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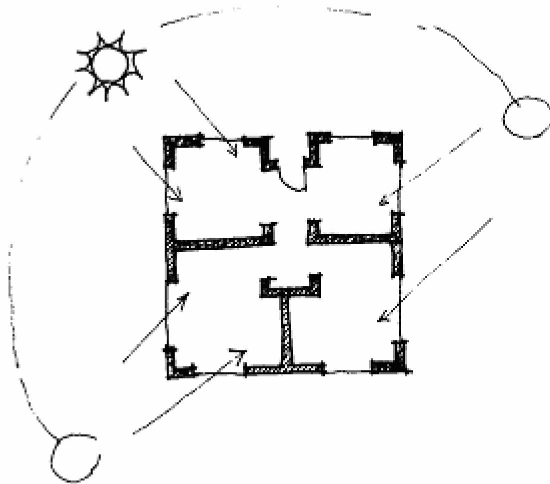
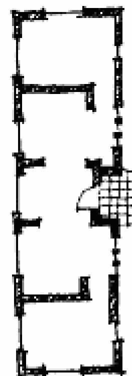
This issue of *EAP* begins our 15th year. We thank the 61 readers who have renewed their subscriptions and include reminders for those who have not yet renewed.

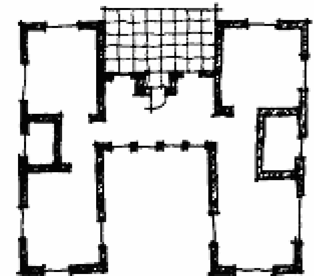
This issue begins with a review of *Patterns of Home*, a new book by architects Max Jacobson, Murray Silverstein, and Barbara Winslow. Next, educator John Cameron considers philosopher's J. E. Malpas' *Place and Experience* as it has significance for environmental ethics and place education. Finally, architect David Wang draws on the philosophers Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Immanuel Kant to explore the nature of artistic creativity.

Enhanced EAP Website

Thanks to Kansas State University computer science graduate student Nagini Indugula, our *EAP* website has been updated and substantially enhanced. The cumulative index is now complete through 2003, and we have added webpage versions of many essays and book reviews from past issues. Also provided is a comprehensive review, by *EAP* editor David Seamon, of recent phenomenological and related qualitative research dealing with environmental, architectural, and place issues. Go to: www.arch.ksu.edu/seamon/EAP.html.







SQUARE HOUSE **LONG THIN HOUSE** **HOUSE WITH WINGS**

Above: Conceptual drawings from Patterns of Home *by Max Jacobson, Murray Silverstein, & Barbara Winslow (Newtown, CT: Taunton Press, 2002, p. 102). Arguing that light coming into rooms from two sides is integral to good house design, the authors describe simple ways to incorporate this element architecturally.* ***Left****, a simple four-square house allowing light into two sides of each corner room;* ***center****, a long thin house, allowing light to enter from opposite sides of most rooms; and,* ***right****, a house with wings creating rooms with the potential for light on two or three sides.* *See review, p. 3.* *Drawings © 2002 Taunton Press.*

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We are grateful to the following readers who have contributed more than the base subscription for 2004. Our membership is fragile, and we could not continue without your support. Thank you all.

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Items of Interest

The seminar, **"Radical Prince: The Integral Vision of HRH the Prince of Wales,"** will be held 1-14 March 2004, at Frenchman's Cove, Port Antonio, Jamaica. The seminar will include a focus on Prince Charles' continuing interest in architecture, including Christopher Alexander's work. Writer and philosopher David Lorimer will lead the seminar, held on a private estate located on the northeast coast of Jamaica. Contact: lainnes@gonuts4free.com.

Interdisciplinary Environmental Review is an international journal that publishes research and survey papers, from all disciplines, concerning the natural environment. The journal is sponsored by the Interdisciplinary Environmental Association, whose mission is to "bring together all disciplines so that our understanding of environmental issues is enhanced through interdisciplinary communication." Contact: Prof. Kevin Hickey, Economics Dept., Assumption College, 500 Salisbury St., Worcester, MA 01609; khickey@assumption.edu.

Janus Head, an on-line and paper journal published twice a year, is devoted to "maintaining an attitude of respect and openness to the various manifestations of truth in human experience; it strives to foster understanding through meditative thinking, narrative structure, and poetic imagination. Like the Janus head reliefs found over the doorways of old Roman homes, this journal, too, is situated at a threshold. The space within this journal, like the space beyond the Janus head relief, is a space where dwelling can occur, where thinking can take place, and where community can be built." .P.O. Box 7914, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15216-0914; www.janushead.org/jhinfo.cfm.

Membership News

Chicago Architect **Mark Miller** recently presented a talk on "Zen in the Art of Architecture" for the lecture series, "The Emerging Horizon," sponsored by the AIA Chicago Health Professional Interest Area. A major issue that he addressed was whether the Eastern philosophies that underpin many alternative medical therapies can be integrated into architecture itself. mark@zenplusarchitecture.com.

Ray Weisenburger, Professor of Planning and Architecture at Kansas State University, writes: "I subscribe to about ten journals and receive another 20 or so that are free—some very good ones. However, your journal is the only one I read from cover to cover. I particularly liked the recent "Travel Drawing" article, although drawing is not a recreational activity in my mind. My Urban Visual Analysis class focuses on drawing as a way to understand the structure and content of a community or neighborhood—not just to put a "picture" in our sketchbooks. Later on the author says may things I agree with. Keep up the good work." rbw@ksu.edu

University of Michigan School of Art & Design's **Jack Williamson** sends news of *Design Biz*, a web-based educational initiative that brings together businesspeople, designers, and students interested in the ways that good design can help and be helped by business. A summary of the work is provided in *Design*in*Buz: Furthering the Synergy between Business and Design—a Model for Community Building on the Web*. To receive a copy, contact Williamson at: jhwill@umich.edu.

