility: The one who sees may be able to guide the other who does not. An appreciation of the qualities of natural objects may be communicated to a willing apprentice.

As I followed the second kingfisher down the canal, it alighted at a branch farther on. It settled in an upright pose before taking off again. This was the first time I had seen a kingfisher perched upright on a branch. I had so often seen that pose captured in birdwatching guides, but now I had witnessed it directly. It was always a pleasure to see the flash of a kingfisher's

flight over the water, but to capture its typical resting pose heightened the encounter. I felt my appreciation of the bird rounding out, taking on a deeper level of significance.

Bennett described this intensification as one of the fruits of noticing, to see things in their wholeness and fullness: "You see that things are what they are. You see that a tree is a tree, that the earth is the earth—[you see each thing as] having another dimension or substance to it. Ordinarily we see things flat, but when we notice, we see them in the round" (Bennett 1976, p. 30).

A change in the quality of consciousness, even a simple act of noticing—spotting a moorhen or a pair of mallards on the lake—had a calming effect on me. I felt more content and confident, less anxious and frustrated. If I had been worrying about how to code a difficult algorithm or fix a computer bug, then my thoughts became clearer. I saw the next steps to take, even if the final solution was still out of reach. I experienced a change in the quality of my consciousness. Before, I was turned inward to my stresses and preoccupations. Now I was turned outward, more at ease with the world and my place in it.

Philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch offered a beautiful example of this change in the quality of consciousness: "I am looking out of my window in an anxious and resentful state of mind, oblivious to my surroundings, brooding perhaps on some damage done to my prestige. Then suddenly I observe a hovering kestrel. In a moment everything is altered. The brooding self with its hurt vanity has disappeared. There is nothing now but kestrel. And when I return to thinking of the other matter it seems less important" (Murdoch 2014, p. 84).

Within Bennett's philosophy, when we are wrapped up in ourselves and oblivious to what is happening around us, we are living under the laws of conditioned existence. When we notice, we pass under the influence of higher laws, the laws of essence experience. Among the laws of conditioned existence is the law of accident. Bennett explained how the law of accident is responsible for many of the frustrations of the conditioned mode of existence: "Things do not go as they should. We miss opportunities. Things happen to us that need not happen. Things go wrong."

With the law of accident, things escape our control, they "happen without coming from some action of our own." Bennett went on to explain that "When we begin to notice, we are protected from this as one of the fruits of noticing" (Bennett, 1976, pp. 29-30). We feel more in control. Things make sense for us and seem at their rightful place. Noticing brings us consolation, putting our worries in a proper perspective and giving us greater power to act [2].

Heightened contact

When I spotted a heron squatting at the lake edge one windy day, the encounter already had a heightened quality. The bird was familiar to me, but I had never seen it by the lake before. On other occasions where the species was completely new, the encounter had a particularly intense quality. Mysteriously a bird known only from books or films came to life before my eyes. The unknown became known. The image of the living being became flesh. In the fullest experience, I knew the bird instantly and the "coming to flesh" was strong. At other times, I encountered the new bird with less clarity or recognized the species with less certainty.

There were heightened encounters mixed with uncertainty. One autumn I saw a bird flying across the lake with a distinctive yellow belly. It had a strange dipping flight. The bird's gestalt said "wagtail," but the bird was too large and its tail too long. The yellow wagtail always gave me an overall impression of yellow. This bird stood out by its yellow belly but disappeared against the grey stones of the exposed lakebed.

After that first impression, I continued to wonder what bird I had seen. The thought shot into my head that it was a golden oriole. The bird I saw seemed about the size of a blackbird and the oriole was, I thought, a kind of yellow blackbird. As I researched this possibility, there were things that did not fit. The golden oriole is not found near water but keeps up high in the forest canopy. Its black wings and bright yellow head contrast with the softer colors of the bird I had seen.

I turned to Richard Fitter's *Pocket Guide to British Birds* for help (Fitter 1966). He presents birds by size (from very small to huge) and habitat (land, waterside, or water). This is not the traditional scientific arrangement but one "which it is hoped will

prove more helpful to the beginner” (Fitter 1966, p. 10).

I searched among the waterside birds as large as a blackbird, but no luck. I turned to those of the next smaller size and found a match! The grey wagtail has a yellow belly, a grey back, and is larger than the yellow wagtail, with a longer tail and a more dipping flight (Fitter 1966, pp. 127–128). The beginner-friendly layout of Fitter’s book guided me from first impression to plausible identification.

Walking back from work one day, I noticed a small bird of prey by the side of the motorway. The overall impression was grey. It could not be a kestrel, as the bird lacked the clear chestnut markings. Its head was small and round, and its wings very short and sharp. Following Fitter (1966, pp. 89–90), I surmised that the bird was likely a hobby. I was unsure of the identification however, not being able to bring my recollection into sharp focus. Maybe I imagined those scythe-shaped wings after reading elsewhere about the hobby’s defining trait. A heightened encounter was on offer, but my knowledge of birds of prey was inadequate for me to fully engage.

The confidence of my identification of the grey wagtail and the hobby followed how strongly I captured the bird’s character. Was that initial impression reliable? Was I simply projecting what I hoped to see? Certain commentators (MacDonald 2002; Ellis 2011) underline the risk of this kind of wishful thinking. The birdwatcher may be tempted into a hasty identification and become distracted from the more productive study of field marks.

In my case, I was wishfully thinking that the yellow-bellied bird was a golden oriole. I had seen the bird in books, had a liking for the bird’s name, but only the vaguest idea of what an oriole was. My first impression of the bird in the field was truer, coming before discursive thought. In the impression “wagtail,” I glimpsed something of the “character rather than characteristics, the tout ensemble of the subject” (Coward 1922, p. 141).

Instant recognition

I was filled with amazement on those rare occasions where I saw a new bird for the first time and knew instantly what it was. There was no doubt, no need to look the bird up in an identification guide. In a

flash, the bird was there in all its life and wholeness. I was present, feeling confident and alert. I had the necessary background knowledge and desire to see. My whole being was ready to meet the bird.

That oneness with nature, hinted at in other heightened encounters, was there. How was I sure in that instant? “Shape, size, manner of flight, or maybe note, is the reply. Yes, but there is something more; something definite yet indefinable, something which instantly registers identity in the brain, though how or what is seen remains unspecified. It is its jizz” (Coward, 1922, p. 142). *Jizz* is the unique quality or character of a living being that allows an identification in a flash of insight.

On three occasions I caught the jizz of a new bird and instantly recognized it. Once, walking back home from the center of Avignon, I heard a strange cry from far overhead. I looked up to see a flock high in the sky and knew right away that the long-necked, white-bodied birds with broad black wings were migrating storks. The Rhône valley is an established migration route for storks, and their passage that day was recorded by local radio. Until then, I had only seen storks in a wildlife film featuring the so-called “stork villages” in Germany, where they nest in the chimneys of people’s houses. In that moment of recognition, storks suddenly became much more real for me.

Another vivid recollection is my first time seeing a kingfisher. I had returned home to Bathampton in the west of England and taken the habit of early morning walks. I ambled down the hill from the village to the canal, over a bridge, and along to the River Avon. I stopped at a lovely spot by an old toll bridge where the river formed gentle cascades over the rocks.

I stood there feeling happy to be up so early before most people were about. And there it was: a flash of sapphire across the water. Ah! I remembered those words from Fitter’s *Book of British Birds* that I had devoured when I was a boy: “A flash of sapphire is all that is needed to identify the kingfisher as it streaks downstream or bellyflops to catch a minnow” (Fitter 1974, p. 178). Had his evocative words allowed me to see? Now they took shape before my eyes, and I knew instinctively that I had seen my very first kingfisher. I felt a greater sense of intimacy than with the storks, an even more heightened contact, as

the bird was close to me, not in the distant sky above. I felt a greater affinity for the bird, inspired by Fitter’s poetic words that had stayed with me over the years.

Chance may have brought me my first kingfisher, but design brought me my first hoopoe. I had wanted to see a hoopoe ever since reading Fitter’s *Pocket Guide to British Birds*. The hoopoe is overall orange-brown and black on its distinctive crest. With black-and-white stripes on its rounded wings and its curious manner of flight, the hoopoe resembles “a huge, rounded-winged black and white butterfly or moth” (Fitter 1966, p. 87). These striking words stayed with me and inspired a love for the bird, as well as a strong desire to see the bird myself. Having moved to Avignon in April, hoopoes were already arriving from Africa and would stay to raise their young until August (Collectif LPO 2010, p. 50). I was determined to take a hoopoe spotting trip before they flew south again.

For her birthday in May, I surprised my wife with a stay in a guest house near Apt, in the beautiful Luberon countryside, about 40 miles from Avignon. The occasion produced feelings of contentment and openness to the unexpected. Returning from an outing, my wife and I made our way back through the town. Many routes were blocked as Apt was celebrating its annual festival. We were diverted to a road that climbed into the surrounding forest before descending again.

