



# Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology

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As readers know, 2014 marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *EAP*. In celebration, we are planning a special fall issue composed of commentaries by researchers associated with work in phenomenology, broadly; and environmental and architectural phenomenology, specifically. Depending on the number of commentaries received, this special *EAP* may become a double issue. We'll only know once we begin its assembly, in late summer.

This issue includes four essays. In describing the phenomenon of “running-with-a-stroller,” psychologist **Tomoaki Imamichi** makes a contribution to what might be called “everyday phenomenology.”

Second, geographer **Jacob Sowers** draws on a phenomenological approach to explore the unique character and ambience of southern California’s “Wonder Valley,” an unusual place inhabited by three different lifestyle groups that Jacobs identifies as “homesteaders,” “dystopics,” and “utopics.”

In the third essay this issue, independent researcher **Stephen Wood** probes his interest in place attachment by examining two lived dialectics: the *spatial* tension between inward and outward aspects of place; and the *temporal* tension between repetitive and singular events relating to place. In closing out this issue, environmental educator **John Cameron** writes a ninth “letter” from his island home off the coast of Tasmania. Drawing on an unusual environ-

mental encounter with “phosphorescence,” Cameron ponders the difficult lived and conceptual tension between understanding and imagination.



*Left: Coastal scene, Bruny Island, Tasmania. See John Cameron's essay, p. 17. This photograph and those on p. 19 and p. 21 are by Vicki King, John Cameron's life partner. Other images of King's artistic work are included in several past EAPs—see fall and winter 2012; and spring and winter 2010.*

## More Donors, 2014

We gratefully thank the following readers who, since the winter 2014 issue, have contributed more than the base subscription for 2014: **Suzanne Bott; Julio Bermudez; Robert Habiger; Robert Mugerauer; Jenny Quillien; Justin Winkler; and Craig Holdrege** and the **Nature Institute**.

## Items of Interest

The **International Coalition of North American Phenomenologists (ICNAP)** will hold their sixth annual conference at St. Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri, May 23–25. Committed to facilitating interdisciplinary connections with original works in phenomenology, the group highlights at the sixth conference, “Phenomenology and the Social World.” The emphasis is “theoretical and applied expositions of the social world understood phenomenologically.” The conference description reads in part: “The social world may be approached as a relational phenomenon, crated, sustained, and changed by virtue of (1) interpersonal relationships; (2) intersubjectivity; (3) institutions practices; and (4) as trajectories of historical and cultural influence.” [www.icnap.org/](http://www.icnap.org/).

The conference, **Space and Place: Exploring Critical Issues**, will be held September 3–5, 2014 at Mansfield College, Oxford University, Oxford, UK. Conference organizers hope to “open a dialogue about the politics and practices of space and place.” They seek contributions from all disciplines. The conference will include traditional papers, paper panels, workshops, and “other forms of performance.” Contact organizing chairs **Matt Melia** and **Harris Breslow**: [mattandharris@inter-disciplinary.net](mailto:mattandharris@inter-disciplinary.net); and Rob Fisher: [sp5@inter-disciplinary.net](mailto:sp5@inter-disciplinary.net).

The **Nature Institute** is offering two summer courses for 2014: first, “Reading in the Book of Nature: Enlivening Observation and Thinking through Plant Study,” taught by biologist **Craig Holdrege**, science teacher **Henrike Holdrege**, and artist **Patrick Stolfo** (June 29–July 5); and “Dynamic Embryology and Morphology,” taught by anatomist **Jaap van der Wal** (July 31–August 3). [www.natureinstitute.org](http://www.natureinstitute.org).

## “Human Bodies in Material Space”

The September 2013 issue of the *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment* focuses on the theme of “human bodies in material space.” In her “Editorial,” *JHRE* Editor **Anna Grear** calls for “a renewing transformation of our deepest sense of who ‘we’ are as earthlings amongst other earthlings and earth systems.” One crucial task in the field of law, she suggests is “to create space for the materialities of human embodied existence—in a lively world of beings and systems, scenes and contexts, environments and ecosystems—to feature much more potently in our ethic-judicial deliberations and structures.” She concludes that the articles in this special issue contribute to “a thoroughly embodiment-centered, ecologically-open reflection upon human situatedness in a vulnerable living order.”