Book Review

Max Jacobson, Murray Silverstein, & Barbara Winslow, 2002. *Patterns of Home: The Ten Essentials of Enduring Design.* Taunton, CT: Taunton Press.

Authors of the earlier *The Good House: Contrast as a Design Tool* [Taunton Press, 1990; reviewed in *EAP,* fall 1991], These three architects aim in this useful new book to identify and to illustrate the central qualities that make a house "a truly wonderful place to live" (p. 3).

After designing many houses themselves and analyzing other home designs that are "memorable, satisfying, and enduring" (p. 8), the authors arrive at ten *patterns* that they claim underlie and sustain a thorough sense of at-homeness. These patterns, summarized in the box, next page, are said to:

> link the way the house is designed with the way we experience the world. They explore the presence of light, the way we move through a space, the feel of one space as you are sitting in another, the relationship of indoors and outdoors (p. 9).

After an introductory chapter overviewing the ten patterns and discussing how they were established and how they might be used practically, the authors elaborate the patterns in ten chapters well illustrated with built examples taken from the authors' own architectural practice or from the home designs of other architects.

Each chapter presents a pattern in broad terms, then identifies several practical ways in which that pattern can be designed for and grounded architecturally. For instance, in the chapter on "capturing light," the authors emphasize design elements that include the following:

- Locating the house on its site so that the building receives light throughout the day;
- Shaping the house so that light can enter important rooms from at least two sides;
- Using light from skylights or clerestories when light from a second side is not possible;
- Placing rooms in such a way that they receive light at the time of day when most important activities occur there;
- Shaping each opening to suit the climate and activities that will be lit by the opening;
- Creating window places like bays and window seats to enhance the life of the house;
- Using shading devices to control the light and heat entering the house.

For example, in regard to allowing light in each room from two sides, the drawings on this *EAP's* front page illustrate some possibilities for differently shaped houses—the rectangular house, for which each corner room has the potential for windows on two sides; or the long thin house or house with long wings, both house forms affording the possibility of windows on opposite walls.

Commentary

From a phenomenological perspective, perhaps the most valuable aspect of *Patterns* is the authors' effort to hold tight to the lived relationship between people and world as, in this case, that relationship infuses, through house and home, an experience of centeredness, contentment, and deep personal and family identity.

If one accepts the central phenomenological principle that home, working rightly, resolves a series of lived dialectics like rest/movement, center/horizon, dwelling/journey, inside/outside, and privacy/publicness, then one can say that all ten patterns contribute in some fashion toward resolution through the participation and support of the built world—*viz.,* a well designed house.

For example, "creating rooms," "sheltering roof," and "private edges, common core" all help to establish and enhance a sense of center and rest so that the individual, couple, or family unit can identify, remember, and strengthen their sense of at-homeness and selfhood. On the other hand, the patterns "inhabiting the site," and "refuge and pros-

The Ten Essential Patterns

1. Inhabiting the site
Think of the house and its site as a single thing but also as parts shaped by a larger environment.

2. Creating rooms, outside and in
Buildings give shape to their interior spaces but also to the exterior spaces around them.

3. Sheltering roof
One of the defining comforts of home is the feeling of being enveloped by a simple, sloping roof.

4. Capturing light
A home must open itself to the light and warmth of the sun.

5. Parts in proportion
A home is an assembly of parts, materials, and spaces. In some graceful, rhythmic way, these parts must make an orderly and sensible whole.

6. The flow through rooms
How we arrive on a site and enter the house and move through it has a profound influence on our sense of the building as home.

7. Private edges, common core
Against the flow of movement, rooms are meant to hold activity, to gather the life of the home.

8. Refuge and outlook
One of the abiding pleasures that home offers is being in and looking out—providing a solid, stable, and protected place from which you can look out toward and over a larger "beyond."

9. Places in between
The house needs places where one can pause, leave the mainstream, enjoy quiet eddies along the margins.

10. Composing with materials
Envision a melody—materials that support and underscore; those that offer counterpoint, slow the progression—all with a view to letting the house sing.

pect" do more to mediate the centering quality of home with its larger context of natural setting, neighborhood, natural landscape, and views.

Yet again, patterns like "capturing light," "parts in proportion," "places in between," and "composing with materials" work more like a physical and aesthetic bond that holds the home's centering and reaching qualities together, making them a built and lived whole that contributes architecturally to the continual, lived resolution of home's inescapable dialectical nature. In short, good design, through the reconciling potential of the patterns, can help resolve home's lived dialectics and transform an unavoidable "struggle" of opposites into lived relationship. House becomes home and environment becomes place.

As this newsletter has regularly argued, too much of the phenomenological research on place and human dwelling emphasizes the person aspect of the person-world relationship with little awareness or concern with how the world—particularly its physical and built dimensions—also plays a crucial role in shaping lifeworld and place. *Patterns* is important because it gives most attention to these environmental and built qualities and thus helps demonstrate how they constitute an integral part of what the world *as lived* is about.

One critical concern I have about the book is how directly, in the houses illustrated, the architects have actually used the patterns in the house designs. Some of the homes chosen are the authors' own work, which indicates a direct use of the patterns in the design process. By far, however, the over 30 houses providing pattern illustrations are the work of other architects who more than likely had no direct notion of "patterns" and no doubt designed their houses in the typical formalist-visual way that dominates architectural practice today. If the idea of patterns was not used in designing these houses, is it really that useful a design tool?

At the same time, one wishes that the authors might have included at least a few examples of houses poorly designed from the vantage point of the ten patterns and then considered whether these patterns really help demonstrate why the houses work badly as homes.

There is also a question concerning the many house photographs, which are beautiful aesthetically

and appear like the standard stunning illustrations that one finds in glossy architectural magazines and journals—a portrayal of houses that are perfectly ordered and with few indications that real people actually live in these places and transform them into the lived messiness of homes in their day-to-day ordinariness.