As we approached the forest edge, I caught the strange flight of an orange-tinted bird, with curved bill and rounded black-and-white barred wings. The road turned, I lost sight of the bird, but I knew I had encountered a hoopoe. When we lost our way and found ourselves in the wooded hills again, a hoopoe again flew across the road in front of us! I had seen at last, not once but twice, my “huge black-and-white butterfly or moth.”

Notes

1. Inscape is the inner quality of a natural object or living thing, and instress is the expressive power that evokes the inscape in the observer (Hopkins 1953, pp. xx–xxi).
2. For more detail on the laws of the different worlds, see Bennett 1978, Chaps. 5–8) and Seamon 2020.

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Three Alaskans Walk into a Bear

Travel Vignettes from an Amateur Phenomenologist

Jenny Quillien

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Encounters with place, to be genuine, require a willingness to shake off our human tendencies to sleepwalk through our days: we must hold ourselves alert and porous to unfolding unscripted moments of contact. Vulnerability enters the mix. We risk not only being thrown off course by what is foreign. We risk self-discovery and even transformation.

And should we have the audacity—as I do here—to attempt communication of such experiences, we're confined to words, those ill-fitting boxes half the size of whatever diaphanous transient sensations we want to convey. But if try we must, the vagaries of travel to distant lands are particularly propitious. Herewith, seven lived experiences from my forays into Alaska.

An ALCAN gas station

I must start with the Alcan Highway, the famous WWII engineering feat that laid a road across a huge expanse of rural Canada, affording land travel between Alaska and the Lower 48. I start with the Alcan not out of logic—because it is the overland entrance to Alaska—but because it is where I left my heart.

People live along this road with what poet David Whyte calls "economy of presence." To explain what he means, Whyte speaks of an old sheep dog, too used up to be frolicking for no reason and with just one good eye. That dog, however, knows her sheep and her hills and can, keeping her good eye always to best advantage, move those sheep competently home. Whyte also uses the example of a Welsh villager known for building dry rock walls, his eye gazing calmly over stones—assessing shape, size, and number of needed chisel blows—to competently and patiently build beauty with minimum effort and waste.

The people of this rugged and empty Canadian landscape embody that quality. Houses and household objects are frequently homemade. The cups won't match nor will the chairs around a table. But what you need will be there and what you don't need won't. All just matter of fact. The minimalism won't be arty but it gives a spaciousness—no clutter to impede your physical or mental movements. The spaciousness gives a graciousness, even a sort of truth. An *au naturel* prevails along the road. Recall the eye of Degas. He didn't paint the ballerina posed on stage but preferred her unawares, just tying her slippers or gazing out a window lost in thought. It's a bit like that. There's not much posing here—it's all *au naturel* and, like the Welsh stone mason, imbued with a certain unaffected competence.

The military chose to run a long section of the highway along a fault line where two plates crush and grind. A long skinny, silver lake traces the divide; quakes and tremors frequently shake the soil; and multiple hot springs bring up water from the depths. The road is cut into the rock, no shoulders, few points where habitation would make any sense.

I thought of Heidegger's term "*gathering*." What would Heidegger have done with the Double G, a trucker's stop here at this finger of a lake, with its loose choreography of travelers, coffeepot, cook a.k.a. owner, available supplies of local meat, more distant markets for flour and salt. The truckers know their meal will be hearty; they look forward to it: they are the regulars. Then there are the irregulars: the drop-ins, the cook's father, and oddball neighbors from down the way. I wondered if there was some magic in the spatial arrangement of that tiny café—maybe the placement of the different sized tables or the mismatched chairs—which gave rise to

some sort of coded alchemy of invitation and acceptance.

A "regula" customer orders two fried eggs. The cook brings him three, "*Here's them eggs. The third one was already cracked.*" The only available code for *I love you*. The solo driver of a white RV plastered with national park and museum stickers bends everyone's ears with stories of all the places he has been and his son back in New Jersey. Everybody hears Hank Williams, *I'm so lonely I could die*.

The Double G gas station, which really isn't much to look at, had four rooms for rent in a small building in the back. Had I been traveling alone, I would have stayed on. There were things to learn here. How to stay attuned to the mountains and their growling. How to combine movement and stasis like overlapping moiré patterns. How to take part in the gas station place ballet. How to handle growth and repair.

I did learn a bit on this last question one afternoon when I entered the café during an afternoon lull and found the cook a.k.a. owner counting the cash in the till while considering a list of building supplies. He paid me no mind and muttered his deep philosophy, "*Take care of your milk cow, and your milk cow will take care of you.*"

The Double G had all the enchantment of a caravanserai—it only took switching out camels for diesel trucks, sand for pot-holes, and flowing desert robes for blue jeans and plaid flannel shirts. The place was all about the road. It *gathered* its very existence from the dusty greasy needs of the road. The road had birthed it.

As I traveled in Alaska proper, I never saw this again: not the magic, not the economy of presence, not the truth. It became my measuring stick of some sort of goodness.

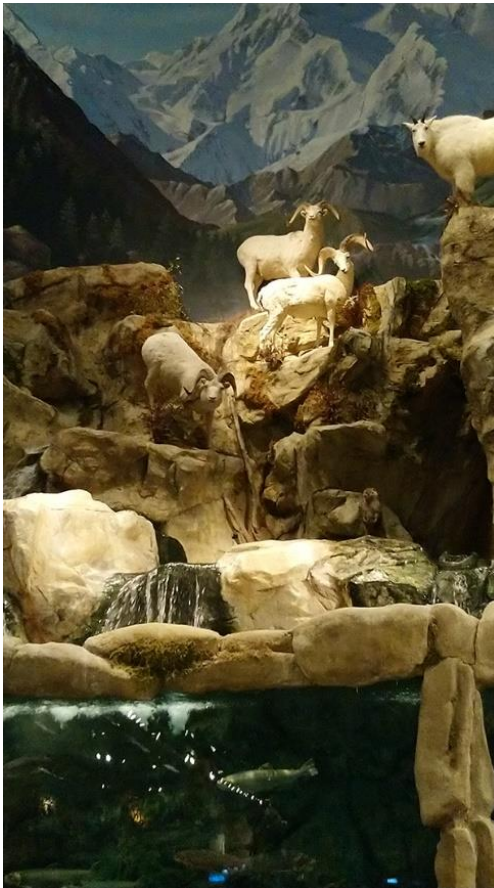
Jesus and the Grizzly Bear

There are two decidedly different Alaskas. One—let's call it the road-based Alaska—with 600,000 inhabitants (that's eighty-five percent of the total population), consists of the greater Anchorage/Palmer area and Fairbanks. I gave it instant disesteem. Perception is a participatory event. Where another pair of eyes might see convenience, mine saw a cancerous cement kudzu vine.

Fairbanks wins the Gertrude Stein award for *There is no there, there*. Greater Anchorage, as an urban fabric, sorely disappoints: an ordinary road network connecting malls of numbing banality, lining up standard Americana big-box chain stores of numbing banality, filled with standard stuff of numbing banality. Housing is by subdivisions of mostly of nondescript single-family ranch-style houses.

I could only come up with two observations indicating a specificity of townscape. One concerns the cleavage of inside and outside. In Italy or France, lingering on a balcony with a glass of wine seems self-evident. In Ireland, the sharp delineation between inside and outside, the absence of terraces, patios, balconies, seems self-evident given the chilly, rainy climate. But Alaska? All these homes, up or downscale, have extensive porches and outdoor areas—in constant use regardless of weather—which display family toys: barbecue pit, bikes, camping chairs, family RV, extra car, boats, kayaks, ATV machines, snowmachines. The good life here is a visceral one—the feel of gunning a snowmachine on ice, the weight of a halibut on the line, the taste of cold beer down the gullet. Alaska as land-as-playground.

The second observation concerns churches. In space syntax and wayfinding, churches are often noted for orientation



because, historically anyway, they have been mindfully and prominently sited. Not here. Anchorage churches consist of a parking lot and a could-be-anything building just somewhere along a street. Some sort of small signage indicates denomination.

I did, however, enter what felt like a “cathedral,” four times the size of any ordinary church and sited as the anchor at the heart of commerce. I’m talking about Bass Pro. This is no wimpy sporting goods



store selling fleece jackets and promoting goody-goody values of healthy exercise. This is the grand depot of serious equipment, the kind of gear that will save your sorry butt when you are out in the woods.

Let me make my case in both word and image. A worthy entrance with brass antlers for doorknobs yields a view on the altar: a two-story façade of waterfall and rock cliff graced with bighorn sheep with judging stare. The high vaulted ceiling displays celestial geese; the guns shine as bright extensions of man's natural prowess. The narratives speak more clearly than any stained-glass figures of biblical tales: a man was born to be a man in an I/It world.

How far-fetched is it to consider Bass Pro a wellspring of cosmology? Is there a relationship between cosmology and landscape? Yes, I think so. It makes sense to me that the woodlands of Scandinavia and Britain would birth indigenous religions based on spirited elves and trolls. It makes sense to me that monotheism would come howling out of the desert and that Jesus, as a shepherd, would reach temperate agricultural Europe and feel the need to switch metaphors, don a suit, become a bookkeeper, tally up sins and tithes.