Articles in the issue include **Haydn Davies’s** “Environmental Justice and Equal Protection: Intent, Motivation and Cognition in Decision-Making”; **Vito De Lucia’s** “Toward an Ecological Philosophy of Law: Intent, Motivation, and Cognition in Decision-Making”; **David Seamon’s** “Lived Bodies, Place, and Phenomenology: Implications for Human Rights and Environmental Justice”; and **Burns H. Weston** and **David Bollier’s** “Toward a Recalibrated Human Right to a Clean and Healthy Environment: Making the Conceptual Transition.” [www.elgaronline.com/view/journals/jhre/4-2/jhre.2013.4.issue-2.xml](http://www.elgaronline.com/view/journals/jhre/4-2/jhre.2013.4.issue-2.xml).

## Citations Received

**Susan Power Bratton, 2012.** *The Spirit of the Appalachian Trail: Community, Environment, and Belief on a Long-Distance Hiking Trail*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

This theologian examines “how long-distance walking might enhance spiritual wellness. The research design assumes that hikers of different religious preferences, levels of religious commitment, and generations may experience a mega-hike or extended wilderness sojourn in different ways.” The study context is hikers’ experience of the 2,180-mile-long Appalachian Trail.

**Andres Duany and Emily Talen, eds., 2013. *Landscape Urbanism and its Discontents: Dissimulating the Sustainable City*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.**

This edited collection examines the contentious debate between “landscape urbanism” (advocating an emphasis on “ever-evolving, unstable ecosystems and their rapid changes and dynamic oscillations that overturn or rattle longer periods of static equilibrium”) and “new urbanism” (a model of community design and planning emphasizing walkable, mixed use neighborhoods of common architectural style). Contributors to the 18 chapters argue for one position or the other (most support new urbanism). A few authors suggest that there might be points of agreement between the two approaches, though several contributors eschew compromise. Chapters include “Landscape Urbanism, New Urbanism and the Environmental Paradox of Cities” (**Doug Kelbaugh**); “The Social Apathy of Landscape Urbanism” (**Emily Talen**); “Landscape Urbanism: Supplement or Substitute?” (**Paul Murrain**); and “Art Vitiating Life” (**Michael Mehaffy**).

To indicate the lively and often embittered controversy running through the volume, we include, in the sidebar, right, a portion of landscape critic **James Howard Kunstler’s** bombastic but entertaining chapter, “The Zombies of Gund Hall Go Forth and Eat America’s Brains.” Gund Hall, by the way, houses Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design (GSD), a primary villain in Kunstler’s account of the situation.

**Leif Jerram, 2011. *Streetlife: The Untold History of Europe’s Twentieth Century*. NY: Oxford Univ. Press.**

This historian “tells the story of Europe’s twentieth century from the point of view of the street corners, bars, factories, squares and living rooms in which it happened.” He writes: “‘Where’ matters. The physical spaces matter—the layout of rooms the relationships of things, the distances between, the temperature, the lines of sight. And the values of a place matter—the ideas it bears, from danger to fun, from sick to healthy, from sacred to profane.” Jerram considers five transformations “from the point of view of some of the spaces and places which dominated that transformation and where the big histories of great individuals and the small histories of ‘ordinary’ people came together...”: politics, women’s experiences; culture; sexual identity; and urban design, policy, and planning.

**M. Reza Shirazi, 2014. *Towards an Articulated Phenomenological Interpretation of Architecture*. London: Routledge.**

This architect draws on the work of Christian Norberg-Schulz, Kenneth Frampton, Juhani Pallasmaa, and Steven Holl to consider “the contemporary status of phenomenological discourse in architecture.” Shirazi argues that, although there are con-

trasting and sometimes contradictory approaches to “architectural phenomenology,” there are commonalities that he identifies through 36 themes that he describes as “the hidden chain that connects all the varieties of architectural phenomenology together and constitutes the general structure of the discipline”—e.g., multisensory experience (no. 18), spirit of place (no. 27), materiality (no. 33), and phenomenal zones (no. 36).