Two of the book's authors worked with Christopher Alexander to write the original 1977 *Pattern Language* and, in this regard, it is instructive to set *Patterns* next to the recently-published second volume of Alexander's *Nature of Order* (*The Process of Making Life,* Berkeley, CA: Center for Environmental Structure, 2002). Few if any of the several house designs that Alexander illustrates in that work have the formalistic perfection or magazine elegance of the houses illustrated in *Patterns*. In fact, most of Alexander's house designs appear downright crude and filled with an awkwardness, both architectural and lived, that Alexander calls "roughness"—a kind of intentional inexactitude that he claims contributes to the life and wholeness of the design.

There is little of this roughness in the houses displayed in *Patterns* and that is not necessarily a weakness, though we are given very little evidence to know if the patterns illustrated in the houses actually evoke, in the daily lives of the occupants, the kinds of environmental experiences claimed by the patterns.

In short, one would like to know how at least a few of these houses really work as physical contexts for human worlds and whether the built parts arise from and evoke the patterns with which they are identified.

This concern, however, is the quibble of a phenomenologist who believes that, eventually, any presentation arguing a link between human and built worlds must verify that link in terms of real peoples' doings in real built environments.

As architects, these authors have done more than enough by providing a valuable house-making tool that should motivate both lay people and designers to better envision homes that are places of life, graciousness, and comfort.

Particularly, the book should be considered as a required text in lower-level architectural studios, where students are too often subjected to a design pedagogy that reduces place making to sterile, aesthetic form making.

—David Seamon

Some Implications of Malpas' *Place and Experience* for Place Ethics and Education

John I. Cameron

Cameron is a faculty member in the program in Social Ecology at the University of Western Sydney. This commentary is based on excerpts from a longer article, "Educating for Place Responsiveness: An Australian Perspective on Ethical Practice," to be published later this year in the academic journal Ethics, Place and Environment. *j.cameron@uws.edu.au.* *© 2004 John I. Cameron.*

J. E. Malpas' *Place and Experience* (Malpas 1999) is part of a renewal of attention to the subject of place by philosophers (Casey 1993, 1997) and, more recently, by writers on environmental ethics (Stefanovic 2000, Smith 2001).

I had occasion to review Malpas' work while reflecting upon the ethical and educational implications of place-responsiveness work I have been undertaking in Australia. By "place-responsive," I mean a society whose institutions and customs nurture and support a rich, deep connection with land and place (Cameron 2001; Plumwood 2000).

As an educator committed to the goal of moving towards a place-responsive society, I have been ac-

tively involved in engendering place responsiveness with university students, conference participants, and other members of the public. Through running experientially-oriented courses on sense of place, national colloquia on place, and researching with local community members, I have sought to foster an inclusive love of place as a deep motivation for an environmental ethic.

Coming into this work from a conservationist background and being motivated by a strong environmental ethic has sometimes been a challenge. It has led to three major questions of ethical practice:

- Does it generate positive environmental and social outcomes?
- How to bring depth experience and critical thinking together?
- How to engage with indigenous knowledge?

The philosophical topography traversed by Malpas, especially when considered in combination with Stefanovic's (2000) place-based ethics, has helped me think about these questions constructively**.**

Place and Experience

In *Place and Experience*, Malpas (1999) does not mention directly the word 'ethics', but makes such a thorough investigation of the philosophy of place from first principles that it provides a substantial basis for examination of my place responsiveness work.

Malpas contends that much writing about place misses the point by effectively describing place as human response to physical surroundings as distinct from mere location in objective space. In books such as Tuan's *Topophilia* (1974), 'it is not place as such that is important, but just the idea of human responsiveness – a responsiveness that need not itself be grounded in any concept of place or locality at all' (Malpas, 1999, p. 30). I have encountered this phenomenon also in those students who lost sight of the place itself in the intensity of the personal experiences the encounter with place triggered.

The best way to describe the relationship between place and experience, Malpas suggests, is not to talk of the experience of place as if place were one of a number of things that could be experienced, but that it is the complex structure of place itself that makes experience, *any* human experience, possible at all.

He carefully maps this structure of place by surveying the interconnected elements that are contained within it – objective and subjective space, self-subjectivity and other-subjectivity, memory and mental states (thoughts, feelings, experiences), action and narrative. He draws out the structural interdependencies of all these elements within place, for example, how memories are nested within each other the way places are nested within other places with multiple and overlapping connections.

Neither objective nor subjective space can be grasped without the possibility of the other, and both are required for the intersubjective space opened up between two people encountering the same object. The narrative structuring of mental states constitutes the self and the possibility of agency. Actions are nested in personal projects that are nested in larger narratives that structure place and are structured by place. As a result:

> To have a sense of one's own identity….is to have a sense, not of some simple underlying self that is one's own, but rather of a particular place in the world. While the having of such a sense of place consists in having a grasp of a conceptually complex structure – a structure that encompasses different forms of spatiality, concepts of self, of others and of an objective order of things – it is also a sense of place that is necessarily articulated linguistically (p. 152).

While Malpas notes in conclusion that he has not directly discussed the practical, moral, and political implications of his work, he has provided a framework within which they might be considered. For example, he suggests that 'the complex structure of place…..suggest[s] that the idea of place does not so much bring a certain politics with it, as define the very frame within which the political itself must be located' (p. 198). If we substitute 'ethics' for 'politics' in that sentence, it reads just as satisfactorily as a basis for rethinking ethics.

Malpas' exposition of the complex structure of place itself illuminates why rediscovering childhood sense of place became important for my students. Childhood memories of place are not merely an interesting side issue, far less to be dismissed as nostalgia. They are critical to self-identity, to the narra-

tives we develop about our lives, and to our capacity for self-reflection (pp 182-183).