Alaska? Ordinary Christianity doesn't fit here. There's no way for Yahweh either. A tidy Zen Buddhist black cushion for meditation? Don't think so. The land is too big. Way too big. Way, way too big. The tattered remains of First Nation religions? No—too tattered. Here—I dare to conjecture—that, while little children snuggle with teddy bears to feel safe, it is the taxidermist who performs the priestly duties for the adult Alaskan's need for reassurance. In all Alaskan public places, airports, administrative offices, hospitals, schools, hotels, and, of course, Bass Pro, a defeated but worthy opponent stands tall in arrested attack. The stuffed bear makes the iconic declaration: *You are in Alaska now, damn it. Our tribe. Our values.*

Small Settlements

The other Alaska—the roadless remote Alaska—hosts a meager population and, for me, moments of beauty so intense and so ineffable that I question my own perceptions and mind. Here, small human habitats are *places*, deeply situated, utterly different one from other in history, appearance, vibes, mood, ways of making a living, and ways of getting along. The buildings in these communities won't ever be much to

write home about, but the towns will be sited well, following the natural curves of a harbor or river valley. The absence of heavy machinery means that people leave the land alone and adapt their built forms to it, a few vehicles will be a late afterthought of limited utility so walking and a comfortable density reign.

Each of these towns has unfolded itself forward from its own bootstraps, a uniqueness moving through time. A visit to any of them prompts reflection on what dynamic calculus between population size, economic base, diversity, connectivity, and integration could account for a remote settlement's evolution, personality, and continued vitality or decline.

A tangible depth also marks these towns as different from the shallowness of road-based Alaskan sprawl. Take, for example, the sedimentary layers left by repeated endeavors and failures in the little town of Cordova (population 2000) on Prince William Sound. Underneath are Alaskan native place names and faces (sometimes just lingering traces in the shadow of a smile), then the boastful proclamations of Spanish explorers, a Russian church, fur trappers, depletion of sea mammals, American commercial fishing and canneries, depletion of

fish, discovery of copper, a Ripley's Believe It or Not insane railroad line from mine to port, railroad and mine quickly abandoned, mediocre fishing, a colossal bronze statue of Old Testament mood looms over the harbor to salute the many men lost at sea, Valdez oil spill, an Exxon financed make-amends institute for ocean studies, abandoned cannery remodeled as a lodge for tourist fishing.

Or take Kodiak (population 5000), which felt to me so dark, so forsaken, so silent. I had to dig around for clues. The 1964 earthquake and tsunami swallowed half the town, every boat, and every man on every boat. All families amputated. I asked to fly on a scheduled run to a native Aleut village and was refused service by the pilot. *"The weather is iffy, not sure I could get you back out. You don't know anybody. You won't be welcome. Lots of drinking at night. I won't take you."* A lovely Aleut man getting on in years did talk to me. *"Our villages are small now. Run by the old women. Their main job is to prevent marriages between kids who are too close."*

The panhandle island town of Sitka (8000 inhabitants) sits on a small shelf of land approachable from the high seas—hence its long history going back to Russian fur trade and Tlingit tribes before that. Like other remote settlements, you can't drive out or walk out. Ferry service and air traffic keep Sitka alive, but it's five hundred bucks for a plane ticket to anywhere, or nine hours on the ferry to the next port of call. A palpable hemmed-in feeling prevails, not quite flies caught in amber but, say, a petri dish, where, like an introverted neurotic nuclear family, folks stew in their own juice.

In these smaller places, we can encounter a wider range of characters and walks of life than in the city, where we tend to find ourselves in the company of similar kinds of people doing similar kinds of things. I like to travel solo and to look for conversation-friendly configurations.

What works well is a barstool in a gently full pub. In just one evening in a Sitka bar, I chatted with: An entrepreneur and his wife out to buy up hotels and a yacht to complement their California vineyards and farmland in Illinois. The local drug dealer



who stopped by for a friendly exchange with the entrepreneur. A commercial fisherman with a long ginger-colored beard who lived on his boat in the harbor. For sure, he had more testosterone than his fish, but I'm less sure about his general intellect. He was seeking solace through drink after his last failed marriage. His bride had stayed one night and then got up and left.

A man from Nebraska up to hunt black bear. He walked the forest, sighting any number of bear but would only shoot the one he thought would look really good on his den wall. Not unlike a woman shopping for a new dress. The operator of the local radio station who played and commented on classical music. A North Dakotan who, after a long career as a schoolteacher in the tiny bush villages of the far north, semi-retired to the milder climate of Sitka and a job at the public library. He said he couldn't face another winter at 45 below and hadn't been to the Lower 48 in years. The Tlingit priest (but without his wife and six children) imported from Kodiak Island to run the Russian Orthodox Church to which the Sitka natives have been loyal since the 1840s.

I did not, however, run into Kevin Costner who, for the joys of fishing, owns an island just offshore. He sometimes comes into town wearing a hokey disguise. Town folk just roll their eyes, play along, and find him rather silly: it's a family joke.

Alaska as Theme Park

Nobody comes to Alaska for the fine arts, music, architecture, shopping, or cuisine. Visitors come to taste the wilds. There's plenty of wild and a plethora of ways to genuinely meet and greet it. Put on your boots and hike out. Hire an outfitter. Fish.

I listened to the guys up for fishing in Cordova—talking bait, gear, and salmon runs. I suspect (although they never said so) that among the silvery fish in their nets were silvery pieces of themselves that they had lost on the subway commute into the office and that's what they were really fishing for. Hunt. A moose hunt safari will cost you fifty grand but if you corner a hunter for a chat, he might quietly admit that he sometimes lets his trophy walk on—just because *it is so damn magnificent*.

For many visitors, much of a first trip gets frittered away just figuring out how best to travel around. They may have read Jack London or John McPhee, or, more likely, watched Reality TV and took bets on which contestant could stay out there *Alone* the longest. They may have imagined themselves camping in the woods to a soundtrack of howling wolves, but, when push comes to shove, most vote with Monty Python, *"I'll have just a little bit of peril, please."* Tourism now ranks as the state's third largest industry and deploys a strangely effective magnet that pulls greenhorns into its traps. This leads me to contemplate authentic versus counterfeit encounters.

I read Mathew Crawford's *Shop Craft and Soul Craft* and then his *The World Beyond Your Head: How to Flourish in an Age of Distraction*. The main thrust of his argument goes like this: only when we engage with another (an *other* has a mind of its own) we will experience our own selves coming forth.

The *other* can be an old car engine that sputters and spits, the irregularities of French verbs, a person, or a forest. We find ourselves coming into existence through opposition, as it were, as we respond to something which is not us. Crawford points out that we don't do this much anymore. We don't have to fix quirky old engines or struggle with foreign ways, and, in conversations, we hide behind our oft-repeated scripts. The world of marketing, consumerism, and tourism pampers us in non-effort.

Allow me to pursue the point. Crawford tells us how he became dismayed with his young daughter's addiction to the Mickey Mouse Show and decided to look into how

the program had evolved since his own childhood. Compare (as a random pick) a show from the 50s where Mickey, Donald, and Goofy have ordered a build-your-own-boat kit from a mail catalogue. Goofy tries nailing down a wood plank, but the nails pop out and the plank bonks him in the head. Donald walks under the ladder where Mickey is painting and finds himself with a bright blue head. When Minnie christens the vessel with a bottle of champagne, their ship sinks. They all laugh from their failure. Failure.

In more recent shows, Mickey has become the Master of Ceremonies of the Mickey Mouse Clubhouse. These episodes are not about frustration but about solving a problem. A problem is addressed by saying “*Oh Tootles!*” which makes the Handy Dandy machine appear which, in turn, presents a menu of four “Mouseke-tools.” There is never an insoluble problem that would pit one’s will against the world. The structure of the show prevents any moment of helplessness; the prompts from Mickey protect the child from making a bad choice. No bad choice? In what kind of world is there no bad choice? What would happen to us out in the wilds oblivious to the possibility of a bad choice?

Tourism, based on counterfeit encounters, combines passivity of the tourist, a forged thrill, flattery, protection of the goose who lays the golden egg (a dead tourist is detrimental to business), and no bad choice. Just two lived examples. A Glacier Viewing Tour. I had poles and crampons for my shoes so that I could walk on the ice—but no need—on offer was a viewing not a visiting tour. One-hundred-twenty-five bucks by credit card or one-hundred bucks cash. Two discarded Deuce and-a-Half Army trucks carried us cross country (no real risk but a tiny illusion of thrill, as in reality TV shows) to a river where two boats carried us (as in reality TV shows) to the moraine where we could walk about on a path and enjoy the pre-prepared hot chocolate. Not a liability in sight. The organizer knew nothing of geology or glaciers—but no need—nobody asked. The satisfied tourists took selfies with the glacier as background.