### **“Menacing porches and picket fences...”**

[An anxiety in relation to the 1990s successes of New Urbanism] was most acute at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD), the Vatican of modernism. After more than seven decades and countless iterations of dogma, and a vast record of built mistakes, it had little left to offer but a pretense of ideological correctness, in particular that it represented “the cutting edge” of design innovation reaching toward an ever-more technologically dazzling future. The New Urbanism (NU) especially galled it, with its menacing porches and picket fences, those totems of bourgeois small-mindedness. Eventually, the GSD folk began to grok that the NU was about way more than these minor details, but rather a wholesale reordering of the human habitat into a coherent and comprehensible design theory that ran from the relations between buildings to the ordering of streets, neighborhoods and regions....

In elite architectural circles, mystification was the supreme weapon wielded by their warriors-of-the-cutting-edge. Harvard’s Aegnor at the time was **Rem Koolhaas**, the Dutch architect who used mystification the way Stanford White had used a T-square. Koolhaas viewed the predicaments of overpopulation, resource depletion, financial instability, and consumerism as fundamentally hopeless, and had adopted the career strategy of going with the flow of the entropic zeitgeist, with all its delirious confusion. Hence the buildings he designed were intended to confound people who used them or saw them, to produce a delicious sense of anxiety, the characteristic emotion of the era....

[In 2009, to counter the growing impact of New Urbanism in urban-design circles], the Harvard GSD found its avatar in **Charles Waldheim**, an associate dean at the University of Toronto, a sedulous contributor to the professional journals, and an especially deft theorist conversant with all the post-structuralist lingo that had infested the humanities and fine arts programs since the 1970s. He had conveniently coined the term “Landscape Urbanism” as a way to make the profession [of Landscape Architecture] seem more up-to-date, edgy, and sexy, and in him Harvard found the perfect field marshal to carve out some of its own territory on the battlefield of urban design, where, so far, it had been subject only to humiliation.

He came out swinging immediately with an overt declaration that his new field was a “critique of the disciplinary and professional commitments of traditional urban design and an alternative to ‘New Urbanism.’” He accused the NU of failing “to come to terms with the rapid pace of urban change and the essentially horizontal character of contemporary automobile-based urbanization across North American and Much of Western Europe”.... Waldeim assumed that the *horizontal* spewage of sprawl would continue indefinitely and that there was no need to arrest it, merely a charge to refine and improve it. He showed next-to-zero awareness of the global energy resource quandary, or its relation to the disorders of capital formation and all the related dilemmas of epochal economic contradiction.

In essence, he was enlisted to serve Harvard’s chief institutional aim: defense of the status quo, that is, the cherished old dogmas of modernism. The giveaway was in his statement that LU amounted to “a critical and historically informed rereading of the environmental and social aspirations of modernist planning and its most successful models.”

—James Howard Kunstler, pp. 125–26; 133–34

# The World Experienced through a Stroller

Tomoaki D. Imamichi

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*Imamichi is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at the City University of New York at LaGuardia Community College. Specializing in social and environmental psychology, he describes his research interests as “the transformations of person-environment relations and how people deal with challenging tasks and environments.” As the following essay and 2012 photograph, below, demonstrate, he enjoys running with his daughters Luna (three years old in 2012) and Stella (one year old). The author thanks Dr. Rebio Diaz for his comments and suggestions. [imamichi@gmail.com](mailto:imamichi@gmail.com) © 2014 Tomo Imamichi.*

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No, I do not ride in strollers. I push them. And pushing them changes one’s perception of the world. To use a phenomenological phrasing, it changes one’s way of being-in-the-world. I experienced this particularly in the beginning as I relearned how to navigate the world with a stroller—a double stroller, to be exact. The world that I took for granted and related to in a non-self-conscious way—what Heidegger termed *Zuhanden*, or “ready-to-hand”—shifted in a self-conscious way to what Heidegger termed *Vorhanden*, or “present-at-hand” (Heidegger 1962).

When I run with a stroller, stairs become obstacles and I look for ramps and elevators. Narrow pathways and entrances become challenges. I give directed attention to all these things I was not concerned with before, when I ran alone. I’ve quickly realized the importance of universal design and feel frustrated when the environment impedes accessibility.