Malpas also notes that as we age, such places and memories become increasingly significant to us, according to psychological studies of autobiographical memory. It may be no coincidence that most of my students and members of the colloquium are mature-aged, often in their forties or fifties, and it suggests that education for place responsiveness should prioritize work with childhood place memories, especially when working with mature-aged people.

Malpas' emphasis on the primacy of narrative in structuring experiences, a sense of self, taking action in the world, and place itself provides a philosophical foundation for working with story in place education (Cameron, Mulligan & Wheatly 2003; Hay 2001; Mulligan 2003). In addition to validating my use of 'a storied sense of place' in classes and workshops, his work suggests the value of exploring the interconnections between self, place, and action.

It is not simply a matter of place containing and being structured by stories – our very sense of who we are as individuals is a narrative connected intimately with place, Malpas says, and the possibility of our being able to take action is structured by narrative and place. Thus there may be value in encouraging students to consider notions of selfhood and capacity for action in narrative terms, and then relate those stories to significant places in their lives – something that some of them have done already.

More generally for education, Malpas' work suggests that whatever else place education does, it must begin to draw out the consequences of place being the structure that enables any human experiencing to occur. Place education becomes broadened and deepened by the understanding that coming to terms with the structures of our dwelling places, past and present, enables us to grasp how we structure our lives and sense of ourselves, as individuals and as members of a culture.

As Malpas' critique of Tuan implies, it is not enough to treat place as a vehicle for developing human responsiveness – the ability to listen, to engage deeply in relationship with other beings, to open the imagination and all the physical senses to another, and so on.

These abilities can be cultivated in a variety of ways, and it is a worthy thing to do, but it's only half the battle. The other half is to acknowledge the particular quality of the structure of place; any place, that is, and not just special sites. The challenge, perhaps, is to give practical expression to the view that the idea of place redefines the very frame within which education itself must be located.

Towards an Ethic of Place

Malpas' work, viewed in this way, might provide a philosophical grounding for Ingrid Stefanovic's (2000) place-based ethics that was recently reviewed in this newsletter by Kenneth Maly (2001). She is one of several recent writers who have explicitly considered what an ethics of place or a philosophy of place and experience might be (Callicott 1994; Fox 1990; Plumwood 1003, 2002; Salleh 1997; Singer 1975).

In rethinking sustainability, Stefanovic introduces the notion of 'place' into environmental ethics. She arrives at a place-based ethic that 'aims to guide us in our actions, not through the imposition of static principles and rules, but instead by teaching the meaning of attunement to a balanced fitting relation between human beings and their world' (p. 117). This ethic 'respects the bonds that tie us to our dwelling places but [is] one that allows for continuing dialogue as we collectively reflect on environmental questions of right and wrong' (p. 135).

Because I have journeyed through environmentalism to the phenomenology of place, I am particularly interested in Stefanovic's attempt to bring phenomenology to environmental ethics. It is noteworthy that she advocates an ethic that provides guidance through *teaching* the meaning of attunement and right relationship with the world.

She establishes the centrality of educational processes in a place-based ethics, and thus demonstrates the significance of place responsiveness work for an understanding of what an ethics of place might be in practice. She includes a section on phenomenology and environmental education that considers how to promote grounded ecological values, and takes up the relationship between critical thinking and place awareness.

In his review of Stefanovic's book, Maly (2001) draws out the tension in her work between attunement to being-in-place and environmental questions of right and wrong. Calling for an ethic to do both these things might be considered to be glossing over the inherent difficulties, except for the fact that Stefanovic provided specific examples of how this might be done.

Her third case study is particularly informative and describes involving the community of Short Hills Park in developing a 'bottom-up' environmental code of ethics for the park. She discusses her role as a phenomenologist in drawing out converging images of the park as well as critically analysing the value-laden and conflicting claims of participants. She concludes that:

> the iterative process of evolving a code of ethics for Short Hills Park does suggest the possibility that ethics is neither a linear product of philosophical theorizing nor merely a sociological accumulation of viewpoints. Rather, what emerged on this project was a role for philosophy of mediating between concrete place-based needs and critical thinking about the broader implications of how best to collectively reconcile those needs (p 169-170).

If the place-based needs are understood to arise from attunement to being-in-place, and the need for mediation stems out of critical thinking about different experiences and values regarding the park, then Stefanovic is working with the same dynamic between experience and critical awareness that I have been raising.

It is interesting to note that it is not a simple oppositional dynamic. As her discussion of education reveals, critical thinking about taken-for-granted experience is required in order for students to move beyond the 'natural attitude'. That is, depth experience and critical awareness are in creative tension, sometimes necessary for each other, sometimes apparently pulling students in different directions. Stefanovic's case study provides an example of how to work with this tension in a practical ethical setting.

It is significant that it was an *iterative* process, requiring the moving back and forth between identifying images and needs and reflecting upon emerging conflicts. It also was a *mediated* activity, necessitating someone outside the immediate community being able to hold the power of people's experiences and expressed needs as well as the conflict. The latter confirms our experience in the local research and the colloquia, and the former is a valuable addition to the criteria for successful place-based processes.

Narratives of Place

Narrative emerges from this discussion as a 'central organizing principle' of place and identity, although as Malpas reminds us, place both structures and is structured by narrative. The narratives that are embedded in a culture's landscapes and memory can be viewed both as stories that connect us and stories that make us different. Each point of view is helpful in breaking down the potential for local place relationships to be devalued by the experience of extraordinary places that appear to have their own special characteristics.

The fact that all places and all cultures have their narratives (about how country came into being and is maintained, how humans and non-humans are related, how conflicts are resolved, and so on) might be a starting point for a discussion about which narratives are dominant and why, and whether new narratives can be enacted.

Critical environmental and social awareness is clearly important to an ethical process that can occur at many different levels, from a code of ethics for a local park to national debates on reconciliation and place – which of the stories we tell ourselves and implicitly live by, or would like to live by, are more likely to lead to ecological sustainability and the flourishing of difference?