More informative than glacier viewing was the organizer who sat on the back of the truck swinging his legs, quite willing to tell his tale—a version of the old follow-

the-money story. You can, in Alaska, lease 40 acres of land for \$150 a year. Pick your parcel and set up your gig. His Glacier Viewing Tour accommodates twelve tourists in each tour group, four tours a day, a two-month summer season. This entrepreneur from Michigan impressed me as a true Alaskan and pertinent to my inquiries about place—specifically, the question of what endures over time and comes to define a place. The constancy of Alaska resides partly in its capacity to lure the schemer—such as our Michigander—who is out to sidestep a life of dull drudgery by being clever. Sometimes the schemer is pulled forward by a rainbow, sometimes he’s running from poverty, a past, or his demons.

True Alaskans can also be bred. I watched, in the small inside passage town of Haines, a loving father pack off his only child to a grueling stint as a helpmate on a fishing vessel. The 13-year-old lad endured conditions that would propel any child labor lawyer into action.

The child did, however, limp home in one piece, and in his pocket was his share of the catch (three thousand dollars), a glint in his eye, and plans to do it again. Rite of passage? Instant manhood? The making of an enculturated Alaskan unfit for life elsewhere? I flashed back to the milk cow philosophy of my Alcan gas station. None of that slow-paced diligence here. The lad was already hooked on immediate wealth and the willingness to gamble for more.

My second example is less clear cut. Katmai National Park is home to a population of brown bears which, every summer, come to the streams to feed on the salmon runs. Webcams have been judiciously put in place and you may, at no cost whatsoever, sit in your armchair at home anywhere in the world and observe the feeding frenzy from your computer screen.

Hundreds of locations throughout Alaska also lend themselves to such viewing live *in situ*, but if you don’t know any better? For one thousand dollars you may take a daytrip into Katmai Park: a small prop plane from Anchorage flies you for one and a half hours over an expanse of uninhabited scrub forest to a small airstrip where you will be directed to a float plane for a last leg into the park. Mandatory Bear School (with silver pin upon graduation) precedes your freedom to enjoy carefully

constructed boardwalks and viewing platforms that separate you from the bears. The place is crawling with highly trained park rangers, some of whom are “bear technicians.” The bears are numbered (409), individually identified, and some named. The bears have become accustomed to the (highly policed) human presence. If one day of watching does not suffice, you may, for an additional thousand dollars, stay for a night in the rustic lodge.

What to make of this encounter? These are wild animals in natural habitat doing their natural wild-animal thing, and the tourist pays for the privilege of supervised watching. Akin to the modern Mickey Mouse Show, the physical set up is constructed so that there is no bad choice. At no point can the tourist be confronted by a bear with a mind of its own. There is no Martin Buber I/Thou encounter between man and beast. What we have is a most interesting day of I/It observations which can be topped off with an ice cream cone and a flight back to town.

Life Attained by Living

... The solution of the problems of life, is life itself. Life is not attained by reasoning and analysis, but first of all by living. For until we have begun to live, our prudence has no material to work on. And until we have begun to fail, we have no way of working out our success.

—Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*
The Aleutian chain crosses the vast, frigid waters of the North Pacific. Eons ago, the Aleuts migrated from Siberia, down through mainland Alaska, and then settled the islands (sparsely) from East to West, eking out a precarious existence. In the 1800s, Russian fur traders decimated the populations, both animal and human. What women they didn’t kill, they bedded so the remaining population became creole.

Americans were not much of an improvement. In World War II, the population, with no justification whatsoever, was rounded up for internment camps so wretched that many died. After the War most islands were simply and permanently left to the howling winds. A few Aleuts returned to Dutch Harbor, the last outpost used by fishing vessels and where an old Russian Orthodox church still stands.

Today, Dutch Harbor lists a population of 4000, but how do they count? Most are short-term seasonal workers: Filipino women in one cannery, Mexican men in the other, Samoan crews for fishing vessels. American English is the lingua franca but does not dominate. The list of amenities remains single digit: grocery, hardware, liquor, bank, Western Union, barber, immigration counseling. A finicky intermittent hotspot service will sell you one gigabit for twenty-five dollars. One hotel and two bars (owned and operated by the bigger cannery) accommodate newly arrived labor and seamen in transition. Dutch Harbor fails to be picturesque but does have the vitality of an operation in full swing and the sort of decency of a reliable car mechanic shop with well-maintained tools and swept floor.

Men (mostly) come here, as they have throughout Alaskan history and geographies, to seek their fortune. Thomas Merton, the Trappist Monk, came to Alaska in 1968, not to seek his fortune but to see if it would be a place conducive to the contemplative life. I did not come across much in my Alaskan travels in the way of contemplative living, self-reflection, or study.

Here in Dutch Harbor, however, I did witness the playing out of Merton's *Thoughts in Solitude*: life's problems being addressed through living or, more precisely, through toil. Merton—no surprise given his personal curriculum—chose the example of Prudence as needing life's material to work on. Here I saw, not so much Prudence, as Fortitude and Tolerance.

Still wet behind the ears and grinning wide, the brand-new Samoan recruit enthusiastically declared to me, "*Big Boy Pay for Big Boy Jobs*." His more fortitude-seasoned colleague just faintly smiled at him and then spoke of fatigue, a fatigue so deep that when he went home on furlough with his wad of unspent money, all he could do was sit on the couch and stare into space. "*I can't even turn on the TV*," he said. "*I just sit and stare*."

I found a peculiar stuck-in-fortitude, a permanent postponement of gratification, as if there were nothing to life but toil. Take Bobby, 20 years in Dutch Harbor, his wife 30 years: "*We've already paid for an apartment in Seattle and a house in Hawaii, but we're still here. My wife at the hotel. I'm down on the docks*." Bobby was

known on the docks as the one who set the tone. He commented: "*These American Black guys come in with a chip on their shoulder and a lot of racism talk. We just say, 'the only discrimination around here is against slackers. See if you can pick up that box and keep up the pace'.*"

A shrug-your-shoulder tolerance of a man's occasional need for a primal scream was deemed proper etiquette. At the Norwegian Rat Saloon, a seaman stripped buck naked on a dare to go skinny dipping. As reported to me, nobody got upset. Nobody minded. I minded since I missed it and had obviously picked the wrong bar to do my ethnography.

Did I find an awareness of the wild and forlorn beauty of the empty cold Aleutian mountains and even colder sea? Not much, Dutch Harbor was a place to work and make money. There were exceptions. There was Michael, a heavy-set fellow with tattoos on every body part that I could see. A mongrel, Lord only knew (because Michael didn't) what cocktail of white, black, and yellow blood filled his veins. He was San Diego raised by bouncing from one foster home to the next, a few years on the street, a few years as a Hare Krishna, and, finally, tossed up into Dutch Harbor. "*I've been here four years and I'm staying*," he said. "*It's beautiful. Summer is beautiful. Winter is beautiful. The storms are beautiful. I'm staying*." He's got a Filipino girlfriend at the cannery. They can work, save, and buy a little retirement house near her folks. Working out his success, he is.

The White Man's Clock on Eskimo Space-Time

Ethnographic fieldworkers chose between two basic philosophies on preparation. One has it that you should not prepare at all but keep your mind blank lest you pollute yourself with erroneous conclusions from less witted travelers. The other philosophy suggests you prepare to the hilt, read everything, lest you stupidly waste time reinventing an old wheel or miss out on some critical must-see. I've tried both ways.

For Alaska's extreme north, I prepared. I read up on the old Eskimo legends and early explorer reports. The most basic experiences of life and space-time are described as transience, transformation, and insubstantiality. Consider this passage.

*In a land where summer fogs blur the distinction between land and sea, where winter wind and snow can produce the condition known as 'white-out'—where land and sky cannot be separated . . . the concept of an ever-changing, amorphous world is not surprising. The Eskimo world was essentially smooth, without projections or sharp corners. Apparent transformations of various kinds were always occurring, so the change of a man to a wolf was no more unbelievable or inexplicable than the merging of land and sea. If an Eskimo were tricked by lighting conditions into thinking a ground squirrel was a grizzly bear and suddenly discovered he was looking at the smaller animal, the most obvious explanation was that the bear transformed itself, probably through magic, into a ground squirrel (Edwin Hall, in Nick Jans' *Last Light Breaking*).*

My favorite read, Barry Lopez's *Arctic Dreams*, offers poetic descriptions of life and space-time pierced with hard-nosed explanations. Human vision, we learn, uses the relative density of blue light scattered in the air to judge distance, but the clear Arctic atmosphere scatters little light, so it is quite normal to not know whether something is 5 miles or 25 miles away. And Lopez delighted me with Inuit vocabulary:

Quinuituq. The deep patience to wait hours, days, weeks, for the caribou to come through, for the wind to let up, for ice to harden.

Kappia: the fear of unpredictable violence like a calving iceberg or polar bear springing from nowhere.

Perlerorneq: winter insanity.

Nuannaarpoq: the extravagant pleasure in being alive.