Articles on bicycle commuting (Wong 2005) and distance runners (Hockey & Allen-Collinson 2006) inspired me to explore a phenomenology of “running-with-a-stroller.” I examine this phenomenon via a first-person phenomenological method (Seamon 2000). My phenomenology is colored by my multiple identities as a runner, scientist, and parent (Rogers 1955). What I examine phenomenologically is not merely strolling but *running with a stroller*.

At first, running with a stroller seemed inconceivable, since running

in a city even *without* a stroller poses many challenges. Running-with-a-stroller has allowed me to fulfill multiple goals more or less simultaneously: I can run, take care of the kids (who, I may be projecting, enjoy the rides), and give my spouse a break. And I get to ponder about things to write. A win-win situation for all parties involved!

Running-with-a-stroller, compared to running-without-a-stroller, shifts things: Accelerating, breaking, dealing with curbs and hills—every maneuver requires more physical and psychological effort. One’s running route suddenly becomes more taxing and complex, particularly uphill and curb-wise.

The affordances of a place—i.e., the environmental characteristics involving action possibilities (Gibson 1979)—are perceived differently. One example is surfaces, which are not only recognized differently but become *different* surfaces. They activate different meanings if traversed with or without running with a stroller. Without the stroller, my primary concern is “step-on” and “step-over” convenience, which shifts with the stroller to “roll-on” and “roll-over” convenience, particularly with curbs and potholes. I must also keep in mind “fit-on” and “fit-through” convenience, particularly with poles and narrow sidewalks.

The world, however, does not consist only of inanimate objects. For an urban runner, this fact means weaving through pedestrians on the sidewalk or watching for cyclists and motorists on





the street. He estimates both spacing and timing. He pays heed to additional weight, length, width, and limited maneuverability. He is alert to seizing a window of opportunity for passability and cross-overability. Running-with-a-stroller also requires more personal space—the minimal comfortable spacing between oneself and others (Hall 1966). I not only adjust by giving myself additional space and time. Others give me special consideration by offering extra time and space because of my status of running-with-a-stroller.

**B**ut it is not just running-with-a-stroller—it is “running-with-a-stroller-with-children.” I am responsible for my own safety and for the safety of my two children. The weight of a stroller-with-children is not literal but the responsibility for the precious cargo. I am physically restrained by the presence of the stroller and psychologically restrained by the presence of the children.

I am less willing to take risks and am more vigilant of potential dangers. As traffic approaches from behind, I listen carefully. I can almost tell the car make, its speed, distance, and clearance. Faster speed is tolerable if compensated by greater distance, and less distance is tolerable if compensated by lower speed. My sensing is an integration of auditory information, peripheral to semi-peripheral vision, and the feel of air turbulence of a passing vehicle.

Running alone, I accept all kinds of conditions that disallow running with the stroller. Extreme weather makes the run more risky and subjects my children to conditions compromising their comfort, despite blankets, warm clothes, and a weather shield for the wind, rain, and cold. I cannot judge by my own body: As I run and get warm, my passengers may get cold, and I cut short my run.

**A**s one accumulates experience running-with-a-stroller, he learns subtle tricks making the experience more efficient: reducing time to complete regular routes because he has mastered effective ways to navigate an environment that was originally “new.” The body-stroller-environment relationship becomes second nature. One no longer thinks about moves that are now “automatic” and “handy.” One example is the “front-wheel-lift” whereby, to make a sharp turn, I put my weight on the handle bar to raise the stroller’s front wheels. Coupled with a “back-

wheel-lift” quickly following, this front-wheel-lift allows me to conquer curbs, whether up or down.

As this example suggest, the stroller becomes part of my “body-schema”—a pre-reflective awareness of my body’s spatial relationships and abilities (Gallagher, 2005). In advanced running-with-a-stroller, the body-schema involves my “body-with-the-stroller.” I become more aware of what my body-with-the-stroller can do. My lived relationship with the stroller shifts from a *Vorhanden* state (where the stroller is perceived as an object separate from self) to a *Zuhanden* state (where the stroller and I are “joined”). The stroller becomes invisible and recedes into the background, a situation of mundane technology (Michael 2000). With properly inflated tires and correct alignment of the front wheel, the stroller rolls almost by itself, particularly on a well-paved street whereby I experience what Heidegger called *Werkzeugzusammenhang*—the synchronicity of experience and technology.