The central role for place education in any movement towards a sustainable society has been well established by Stefanovic. The tension in educational practice between facilitation of deep place experiences and reflecting upon them while maintaining critical awareness of their broader environmental and social implications, proves to be a significant and creative tension in the emerging field of place ethics.

Individual *and* collective learning need to take place, from experience *and* critical awareness of the structural issues, and both have to be included in an ethical place education.

A way forward is suggested by Stefanovic's mediated iterative process for group work and the suspension of outcome orientation and judgment to allow the experience to speak for itself prior to critical reflection for individual work.

Malpas observes that it is insufficient to use place experiences in an education for general human responsiveness. By implication, a genuine, ethical place education must enable students to learn the ways in which place itself makes human experience possible. A starting point is to accord childhood place memories greater significance in educational development and self-understanding.

An equally important step is to make more conscious those personal and cultural narratives that often subconsciously structure our sense of personal identity and sense of place. Such educational initiatives, like the practical experience of philosophers such as Stefanovic with local park residents, will assist in working through what an ethics of place might be in practice.

This review of Malpas' work and its connection with Stefanovic's research has focused only on its implications for place ethics and education. If indeed it is the complex structuring of place itself that makes any human experience possible at all, the implications for all fields of human endeavour are profound. This is not a simple deterministic view that we are creatures of place, but an understanding of the structural interdependencies of subjectivity, experience, memory and action within place.

It is something to become aware of, not to be taken for granted. What we do with—and in—the places within which we dwell and raise our children has everything to do with our humanity and our future.

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“Cezanne’s Doubt” and the Phenomenological Core: Thoughts on the Production of Art

David Wang

Wang is an Associate Professor of Architecture in the Interdisciplinary Design Institute at Washington State University at Spokane. Because of space requirements, some passages and notes in this essay relating to Kant’s theory of art have been shortened or removed; interested readers should contact Wang for the full discussion. davewang@wsu.edu. *© 2004 David Wang.*

Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s essay “Cezanne’s Doubt” details the struggles of an artist striving to produce a genuine and authentic art. Cezanne says, “the landscape thinks itself through me … I am its consciousness.” [1] Or again, “others … copy nature … we are attempting a piece of it.”[2]

Evident here is a certain desire, no doubt an excruciating one, in which the artist seeks to transcend the notion of art as mimesis in order to touch a higher reality with paint and canvas. That higher reality is the production of art, not as a human activity by means of propositions and concepts, but rather *as an organic production of nature itself*.

Building upon Merleau-Ponty’s analysis, this essay addresses two related themes. First, a claim is made that any production of art is at bottom complicit with the ability of the artist to allow nature to flow through him or her, as it were, so that the resulting art object may be considered a product of nature. In other words, it is suggested that Cezanne’s experience and his goal of producing art-as-nature is not unique but typical. This claim is not new; it is essentially a Kantian understanding of genius in general and of the production of fine art in particular.[3]

Second, it is argued that the production of art is a phenomenological reality in the following sense. The art object is the material residue of a *total* response of the being of the artist as that being is interwoven with the “nature” (to be defined) of the cosmos of his or her time. This total response is apperceptive and rooted in the immediate unity between artist and environment.

Because total and apperceptive, any accounting of this contact as a *cognitive* engagement (in the sense of determinate knowledge) is already a reduction of the original phenomenological immediacy. The center of this total response in the artist is called here the *phenomenological core* of the artist, and this essay posits that the production of any fine art must necessarily pass through it.

Merleau-Ponty on Cezanne

“Cezanne’s Doubt” is the first of three essays on art written by Merleau-Ponty. These three essays[4] serve as markers of the philosopher’s early, middle and late periods. Each essay shows the growing development of the central philosophical theme of Merleau-Ponty’s work: the ontological unity of the human being’s existence and his or her experience of the environment, and this by means of perception.

For Merleau-Ponty, existence and experience do not constitute a duality, as perhaps Descartes would have it; the *res cogitans* does not exist in a hermetically sealed realm, deliberating and giving definition to the *res extensa.* Instead, existence and experience are one: “… my body is a thing among things; it is one of them. It is caught in the fabric of the world … the world is made of the very stuff of the body...” [5]

Distinct from his early *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) and his posthumous *The Visible and Invisible* (1964), both of which offer a general philosophy on the unity of flesh and world via perception, the three essays on art constitute the arena

within which Merleau-Ponty explicitly addresses the implications of his theory for the realm of art.

More specifically, his three essays on art grapple with the implications of this unity for the *production* of the object of art (in lieu, perhaps, of merely addressing the experiencing of art objects). Merleau-Ponty's thesis is that the production of art, if it is to be art, is necessarily a manifestation of the unity of existence with experience: the art object is what comes out of that unity, perhaps what *erupts* out of that unity. This notion of *eruption* will be explained shortly.

It is in this light that we must understand Merleau-Ponty's interest in Cezanne. He does not intend to set Cezanne up as an unusual exception to the general case of how art objects are produced.

To read the first essay's summary of how strange Cezanne was in his personal behavior merely in this way (that is, as an unusual exception to the general case of how art is produced) would be to miss the point that Cezanne's behavior, indeed his whole life, constitute an example, an instantiation, of the *kind* of convolutions those preoccupied with the production of true art all go through.

Cezanne is given as an example of a larger thesis, which is that the production of art entails a striving of nature to find expression in material forms. The artist that makes this possible merely serves as the conduit, as it were, through which this organic production passes. He or she may suffer behavioral or lifestyle challenges that others could count as odd, in order for the "birthing" of the work of art to take place.