Art books' glossy pages reveal an indigent art in kinship with Paleolithic Lascaux with, to our senses, strange perspectives: objects float freely upside down and sideways. It's all about movement and becoming. The bear becomes the man, and the man becomes the bear in an I/Thou world. A small talisman of a walrus might be carved, but the significance lies in the act of carving. Once the stone has become the walrus, the object itself retains no particular value.



After preparation, I'm in Kotzebue, the administrative hub of the Inupiat Eskimo region. Three thousand souls live here in government housing. Subsistence hunting and fishing remain significant in a household's economy. A few Whites. A state hospital, school, welfare administration, social services, a small museum on arctic fauna and flora, port, airport, and one hotel for visiting civil servants and outfitters for birding extravaganzas. The only way to reach Kotzebue now is by air, but the spot had been used for centuries as a trading rendezvous, typically in early spring when daylight and ice conditions allowed for sled travel.

Place studies sometimes give attention to space syntax: how axial spaces of movement and transport function (or dysfunction) in holding together an urban fabric, allowing goods and people to move along, between, into, and out of areas of stasis. The aerial photograph shows how Kotzebue is laid out. White-Man-Civil-Engineer culture—obviously—laid down the paths of movement (a couple of paved roads), while the infill—the fine grain, the flesh on the bones, so to speak—is Inupiat.

How do the two cultural approaches to place organization compare? The white man's roads are used by a few utility vehicles to get between airport and government agencies. Drivers seemed tolerant of interfering children, dogs, and ATV machines. The Inupiat, for their part, have added no pathways whatsoever. Everyone roams freely cross country. There are no sidewalks or paths between houses. There are no boundary markers. Graves have crosses but no markers between burial area and living area. No markers between one person's yard and the next—nothing like a fence or a shrub. No indication of a way to a front

door: you just walk around a building until you figure out how to get in.

I found it curious that there was not a single place in the entire town to pause or rest. Not a bench anywhere. Overall (so unlike the suburban backyards of Anchorage), the town is a big bone-yard—broken ATVs, snow-machine parts, oil drums, antlers, and just whatever

might, someday, for some as-yet-unknown purpose be cannibalized.

We're not talking junk or trash (although, at first glance, it looks that way). We're talking potential in space-time, a material limbo. When I looked around at how money was being spent, mobility ranked highest—ATV and snow-machines—the power to chase, flee, out-manuever, seize an opportunity.

How should I interpret my Kotzebue experience? Perhaps ideas of land, landscape, place, change with technology. Agriculture, arguably, would lead one to consider the land as malleable, so if potatoes can be grown in a field for food, then why not flowers for pleasure? Since your houses aren't going anywhere, why not fix them up and make pathways between them? Maybe for the more roaming habits of hunters and gatherers, interference with landscape doesn't make sense. Maybe it's never considered. Shelters are temporary. Human beings are but an insubstantial and mobile figure crossing the land much like the caribou humans pursue.

Although my own life has taken me deep into the complexities of bilingual living, Kotzebue invited me to further consider bi-syntax living. In a mild form, all Alaskans, both White and Native, learn a double syntax. They all juggle the bigger fluid arcs of seasonal light and animal migrations alongside the mechanical units of space and time imposed by temperate-zone notions of scheduling and production. As any traveler in Alaska, I quickly picked up on both the bureaucratic necessity and bureaucratic nonsense of imposing clocks on this far northern terrain of midnight suns and dark noons.

With a bit more exposure to the earth's heartbeat and the deep ways, say, of how the salmon run brings on the bears, plus

this curious day in Kotzebue, I began to perceive such bureaucratic nonsense as a benign face of an egregious refusal to recognize where one is. As I stood on flat endless structureless tundra and then looked across endless late spring ice floes on the Bering Sea during a day that didn't end, I recalled my scuba diving precautions—stay aware of air bubbles to remain oriented to which way is up. I knew I was out of my league—fundamentally clueless as to the space-time syntax necessary for survival in this landscape.

Cluelessness works the other way too. Space and time syntaxes come with all sorts of paraphernalia: equipment, maintenance, tools, education, rules, etiquette, expectations. I returned to the airfield for my 7:45 pm flight—a bureaucrat's world, right? The waiting room had chairs in a row against the wall. Nobody sat that way. Families left chairs empty and then piled on top of each other on the floor. I stood in line for the usual security clearance. In front of me an Inuit Auntie (term of endearment for elders) had a can of soda pop and was told she couldn't take it—either throw it away or drink it. She wasn't going to waste it, so she held up the entire line to enjoy “the pause that refreshes.” But then she singlehandedly stopped cold the entire clockwork of Standard Operating Procedures when instructed to walk through the body scanner. Tucked into her undies, Auntie had a half bottle of hooch.

The Shaman, *Isumataq*, & Duende

And then Nome (population 3,500). A brutal short blaze of 1900 gold-rush construction, now a remote ghost town boarded up and falling down with remaining ghosts boozed up and falling down. A Coast Guard station was built nearby. The beautiful able-bodied “Coastie” with a bloom to his cheek cuts a figure of an alien-from-another-epoch as he steps over the drunks. A summer camp provides tents and shovels for crazed amateurs who dig for gold. Even a few boats with divers in thick wet suits dredge the sea bottom. The sad sack bars on Front Street (that's all there is or ever was on Front Street) stay open.

It's here, in Nome, that I came unglued.

In Nome, each person plays many parts in local dramas, engaging multiplicities of interactions with *others* hunkered down in the same little spot. The warp and weft of

human relations takes on thickness, texture, and color, unlike the flatter homogeneity of suburbia.

I met here in Nome, far more than elsewhere, people who did not go by script or role but who spoke their more complex truth and expected the same of me. I spent time with a woman whom I recognized as a kindred soul. She lived a double life, one with children in the lower 48 and one in Nome where she had a long-standing relationship with one of the town's native sons who ran the hardware store—a store as vital to this icy town as a liver to a body.

I met up with a now sober white guy, aged 71, who had come to Nome at the age of 17. No longer a drinking bartender, he kept himself busy prototyping a one-room, one-person dwelling to alleviate Nome's housing shortage. Our exchanges were honest. I fell in with an Inupiat woman who had returned home to collect the pieces of herself, make amends to some, forgive others, and then get on with the task of living. We had heart-to-hearts.

The arctic Inuit from the Nome area have their *Isumataq*—a person who can create an atmosphere in which wisdom shows itself. All Alaskan Native cultures have their shamans. From my New Mexican home with its Hispanic traditions, I am more familiar with the *duende*, a shapeshifter if there ever was one—a spirit or force that can taunt you, haunt you, and sometimes take you over, possess you.

For me, personally, I experience the *duende* as a spirit (often female) who inhabits situations and throws the dare, the challenge: *Can you pull it off? Can you do this? Would you walk away from life's ultimatum?* I felt the *duende*'s presence all over Alaska. She can reward or not. Accept the challenge, do the deed, and she may be pleased. *"I immigrated here in the late eighties,"* one man told me, *"I signed a contract for three years in Barrow. The deal was that if you made the three years, the company paid all your taxes. I made it through, but most didn't. I left with a quarter of a million, bought a house free and clear. Married. Settled down. A good life."*

The *duende* of Nome mostly kills. Hopeless knots of destruction to self and kin from drugs, alcohol, violence, and trafficking (a jug of gin costs a bundle in town but goes for ten times that in the villages and

fishing camps). Past wounds, which are never past, continue to fester. And yet, some, with choice, choose to stay and duke it out, all the more alive for the struggle because, really, what are you worth if you turn down the *duende*'s dare? I had, up until then, remained my old self as I collected the various strands of the Alaskan mind: their knee-jerk libertarianism intertwined with small community pulls together-ism; the exhilarating thrill of domination spiced with risk as they fly small planes over uninhabited expanses; their ruthless capitalism and extraction industries which rarely give them pause.

I had become attuned to extra elbow room, a live-and-let-live attitude, and skip-the-bureaucracy-problem-solving. When Auntie couldn't get through the body scanner, nobody got out the book of rules, nobody yelled, nobody imposed a fine, nobody poured the elixir down the drain. Auntie got to take her booze back home and was rescheduled on the next flight.

I had acquired an Alaskan ear: there is not much art of conversation in this land of hands-on living, nobody reads. Out of hunger for book-speak, I had turned to YouTube podcasts, but—as a now Alaskan—I found them effete, irrelevant, you know, Gawd, so Lower 48.

I had also paid my deepest and genuine respect to *genius loci*, all the spirits of places from inside passage forests to whaling shores. I had, however, not duly reckoned with the *duende*, and she got me. In Nome. The whole point of this travel had been to maintain myself open and porous, to allow myself to be surprised not only by place and others but by myself. Although my travel gauntlet had included a willingness to change, I found I came undone with so much exposure to naked honesty. The *duende* said to me,

Well, well, phenomenology, is it? You got what you asked for and, everyone knows, beware of what you ask for. Genuine encounters with others of independent mind. In true grit Alaska. An invitation to discover yourself in opposition to what is not you. What's your response? Could you be nourished by the peculiar magic of this landscape? This lifeworld? Are you going to just gawk and run? You were willing to

leave your heart in an Alcan gas station, what body part are you going to leave here?"