In many ways, the stroller enhances my running. I learn subtle tricks to take advantage of running-with-a-stroller: As my legs tire, I do “the lean,” putting some of my weight on the sides of the stroller’s handlebars to remove a bit of weight from my legs. At times, I feel I am not pushing the stroller but that the stroller pulls me. In the back pocket of the stroller, I store food, drink, and clothing that can be accessed without a stop. A perfect tool for a long run. The more I become accustomed to running with a stroller, the more it seems strange when I run without it!

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# Wonder Valley

## Place and Paradox

Jacob Sowers

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*Sowers is an Assistant Professor and coordinator of the Geography program at North Dakota's Minot State University. His research interests focus on place experience, specifically attachment, identity, and sense of place as they relate to sustaining dwelling within ecotonal communities. His current research examines how everyday sacred places can provide rootedness for the communities experiencing great social and economic changes because of the Bakken oil boom in western North Dakota. [jacob.sowers@minotstateu.edu](mailto:jacob.sowers@minotstateu.edu). © 2014 Jacob Sowers.*

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No one is quite sure when the vast arid landscape east of Twentynine Palms, California, first became known as Wonder Valley, or even exactly why it was named such. Interviews and textual evidence suggest that the origins of the community's name perhaps lie with Mr. Schooler, a retired Marine and one of the first residents of the area. It is said by some that his description for the area in the late 1950s of "what a wonder of a valley" gained popularity and eventually was shortened to "wonder valley." During this time, the area experienced rapid population growth, and residents began to think of themselves as living in a defined place—a community enclave—within desert space. Somehow, this internal cohesiveness and feeling of separateness from neighboring Twentynine Palms, coupled with Schooler's aphorism, led some anonymous individuals in the early 1960s to place a sign, "Welcome to Wonder Valley," on Adobe Road at the eastern city limits of Twentynine Palms.

Although Wonder Valley's exact etymology and the specific beginnings of community consciousness are unclear, it is certain that Wonder Valley and countless other western desert communities arose largely



because of the Small Tract Act (STA) of 1938. The STA allowed for the disposal of two-and-a-half to five-acre allotments of federal land in the American West. The greatest concentration of these tracts was released to the public just east of Twentynine Palms in what is now Wonder Valley. It is only in this area that an extensive "jackrabbit homestead" landscape and a distinct sense of community still exists.

### Encounters with Wonder Valley

I first encountered Wonder Valley in 1994 during Christmas vacation as a teenager, when I traveled from my Illinois home to my grandparent's newly restored winter house. Because my grandparents met me at the Palm Springs airport well after dusk, I was unable to view any of the surroundings during the late night ride along Highway 62 to their Wonder Valley cabin.

The following morning I opened the bedroom-window shades and squinted eastward into the rising sun's nearly blinding glare. I instantly realized I was in the midst of a landscape that was completely foreign to me. It was during this moment that I first felt the paradoxical power of this place. There was just something about it that both comforted and frightened me—drew me toward it but also pushed me away. It was

strange and yet beautiful.

During my first time there (as often also happens with visitors to Wonder Valley), I became completely obsessed with this place. On subsequent visits, my curiosity reached such a vexing crescendo that I decided to become a geographer and make studying places my profession. Through this focus, I could perhaps unravel the mysterious essence of Wonder Valley and other intriguing places.

Over the next decade as I traveled to other locales for study and pleasure, I came to realize that Wonder Valley's place identity had yet to be duplicated. At first glance, Wonder Valley's landscape appeared disarrayed and chaotic. Over time, however, I came to recognize that Wonder Valley had an unexplained order. The place is unusual, not because of its disorder, which can be expected in a rural desert landscape. Rather, Wonder Valley is unusual and thus a place of interest because it presents some type of order where one would more likely expect chaos—the desert is the ultimate manifestation of empty space, and thus many times portrayed as the antithesis of place and dwelling.

Paradoxically, Wonder Valley is out of place simply by existing and being a place! As philosopher Max Scheler explained, “To find one's place in the world, the world must be a cosmos. In chaos there is

no place.” In studying Wonder Valley more intensively, I came to realize that the story of this unusual community and the accounts of those who call it home needed to be explored and better understood (Sowers 2010).