This usage of Cezanne not as an exception to a rule but rather as an exemplar of the typical case is buttressed by the lengthy digression into the life of Leonardo da Vinci at the end of "Cezanne's Doubt."[6] That is, the passages on da Vinci constitute no digression at all; Merleau-Ponty is merely offering another example of the typical case. Of course, Cezanne and da Vinci do not have identical life experiences. And we are told that every expression of nature through an artist is an unique expression made possible precisely by *that* artist and no other.[7] And from this position emerges a key to Merleau-Ponty's profound understanding of what "nature" means in the production of nature as art.

What he means is this: "nature" is more than just the physical furniture of trees, mountains, sky, vegetation, and so on. "Nature" includes the artist as a piece of nature; the artist is one with the furniture of the cosmos in a primordial way.[8] This is the first sense of what Merleau-Ponty means by "nature."

The second is this (and this point is reinforced by the da Vinci example): nature is also what and how the passage of time has *made* that artist. It is a reading of history as a *process* of nature; not history in some grand globalized sense, as Hegelian idealism would have it, but rather history in terms of the intimate but perhaps seemingly unrelated details of the artist's life through time—all of which contribute to the emergence of the object of art in some way.

And so da Vinci's childhood, the attack by the vulture in his crib, his abandonment by his father, his obsequious devotion to his mother, and so on, all become the stuff of "nature" that emerges in his art.

Kant's Contribution

What Kant contributes to this idea of the art object emerging from the artist as a product of nature is found in his analysis of genius and fine art in the *Critique of Judgment*. Simply put, Kant provides a means by which to understand *how* the production of art-as-nature comes about, something that Merleau-Ponty does not in fact explain.

Kant's "critical philosophy," of which the *Critique of Judgment* is a part, assesses how theoretical knowledge, moral determinations, and aesthetic preferences are all possible in human experience. It gives us a glimpse—at least as Kant sees it—of the internal human cognitive faculties and their various operations that bring about the different modes of human cognition and judgment (theoretical, moral and aesthetic).

First, Kant holds that aesthetic pleasure ensues in human experience when the human cognitive faculties are in *play*.[9] This is when the faculties, chief among them the imagination, senses that the order of an external display[10] is in harmony with the orderly nature of the internal faculties (which include the faculties of understanding, of sensibility, of the moral realm, and of course, of the imagination). Kant regards this harmony between the inter-

nal human faculties and the external display as "the whole of nature regarded as a system that includes man as a member..."[11] There is a resonance between this derivation and Merleau-Ponty's theory of the unity of flesh and world.

Aesthetic play occurs because, rather than only the faculty of understanding arriving upon a fact-of-the-case determination (e.g., "this is a butterfly"), the sensed external display (the butterfly) is also presented to the faculty of imagination,[12] and an aesthetic judgment ("this is a *beautiful* butterfly") ensues. The play of the faculties, an essentially indeterminate reality, emerges from this, and aesthetic pleasure is the result.

Second, Kant holds that, during the play of the faculties, due to the "purposive momentum" of that play, *aesthetic ideas*[13] emerge in the faculty of imagination. These, along with rational ideas,[14] contribute to the imagination's tremendously powerful creative ability.[15] Indeed, Kant says that the imagination "... is very powerful in the creation of another nature, as it were, out of the material that actual nature gives to it."[16]

The end result is the production of the work of art, which, even though the object itself was produced by the artist with "a determinate intention," the thing *looks* like a production of nature, because the faculties are able to *over*look the propositional aspect of its creation. [17]

Now, Kant defines genius as "the innate mental predisposition ... through which nature gives the rule to art."[18] The "rule" cannot come from the art object itself, in which case art production would merely be a process of copying. Nor can it come from the artist only, in which case art would be purely a determinate composition.

Kant therefore says that "... *it must be nature in the subject* that gives the rule to art ..."[19] This is how works of art differ from scientific discoveries. For example, once the genius of a Newton discovers certain scientific principles, those principles become rules which could be used again and again by others, independent of Newton.

But the skill of the artistic genius cannot be communicated; rather, it "dies with him, until some day nature again endows someone else in the same way ..."[20] Art objects, then, could never be held as standards of imitation by others wishing also to produce art. The apprentice could only look to the master's works as models, hoping that "nature has provided [him] with a similar proportion in his mental powers"[21] to produce original expressions of genius.

The Phenomenological Core

This paper now posits the *phenomenological core* as the technical term that describes the locus within the artist *through which nature passes* in the production of objects of art from that artist. This notion draws material from both Merleau-Ponty, in his specific examples of Cezanne and da Vinci, and Kant, in his general observations on nature's role in the production of any fine art, to formulate a single explanatory schema.

For his part, Merleau-Ponty cites Cezanne's prescient statements as to what his goals in painting were (e.g., "we are attempting a piece of nature," etc.) without explicitly explaining how this process happens. On the other hand, Kant, as it were, opens up to view the "black box" in which that precise process takes place within the artist, but is perhaps a little weak on offering examples.[22]

The term "phenomenological core" emphasizes the essentially phenomenological character of the production of art. By "phenomenological" is meant the pre-cognitive reality of the artist's immediate engagement with his or her surrounds. This includes the percolations of aesthetic and rational ideas within the artist (and Kant situates the origins of both kinds of ideas in regions beyond the reach of cognitive determination)[23] that contribute to the production of objects of art from that artist.

That the art object is phenomenological may be understood in the sense that it is possible to overlook in it the processes of determinate reason; in other words, that it is able to communicate some of that primordial *natural* character of the sources from which it came.[24]

But "phenomenological" also includes the reality of how the artist's past, in terms of his or her personal history through time, has uniquely defined that artist's ability to create art. This refers back to Merleau-Ponty's thesis, that even though the art object is a production of nature, nature still requires

this particular artist to produce art in just *this* particular way.[25]

Why is this? Again, on Kant's explanation, aesthetic ideas are the result of the purposive momentum that is generated during aesthetic pleasure, which is in turn the result of the mental faculties in harmonious play. What this tells us is that the empirical concepts that reside in the faculty of understanding[26]—that faculty so essential to determinate judgments—are nevertheless included during the indeterminate play of the faculties in aesthetic pleasure. This results in unique expressions of "nature" as the art object emerges.