I took off a bit early for the airport, a bit trembly in my hiking shoes. I still feel her, the snarky sarcastic *duende*. Finger beckoning.

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Image captions [all photos by author except p. 30]

- p. 25: A culturally emphatic entrance to Bass Pro, Anchorage.
- p. 25: Altar to the experience of the hunt.
- p. 25: High vaulted painted ceiling with celestial ducks.
- p. 25: Riverside Community Church, Eagle River, Alaska.
- p. 26: The natural extension of man. Bass Pro Gun rack.
- p. 26: The state icon. Bear in arrested attack.
- pp. 27: Alaska's relative size. Total population 700,000. Small remote small settlements account for perhaps 100,000 (source. Google images).
- p. 30: Aerial view of Kotzebue (source: Wikipedia).

The Call of the Desert

Harry Oldmeadow

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What makes the desert beautiful is that somewhere it hides a well.

—Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Desert is simply that: an ecstatic critique of culture, an ecstatic form of disappearance.

—Jean Baudrillard

What draws us into the desert is the search for something intimate in the remote.

—Edward Abbey [1]

What is it with deserts? Wherein the fascination and allure of these places of extreme heat, aridity, isolation, apparent emptiness, and unsociable reptiles?

As a young man, I visited the fringes of the great Saharan desert in Morocco and have since fallen under the spell of parched landscapes in the American southwest and the vast Australian interior. I also became a zealous reader of desert literature, ranging from the writings of the hermits and mystics to the classic accounts of the explorers to the strange ruminations of drug-crazed hippies fleeing civilization in the Mojave Desert of southern California. Some fragmentary remarks about this extensive literature come later. But first a few general observations about these places of denudation and abandonment that take up roughly a third of the world's land surface.

Our word "desert" comes from ecclesiastical Latin, *desertum*, a place of abandonment. Geographers classify deserts in



four main categories: hot-arid, semi-arid, coastal, and cold, the constant factor being low precipitation. Scientists tell us that deserts can be categorized via the following formula: $P - PE \pm S$, where P is precipitation, PE is potential evapotranspiration rates, and S is the amount of water surface storage. I suppose all this scientific explication has some sort of utilitarian application, but I'm not much interested.

Geographers also tell us that the popular notion of the desert as a place of sand

dunes rolling away to the horizon only applies to about twenty percent of the world's deserts. The earth's largest desert is Antarctica, covering about one and a half times the area of the vast Sahara. The driest area on earth is probably the Atacama Desert in Chile where, so scientists believe, there was no significant rainfall between 1570 and 1971. That's a long time between drinks!

But more intriguing than such data is the question of why some individuals voluntarily expose themselves to the perils of these inhospitable places. I suggest that we

can isolate three key themes implicated in many human encounters with the desert: danger; strangeness; and purity. Over the centuries, a cluster of other ideas and values have accumulated around these three primal associations.

Danger

Only a complete fool is unaware of the dangers facing anyone venturing far into a desert. Even today, people travelling in robust vehicles, armed with GPS devices and emergency beacons, perish. The desert is a

bad place for things to go wrong. Deserts, by definition, are places where water and food are scarce, where little grows, where temperatures are extreme—a place devoid of the amenities of civilized life, a barren realm presided over by raptors, and peopled until recent times, if at all, by nomads not necessarily friendly.

The great era of European desert exploration covered some two hundred years, roughly 1750 to 1950, though of course there were antecedents—Marco Polo for one, the Chinese monk Xuanzang (602–664) for another. The latter crossed much desert country in his seventeen-year journey through China to India.

Exploring the vast uncharted deserts to be found in every continent posed formidable dangers and offered the chance of adventure and heroic feats. These explorers did not penetrate the deserts *in spite* of the dangers but *because* of them. Expeditions of one kind or another were dressed up in the vestments of “scientific research,” with plenty of grandiloquent talk about “pushing back the frontiers of human knowledge” and “filling in the empty spaces on the map.”

No doubt some of the great explorers were gripped by the scientific impulse—Douglas Mawson was a geologist and Darwin an explorer—but often this justification was window dressing to attract funding. What could be more reputable and praiseworthy than “scientific research”?

Shackleton’s Antarctic expeditions were a fine example of the phenomenon: If truth be known, Shackleton was driven by the thirst for adventure, full stop. Then too, there were those motivated by dreams of imperial expansion and the ambiguous obligations imposed by “the white man’s burden.” I suspect, however, the most elemental attraction (no doubt sometimes subconscious or at least not fully acknowledged) was *danger*. Men (and a few intrepid women) ventured into these places *because* they were dangerous: the more hazards, the greater the opportunity to test oneself *in extremis*.

Many years ago, Paul Zweig observed that the oldest, most widespread stories in



the world are adventure stories about human heroes who venture into the myth-countries at the risk of their lives, and bring back tales of the world beyond human being: “It could be argued . . . that the narrative art itself arose from the need to tell an adventure; that man risking his life in perilous encounters constitutes the original definition of what is worth talking about” [2].

Strangeness

Deserts are strange places—in appearance, in the life forms they support, in the human cultures that have existed there, a rebuke to what we think of as “normal,” a manifestation of “otherness,” in some ways a repudiation of culture (as Baudrillard notes in the epigraph). One might recall the prophet’s conjuration of “the wild beasts” of the desert and the evil spirits that dwelt there (*Isaiah* 34:11-15). The primordial demon-spirit Lilith, sexually rapacious and the stealer of babies, is associated with the screech owl and serpents of the desert.

And think of the animals most readily associated with the desert: ugly, menacing, voracious raptors; cold-eyed reptiles that look like miniature dinosaurs, indifferent to the human world, appearing in many mythologies as dragons; venomous snakes and scorpions; and camels, odd in appearance, cantankerous and odorous (though I understand that camels have been given a bad press; they are not without their attractions—but they are strange beasts nonetheless!) [3].

Or picture the weird plants, the various forms of cacti, tumbleweed, the Joshua tree, agave and aloe vera, boab trees. De-

serts are full of weird formations, monoliths of strange shape both beautiful and grotesque, canyons, naked escarpments, buttes and mesas, interminable sand dunes, claypans, salt lakes. The deserts of the American Southwest are full of these extraordinary sights, of great interest no doubt to geologists and a kind of dreamscape for landscape photographers. As someone remarked, the desert is the place where you see the earth with its skin peeled back.

Some, myself included, find these places full of mysterious beauty. I appreciate Gertrude Bell’s remark that “To awaken in that desert dawn was like waking in the heart of an opal” [4]. The desert night sky, too, is something wondrous to behold. Others share the view of the small girl visiting Utah in Conan Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet* (the first published Sherlock Holmes story): “I guess somebody else made the country in these parts. It’s not nearly so well done. They forgot the water and the trees.”

The idea of strangeness can be linked to that of *mystery*. The desert seems inscrutable, reluctant to yield up its secrets. This is a recurrent theme in desert literature. Thus Edward Abbey: “The desert wears . . . a veil of mystery. Motionless and silent it evokes in us an elusive hint of something unknown, unknowable, about to be revealed. Since the desert does not act it seems to be waiting—but waiting for what?” (*Desert Solitaire*). Or Saint-Exupéry: “I have always loved the desert. One sits down on a desert sand dune, sees nothing, hears nothing. Yet through the silence something throbs, and gleams” (*Wind, Sand and Stars*).

As to European encounters with desert peoples, I daresay few would contest the suggestion that, in almost every case, intruders from other worlds almost invariably found the nomadic desert-dwelling peoples foreign, alien, utterly “other.” The explorer or adventurer in the desert was indeed a “stranger in a strange land.” The association of deserts with faraway planets does nothing to lessen their mystery. One of the most celebrated of sci-fi stories, by Frank Herbert, is entitled *Dune*.

Purity

The desert, sparsely populated by hardy and generally modest forms of flora and fauna, windswept, uncontaminated by the detritus of civilization, often strikes the traveler or desert-dweller as *pure*: clean, pristine, isolated, untainted. This idea is easily associated with *austerity* and with *solitude* and *silence*. “The true call of the desert,” wrote Freya Stark, “of the mountains, or the sea, is their silence—free of the networks of dead speech” (*Perseus in the Wind*).

It is not much of a jump then to the idea that individuals seeking to cleanse their souls might best do so in this kind of environment. Hence, the timeless appeal of the desert to hermits and anchorites, ascetics, monks and mystics, most notably in the time of the Desert Fathers (3rd–4th AD).

Many people of this stripe have recapitulated one of the central themes of the *Upanishads*, the most elevated of the Hindu Scriptures: The path to freedom is renunciation. Where better to renounce the temptations and distractions of worldly life than in the desert? Where better to quench the deepest spiritual yearning? Ultimately, the desert is the place where one might find God but where one might risk a mystical delirium or complete madness in the quest. Here is Nikos Kazantzakis in full flight on this recurrent theme:

Inhuman solitude made of sand and God. Surely only two kinds of people can bear to live in such desert: lunatics and prophets. The mind topples here not from fright but from sacred awe; sometimes it collapses downward, losing human stability, sometimes it springs upward, enters heaven, sees God face to face, touches the hem of His blazing garment without being burned, hears what He says, and taking this, slings it into men's consciousness.

Only in the desert do we see the birth of these fierce, indomitable souls who rise up in rebellion even against God himself and stand before Him fearlessly, their minds in resplendent consubstantiality with the skirts of the Lord. God sees them and is proud, because in them his breath has not vented its force; in them, God has not stooped to becoming a man (Report to Greco).



In slightly more sober but similar vein, T.E. Lawrence: “Those who went into the desert long enough to forget its open spaces and its emptiness were inevitably thrust upon God as the only refuge and rhythm of being” (*Seven Pillars of Wisdom*). And let’s not forget the desert as the Devil’s playground, as the place of Christ’s great temptations. Here is Thomas Merton on this theme:

First, the desert is the country of madness. Second, it is the refuge of the devil, thrown out into the “wilderness of upper Egypt” to “wander in dry places.” Thirst drives man mad, and the devil himself is mad with a kind of thirst for his own lost excellence—lost because he has immured himself in it and closed out everything else. So the man who wanders into the desert to be himself must take care that he does not go mad and become the servant of the one who dwells there in a sterile paradise of emptiness and rage (Thoughts in Solitude).

Some books about deserts

There are many fine works about deserts by explorers, travelers, hermits, monks, soldiers, scientists, naturalists, and journalists. Three sub-genres long since having compelling interest to me are those set in Antarctica, the Australian interior, and the vast expanses of sand and stone in North Africa and the Middle East. The classic works of Antarctic exploration—by

Shackleton, Worsley, Apsley-Garrard, Amundsen, Mawson, Lansing, Byrd—are well-known and need not delay us here. There is also a burgeoning secondary literature on Arctic/Antarctic exploration, spearheaded by the utterly gripping revisionist works of polar historian Roland Huntford who has, so to speak, rewritten the polar maps.

Rudyard Kipling is credited with the line about only mad dogs and Englishmen going into the midday sun, later popularized in a song by Noel Coward. Kipling didn’t get it quite right: the key phrase should be “dogs and mad Englishmen (and women as well).”

The mystique of the deserts of North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula mesmerized a long line of English traveler/explorer writers, most of them quite eccentric. Consider the list, by no means exhaustive: Charles Doughty, Richard Burton, Bertram Thomas, Harry St. John Philby, Gertrude Bell, T.E. Lawrence, Freya Stark, Wilfrid Thesiger, Geoffrey Moorhouse.

Nearly all these characters—and “characters” is the word!—produced arresting works about the deserts they traversed. Thesiger’s *Arabian Sands* is both the most popular and the best (not often one can say that!). To these illustrious desert explorers, we can add the name of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, a pioneer of the desert skies; his *Wind, Sand and Stars* (1939) is an abiding classic in the literature of the desert.

Three more recent works of considerable interest are Geoffrey Moorhouse's *The Fearful Void* (1974); American journalist William Lagerwiesche's *Sahara Unveiled: A Journey Across the Desert* (1996); and Michael Asher's *In Search of the Forty Days Road* (1984). Asher is a soldier, historian, and ecologist much influenced by Thesiger, sharing his view that the desert nomads have much to teach us. Asher's biography of his hero, *Thesiger* (1994) is also well worth reading.

The literature on the deserts of the United States has a much shorter pedigree, but the *locus classicus* is Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* (1968). We may also mention such writers as Mary Hunter Austin, Charles Bowden, and Barry Lopez.

The vast arid regions of Australia attracted an unruly crew of explorers, anthropologists, would-be settlers, and desperadoes on the run or on the make. The names of the great Australian desert explorers—Eyre, Sturt, John McDouall Stuart, Leichhardt, Burke and Wills, Gregory, Giles and Forest—were in days gone by known to every primary school pupil. Are they still so, I wonder?

Some of these explorers left detailed journals or later accounts of their travels, but none were writers of the first rank. Their writings are often over-burdened with scientific data and the tedious daily accumulation of meteorological details and the like. Besides, by the time the desert had finished with them, several of these chaps were, in one way or another, somewhat deranged.

Madness-in-the-desert is a recurrent motif not only in the annals of desert exploration but in our national art and literature, famously in Patrick White's *Voss*. (If you like "madness-in-the-desert" movies, try some of these: *The Four Feathers*, *Fata Morgana*, *El Topo*, or *Waiting for the Barbarians*.)

Sidney Nolan, perhaps Australia's most acclaimed artist, was fascinated by the Australian desert country, referred to both as "the inland" and "the Outback." He produced hundreds of artworks (paintings, drawings, lithographs, photographs) inspired by the desert. Trying to explain this obsessive attraction, he wrote:

I wanted to deal ironically with the cliché of the "dead heart"; I wanted to know the true nature of the "otherness" into which I had been born. It was not a European

thing. I wanted to paint the great purity and implacability of the landscape. I wanted a visual form of the "otherness" of the thing not seen [5].

Beside such "high-culture" tokens of interest in the "dead heart," and more generally in the "bush legend," we might also recall the steady flow of "low-brow" books by "outback" authors such as Ion Idriess, Douglas Lockwood, Frank Clune, George Farwell, and Bill Harney, all somewhat forgotten now but widely read mid-century.

Some of the later literature about the feats of the Australian explorers, or inspired by them, are more interesting than their own writings. A few of the more engaging of these secondary works: Alan Moorehead's *Cooper's Creek* and Sarah Murgatroyd's *The Dig Tree*, both about the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition; Geoffrey Dutton's *Edward John Eyre: The Hero as Murderer*; John Bayley's *Into the Unknown* and *Mr Stuart's Tracks*, about Leichhardt and Stuart respectively.

Readers interested in indigenous conceptions of the land should read T.G.H. Strehlow's remarkable *Journey to Horse-shoe Bend*, published in 1969 but recounting the author's experiences of a perilous journey in central Australia with a party of Aborigines in 1922.

In my armchair travels in the dusty footsteps of the Australian explorers, I have puzzled over the question as to why there are so many books about Leichhardt, and so few about Ernest Giles, the greatest explorer of the continent's deserts. The answer probably has something to do with the fact that Leichhardt came to grief in unknown circumstances, while Giles succeeded and lived to a comparatively old age.

The Destruction of Nomads

The destruction of nomadic cultures and peoples is one of the abominations of the modern era [6]. The Australian story is but one chapter in this dark history of the nomads, many of them desert-dwellers, all over the globe. This is a subject too complex and volatile to be canvassed in any detail here. But the fate of the nomads is a melancholy theme pervading much of the writing to which I have referred; Thesiger's work on the Bedouin and the marsh Arabs is a poignant example.

The full significance of the disappearance of these peoples, however, is not always appreciated. Ruminating on the destruction of the traditional and largely nomadic culture of Tibet, the perennialist author Marco Pallis wrote:

One can truly say that this remote land behind the snowy rampart of the Himalaya had become like the chosen sanctuary for all those things whereof the historical discarding had caused our present profane civilization, the first of its kind, to come into being ... The violation of this sanctuary and the dissipation of the sacred influences concentrated there became an event of properly cosmic significance, of which the ulterior consequences for a world which tacitly condoned the outrage or, in many cases, openly countenanced it on the plea that it brought "progress" to a reluctant people, have yet to ripen [7].

Similar considerations may be applied in more or less analogous cases, whether we think of the fate of Native-Americans, the Australian Aborigines, the Inuit, the Bedouin, the Amazonians, the Bushmen of the Kalahari, or any other nomadic culture which has been razed by the juggernaut of modernization.

In *The Reign of Quantity*, the French metaphysician René Guénon observes that it is only in these latter days, marked by the ever-accelerating "solidification" of the world, that "Cain finally and really slays Abel," which is to say that the sedentary civilizations destroy the nomadic cultures [8]. Moreover,

It could be said in a general way that the works of sedentary peoples are works of time: these people are fixed in space within a strictly limited domain and develop their activities in a temporal continuity which appears to them to be indefinite. On the other hand, nomadic and pastoral peoples build nothing durable, and do not work for a future which escapes them; but they have space in front of them, not facing them with any limitation, but on the contrary always offering them new possibilities [9].

No doubt it was with similar reflections in mind that Frithjof Schuon remarked that "traditions having a prehistoric origin are, symbolically speaking, made for 'space' and not for 'time'" [10]. George La Piana

also alludes to the symbolism of the Biblical story in writing that “Cain, who killed his brother, Abel, the herdsman, and built himself a city, prefigures modern civilization, one that has been described from within as a ‘murderous machine, with no conscience and no ideals’” [11].

It follows from these observations that the slaying of Abel and the violent extirpation of primordial cultures not only drastically contracts human possibilities but is actually a cosmic desecration. Since the genocidal vandalisms of the nineteenth century, a great deal has been written about the destruction of the indigenous cultures. But many writers on this subject are quite impervious to the deeper significance of the events they seek to explain, a deficiency that can in no way be compensated by any amount of moral outrage, justified as that is.