In other words, "nature," as it works its way through the artist, includes the impressions of the events of what Merleau-Ponty calls the artist's "secret history"[27] as part of its trajectory. And so da Vinci's childhood experience with the vulture in his crib becomes a fact of nature, as it were, in his particular case that is instantiated in the work *Saint Anne, the Virgin and Child*.[28]

Finally, the phenomenological core is apperceptive in the Kantian sense. This is a term that Merleau-Ponty picks up on when he cites Cezanne: "… art is a personal apperception, which I embody in sensations and which I ask the understanding to organize into a painting."[29] Again, Cezanne's insight is clear: apperception is *a priori* to the understanding's task of "organizing" a painting.

What is apperception? For Kant, it is the ability of the mental faculties to unify all external appearances into a single reality. It is the "original unchangeable consciousness" that "precedes all experience, and … makes experience possible."[30] And it is just because the constitution of the human faculties are able to give apperceptive unity to external displays, without cognitively *deciding* to do so, that we could say that apperceptive ability is the most primordial connection between the human being and nature.

This is why Cezanne wished to "forget all he had ever learned from science…"[31] in order to be able to create his pieces of nature; he wanted to return to the primordial natural reality, via apperception, prior to any cognitive determinations.

The phenomenological core proposed here, then, groups all the above considerations into one conceptual schema for the purposes of focusing the discussion on the production of art that both Merleau-Ponty and Kant brings to us, each in his own way. Art emerges from the artist via that artist's phenomenological core.

And this emergence from the phenomenological core represents the totality of the artist's being, insofar as the production of art from that artist's being is concerned. The apperceptive unity of all that the artist is in terms of empirical concepts accrued over time, the artist's "secret history," the play of all of the faculties, the aesthetic ideas of the imagination, and so on, all contribute to an *eruption* that results, mysteriously, powerfully, incomprehensibly, in a work of art.

Art as Eruption

But still, why the eruption? Given all that the mental faculties undergo in terms of aesthetic pleasure, why does anything *need* to be materially expressed? Why could not the artist merely enjoy the pleasure within her as something of a secret and closeted joy just for herself? Why must the pleasure result in a public work, put forth, launched, *erupted*, out of her being, ultimately going on to have a history of its own, independent of her?

There are two answers for this, one rooted in the nature of the internal human faculties, the other rooted in nature as such. As to the internal faculties, Kant tells us that it is their fundamental nature to reach to ever larger realms of comprehension and experience.[32]

In short, human reason[33] is motivated to know and to expand in knowledge beyond the bounds of any current state it happens to be in. Insofar as *this* necessity to expand is concerned, it is as *a priori* as any formulation within the Kantian system.

Human history is replete with examples of great leaps forward in the expansion of the human faculties' command of experience: consider Einstein's relativity theory or da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. These two examples illustrate that, at these frontiers of reason, scientific and aesthetic boundaries tend to become blurred and vague, even though the ideas of the former are perhaps rooted in the faculty of understanding, while that of the latter are rooted in the imagination.

The eruption of art is part and parcel of this larger motivation of the human faculties to increase its scope of knowledge and experience. It is necessarily an attempt to *communicate* meaning, and not just to privately revel in it. Perhaps, if we are to follow Wittgenstein, it is even doubtful that a purely private meaning is even possible. Communication and the urge to communicate are all consuming.

The second answer for the necessary eruption of art is just the teeming life of nature itself. Kant notes that nature is not only orderly as a system, but it also has a purpose which is expressed as a *formative* force:

"… a machine has only motive force. But an organized being has within it formative force, and a formative force that this being imparts to the kinds of matter that lack it (thereby organizing them). This force is therefore a formative force that propagates itself—a force that a mere ability of one thing to move another (i.e. as mechanism) cannot explain…"[34]

What Kant is saying is that the organic beings of nature, chief among them the human being, do not only exist in and as nature; they also have an ability to *produce* nature as part and parcel of their existence. In short, trees grow, birds hatch, humans produce art. It is an amazing thing to note that every human culture produces art as an unreflective necessity of its existence. Objects of art are always already there, as evidence of the fact of human existence in the cosmos.

The phenomenological core, then, is a single conceptual schema that intersects all of the Kantian faculties but is not resident exclusively in any one of them. It is a name given to the total sum of the set of factors, resident within the human subject, that contribute towards the emergence of a work of art from the being of the artist. It is through the phenomenological core that nature works to find expression in art.

A Phenomenological Bridge

The irony must be noted in this coupling of Merleau-Ponty's analysis of Cezanne and da Vinci with Kant's aesthetic theory. Kant's aesthetic theory resides in that larger system which he has called the critical philosophy. This system posits the well-known Kantian position that the "thing-in-itself" is not knowable. We could only know appearances of things because, by the time the sensed display is "cognized," our faculties have already processed it.

Hence the original "thing-in-itself" is forever veiled. On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty's goal was nothing but a description of how nature is able to produce the original expression of art as a "piece" of itself, and how the artist (e.g., a Cezanne or a da Vinci) is able to access those mysterious powers for the purposes of realizing this production. How could these two factors be rectified?

Two responses could be made. The first is the frank assessment that Kant himself became less strict on the impossibility of knowing the "thing-in-itself" as his thinking evolved from the first *Critique* to the third. This is not to say that he ever recanted on this claim; but it is to say that the third *Critique* is filled with deference to the need for the supersensible to undergird any possibility of coherence in the realm of the knowable.[35]

The second is this: for Kant, the realm of the production of art is precisely where a connection with the supersensible becomes necessary if a formulation for its possibility (that is, for the possibility of the production of art) is to be proposed. In other words, for Kant, the production of art is a *phenomenological* reality in the sense that Merleau-Ponty would have it: it is a process that is dependent upon a pre-cognitive reality.