To return to our more immediate subject, there have been many visitors to Australia’s desert regions who have attempted to enter the existential universe of the indigenous inhabitants—to enter into an entirely different mode of perception, experience, and understanding. It comes as no surprise that two of the most popular books on this subject are remarkably shallow and hopelessly Eurocentric: Robyn Davidson’s *Tracks* (1980) and Bruce Chatwin’s *Songlines* (1987). I do not claim that these books are worthless and without interest, only that they are of very little help in understanding the mythology, cosmology,

and ritual life of these peoples. The widely-heralded *Songlines* is actually a spectacular case of cultural myopia.

Much more illuminating is James Cowan’s *Two Men Dreaming* (1995), an account of his own time in the Western Australian desert and his relationship with a tribal elder still deeply versed in traditional ways. In my view, Cowan is the most perceptive of all non-indigenous writers on Aboriginal traditions. It would be a good thing if books such as his *Mysteries of the Dream-Time* were far more widely known.

Today, we can take some comfort in the recent emergence of many new indigenous writers, both fictional and otherwise, who seek to bridge the gulf between traditional Aboriginal and modern European worldviews.

Notes

1. The epigraphs are from *The Little Prince*, *America*, and *Desert Solitaire*.
2. *The Adventurer: the Fate of Adventure in the Modern World*, 1981. Paul Zweig (1935–1984) was an American explorer, poet, critic and teacher.
3. A book full of fascinating material about camels: H.M. Barker’s *Camels and the Outback* (1964).
4. Gertrude Bell, *The Desert and the Sown: Travels in Palestine and Syria*, 2012, 64.
5. <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition/sidney-nolan/>.

6. This section is an excerpt from my book, *Black Elk: Lakota Visionary*, 2018
7. M. Pallis, Book review in *Studies in Comparative Religion*, 5:3, 1971, 189–190.
8. R. Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity*, 1995, 78.
9. R. Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity*, 180.
10. F. Schuon, *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, 2006, 8.
11. La Piana in *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, 70n. George La Piana (1879–1971) was a Catholic priest, scholar and author.

Photographic captions [photos by author]

- p. 32: Lake Mungo (a lake without water!), NSW, Australia.
- p. 33: From Mt Bruce, Pilbara region, Western Australia.
- p. 34: Desert Water Hole, Chichester National Park, Western Australia.

Questions relating to environmental and architectural phenomenology (from *EAP*, 2014 [vol. 25, no. 3, p. 4])

Questions relating to phenomenology and related interpretive approaches and methods:

- What is phenomenology and what does it offer to whom?
- What is the state of phenomenological research today? What are your hopes and concerns regarding phenomenology?
- Does phenomenology continue to have relevance in examining human experience in relation to world?
- Are there various conceptual and methodological modes of phenomenology and, if so, how can they be categorized and described?
- Has phenomenological research been superseded by other conceptual approaches—e.g., post-structuralism, social-constructionism, critical theory, relationalist and non-representational perspectives, the various conceptual “turns,” and so forth?
- Can phenomenology contribute to making a better world? If so, what are the most crucial phenomena and topics to be explored phenomenologically?
- Can phenomenological research offer practical results in terms of design, planning, policy, and advocacy?
- How might phenomenological insights be broadcast in non-typical academic ways—e.g., through artistic expression, theatrical presentation, digital evocation, virtual realities, and so forth?
- What are the most important aims for future phenomenological research?
- Do the various post-structural and social-constructionist criticisms of phenomenology—that it is essentialist, masculinist, authoritative, voluntarist, ignorant of power structures, and so forth—point toward its demise?

Questions relating to the natural world and environmental and ecological concerns:

- Can there be a phenomenology of nature and the natural world?
- What can phenomenology offer the intensifying environmental and ecological crises we face today?
- Can phenomenology contribute to more sustainable actions and worlds?
- Can one speak of a sustainable lifeworld?
- What is a phenomenology of a *lived* environmental ethic and who are the key contributors?
- Do the “sacred” and the “holy” have a role in caring for the natural world? For places? For lifeworlds broadly?
- Can phenomenology contribute to environmental education? If so, in what ways?

- Can there be a phenomenology of the two laws of thermodynamics, especially the second law claiming that all activities, left to their own devices, tend toward greater disorder and fewer possibilities? Are there ways whereby phenomenological understanding of lifeworld might help to reduce the accelerating disordering of natural and human worlds?

Questions relating to place, place experience, and place meaning:

- Why has the theme of place become an important phenomenological topic?
- Can a phenomenological understanding of place contribute to better place making?
- Can phenomenology contribute to a generative understanding of place and place making?
- What roles do bodily regularity and habitual inertia play in the constitution of place and place experience?
- What are the lived relationships between place, sustainability, and a responsive environmental ethic?
- How are phenomenological accounts to respond to post-structural interpretations of space and place as rhizomic and a “mesh-work of paths” (Ingold)?
- Can phenomenological accounts incorporate a “progressive sense of place” argued for by critical theorists like Doreen Massey?
- Can phenomenological explications of space and place account for human differences—gender, sexuality, less-abledness, social class, cultural background, and so forth?
- Can phenomenology contribute to the politics and ideology of place?
- Can a phenomenological understanding of lived embodiment and habitual inertia be drawn upon to facilitate robust places and to generate mutual support and awareness among places, especially places that are considerably different (e.g., different ethnic neighborhoods or regions)?
- Can phenomenology contribute to mobility, the nature of “flows,” rhizomic spaces, the places of mobility, non-spaces and their relationship to mobility and movement?

Questions relating to architecture and environmental design and policy:

- Can there be a phenomenology of architecture and architectural experience and meaning?
- Can phenomenology contribute to better architectural design?
- How do qualities of the designable world—spatiality, materiality, lived aesthetics, environmental embodiment etc.—contribute to lifeworlds?

- What are the most pertinent environmental and architectural features contributing to a lifeworld’s being one way rather than another?
- What role will cyberspace and digital technologies have in 21st-century lifeworlds? How will they play a role in shaping designed environments, particularly architecture?
- What impact will digital advances and virtual realities have on physical embodiment, architectural design, and real-world places? Will virtual reality eventually be able to simulate “real reality” entirely? If so, how does such a development transform the nature of lifeworld, natural attitude, place, and architecture?
- Can virtual worlds become so “real” that they are lived as “real” worlds?

Other potential questions:

- What is the lived relationship between people and the worlds in which they find themselves?
- Can lifeworlds be made to happen self-consciously? If so, how? Through what individual efforts? Through what group efforts?
- Can a phenomenological education in life-world, place, and environmental embodiment assist citizens and professionals in better understanding the workings and needs of real-world places and thereby contribute to their envisioning and making?
- Is it possible to speak of human-rights-in-place or place justice? If so, would such a possibility move attention and supportive efforts toward improving the places in which people and other living beings find themselves, rather than focusing only on the rights and needs of individuals and groups without consideration of their place context?

Questions relating to Covid-19:

- Will demands of Covid-19 have a lasting impact on physical places and bodily sociality?
- Can social media and virtual realities effectively replace face-to-face presence and physical places?
- Will human beings return to physical place and firsthand intercorporeality once the pandemic ends?
- Can human life really survive if people lose their direct lived relationships with other human beings and an entrenched physical involvement in real-world places?
- Does the crisis of Covid-19 demonstrate the central phenomenological principle that human beings-are-inured-in place? If that inurement collapses, is human life at risk?



Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology

Published digitally twice a year, **EAP** is a forum and clearing house for research and design that incorporate a qualitative approach to environmental and architectural experience, actions, and meanings.

One key concern of **EAP** is design, education, policy, and advocacy supporting and strengthening natural and built places that sustain human and environmental wellbeing. Realizing that a clear conceptual stance is integral to informed research and design, the editor emphasizes phenomenological approaches but also gives attention to related styles of qualitative research. **EAP** welcomes essays, letters, reviews, conference information, and so forth. Forward submissions to the editor.

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Exemplary Themes

- The nature of environmental and architectural experience;
- Sense of place, including place identity and place attachment;
- Architectural and landscape meaning;
- The environmental, architectural, spatial, and material dimensions of lifeworlds;
- Changing conceptions of space, place, and nature;
- Home, dwelling, journey, and mobility;
- Environmental encounter and its relation to environmental responsibility and action;
- Environmental and architectural atmospheres and ambiances;
- Environmental design as place making;
- Sacred space, landscape, and architecture;
- The role of everyday things—furnishings, tools, clothing, interior design, landscape features, and so forth—in supporting people's sense of environmental wellbeing;
- The progressive impact of virtual reality on human life and how it might transform the lived nature of "real" places, buildings, and lifeworlds;
- The practice of a *lived* environmental ethic.

For additional themes and topics, see the preceding page, which outlines a series of relevant questions originally published in the 25th-anniversary issue of **EAP** in 2014 (vol. 25, no. 3, p. 4).

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