Kant's words on this, unfortunately dense, nevertheless convey his point. For example, he speaks of the harmony between the external display and the internal faculties as experienced "*a priori* rather than empirically." He goes on: when an artist produces a figure… "[s/he] introduces the purposiveness into the figure… into [her] own way of presenting something that is given…, *whatever it may be in itself*." The artist "needs no special purpose outside [of her] in the object to account for that purposive harmony…" And the end effect of "the presentation"—that is, the produced object—is admiration: "an entirely *natural* effect of that purposiveness observed in the nature of things as appearances…[36]

The art object may indeed still be accessed only as appearance, but that appearance has the indeterminate look of the supersensible to it. In this way, the art object may be regarded as a bridge between

the determinate realm and the indeterminate, perhaps even the noumenal, realm.

What Kant means to say in all of this, then, is simply that his aesthetic theory could account for art as a production of nature through the being of the artist. Even though the end result is still an appearance of the art object, it is nevertheless entirely a natural effect because it was entirely a natural process. And that is why we admire works of art.[37]

The point is that the process bypasses, or at least trumps, any primary dependence upon cognitive reductions in the understanding only. Instead, it is able to harness the connections to the supersensible deep within the human faculties.

What Merleau-Ponty clarifies by giving us the examples of Cezanne and da Vinci is that this connection to the supersensible is synonymous with a connection to nature. And so the artist strives to be "nature's consciousness," and the end product of that striving is a piece of nature.

Notes

1 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, "Cezanne's Doubt" in Galen A. Johnson, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993), p. 67.

2 Merleau-Ponty, "Cezanne's Doubt" in *ibid*, p. 62.

3 Kant's thought on genius and his idea of fine art as the production of nature may be found in his *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Warner S. Pluhar. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987).

4 The three essays are "Cezanne's Doubt," "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence," and "Eye and Mind," (1961).

5 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. "Eye and Mind" (1961) in *ibid.,* pp. 124-125.

6 Merleau-Ponty, "Cezanne's Doubt" *ibid.*, pp. 68, 72-75.

7 Merleau-Ponty, "Cezanne's Doubt" *ibid.*, p. 70. "Although it is certain that a person's life does not *explain* his work, it is equally certain that the two are connected. The truth is that *that work to be done called for that life*…"

8 Merleau-Ponty, "Cezanne's Doubt" *ibid.*, p. 65.

9 Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*, 1790. trans. Warner S. Pluhar. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987). Sec. 9, 217.

10 The Kantian term for this is "intuition," which is received by the sensibility. Cognition arises when the categories of the faculty of understanding determine what the sensed intuition is (e.g., "this is a butterfly," etc).

11 Kant. *Critique of Judgment*, *op.cit.* Sec. 67, 380.

12 Kant. *Critique of Judgment*, *op.cit.* Sec. 1, 203.

13 Kant. *Critique of Judgment*, *ibid.,* Sec. 49, 315. See also Sec. 57, Comment I, 342.

14 Kant. *Critique of Judgment*, *ibid.* Sec. 49, 314.

15 The imagination's creative powers are analyzed in Makkreel, Rudolf A. *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 30, 88-107, 119.

16 Kant. *Critique of Judgment*, *op.cit.* Sec. 57, 189.

17 Kant. *Critique of Judgment*, *ibid.* Sec. 45, 306, 307.

18 Kant. *Critique of Judgment*, *ibid.* Sec. 46, 307.

19 Kant. *Critique of Judgment*, *ibid.* Sec. 46, 307. Italics added.

20 Kant. *Critique of Judgment*, *ibid.* Sec. 47, 308, 309.

21 Kant. *Critique of Judgment*, *ibid.* Sec. 47, 309.

22 Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781. trans. Norman Kemp Smith. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965). In the Preface to the first edition of this "first Critique," Kant almost prides himself in not offering illustrative examples, suggesting that the amount of writing needed for presenting just the theoretical contours of his system will require many pages.

23 For example, the rational idea "can never become cognition because it contains a concept of the supersensible for which no adequate intuition can ever be given." *Critique of Judgment, op.cit*, Sec. 57, Comment I, 342.

24 "Countering with the distinctions of soul and body, thought and vision is of no use here, for Cezanne returns to just that primordial experience from which these notions are derived and in which they are inseparable. The painter who conceptualizes and seeks the expression first misses the mystery—renewed every time we look at someone—of a person's appearing in nature…" Merleau-Ponty, "Cezanne's Doubt" *op.cit.*, p. 66.

25 Merleau-Ponty, "Cezanne's Doubt" *ibid.*, p. 70.

26 Again, space does not provide a detailed explanation of Kant's mapping of the faculty of understanding. Suffice it to say that in this faculty resides both the transcendental a priori categories (or the pure concepts of the understanding) which are innate as well as the empirical concepts that accrue in any person's life experiences through time.

27 Merleau-Ponty, "Cezanne's Doubt" *op.cit.*, p. 73.

28 Merleau-Ponty, "Cezanne's Doubt" *ibid.*, pp. 72-13.

29 Merleau-Ponty, "Cezanne's Doubt" *ibid.*, p. 63..

30 Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason, op.cit*., A107.

31 Merleau-Ponty, "Cezanne's Doubt" *op. cit.*, p. 67.

32 This point is made by Kant throughout his *Critiques*..

33 In Kant, "reason" is often taken to mean the disposition of the totality of the mental faculties.

34 Kant. *Critique of Judgment*, *op. cit.* Sec. 65, 374.

35 With each *Critique,* the dependence upon the supersensible realm increases, so much so that the existence of God, ruled out in the first *Critique,* is pretty much allowed back in as "the legislating sovereign in a moral kingdom of purposes" in the third.

36 Kant. *Critique of Judgment*, *ibid.* Sec. 62, 365, italics added.