## Modes of Place Identity

Philosopher Gabriel Marcel contended that individuals are not distinct from their place; rather, *they are that place*. To clarify the place identity of Wonder Valley, I drew on phenomenological geographer Edward Relph's *Place and Placelessness*, which provides a language whereby I could identify modes of place identity and clarify particular place experiences of Wonder Valley residents (Relph 1976). In his book, Relph described the holistic nature of place as the combination of the identity *of* place (a place's character) and identity *with* place (intensity of a person or group's lived relationship with place).

By the identity *of* a place, Relph referred to its “persistent sameness and unity, which allows it to be differentiated from others.” Relph described this persistent identity in terms of three components: (1) the place's physical setting; (2) its activities, situations, and events; and (3) the individual and group meanings generated through people's experiences and intentions in regard to that place.

In contrast, identity *with* place is our fundamental relationship with the world around us. There are varying modes of lived connection we have to the places of our world. Some are comforting where we find ourselves at home and develop a feeling of insideness. Other place situations are unsettling in some way, and we experience those places as outsiders. There are yet other places to which we do not attend in a meaningful way with the result that a sense of placelessness and disinterest overtakes our experience.

Relph developed an insideness-outsideness continuum





to describe the everyday relationships that people have *with* place. Relph argued that the relationship between insideness and its opposite, outsideness, is a fundamental part of human experience. Through different degrees of insideness and outsideness, different places take on different meanings for different individuals and groups. Drawing on Relph's conceptual framework, my study first focused on describing the varying identities of Wonder Valley. This explication allowed me to move toward a better understanding of residents' identity *with* Wonder Valley and thus approach Wonder Valley's unique character—the *Wonder Valley*ness of Wonder Valley. In other words, through the study of its parts and their interrelationships, I was able to shed light on Wonder Valley's singularity. When I first encountered this place, I felt it was on the edge of civilization. After participating in everyday life and speaking to numerous residents, however, I came to recognize that Wonder Valley is actually an overlap of conflicting types of place identity held in a complex tension.

What are these overlapping identities? My research indicated three types: what I labelled (1) *homesteaders*; (2) *dystopics*; and (3) *utopics*. I discuss each identity type in turn.

## 1. Homesteaders

The *homesteader* identity group partly derives its name from the residents themselves. These individuals were the first to settle Wonder Valley. They and their direct descendants refer to themselves as homesteaders, or more precisely, "jackrabbit homesteaders."

This group has more in common than just being the first families to settle Wonder Valley. These residents came to a landscape that they saw as neither good nor bad but full of potential. By working the land—"pushing back nature" and constructing built structures—environmental potential was turned into an actual, pleasing place. Many homesteaders were and are Midwestern retirees who understand the land as a blank slate that demands hard work to provide a part-time or full-time retreat from cold weather, congested land use, or societal and legal restrictions.

Drawing on in-depth interviews conducted with



16 homesteaders, I came to realize there are two homesteader sub-groups: first, the early homesteaders who originally bought land in the 1940s and 1950s; and, second, a more recent group coming to Wonder Valley in the past ten years to restore older structures but who still embody the same homesteader attitude.

## 2. Dystopics

The *dystopic* identity relates to a second group of Wonder Valley residents and refers to those individuals who came to Wonder Valley as a last resort or sought it out for nefarious ends. In either case, the individual is in some way pushed to the community, views Wonder Valley as a necessary evil, does not usually engage in neighboring, and shapes his or her living or operating area as a relative disamenity zone.

Drawing on interviews with seven of these individuals and other supporting materials, I determined that this Wonder Valley identity incorporates three subgroups. First, are individuals who, because of high housing costs, cannot afford to live "down below" (a local term for the Los Angeles basin). These individuals still wish to live in southern California and thus move to less expensive Wonder Valley.

A second dystopic subgroup is the homeless and mentally unstable relocated to the area through government resettlement programs in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A third subgroup is a criminal element



drawn to the area for two reasons: first, abandoned cabins in Wonder Valley provide cover to produce illegal drugs; second, Wonder Valley offers easy access to the nearby Los Angeles and Las Vegas drug markets. The situation of this last subgroup can be summarized by the claim that “nature abhors a void, but it also seems that abhorrence naturally seeks the void.”

For the dystopic-identity group, I was only able to interview seven individuals, mainly because two of the three subgroups were difficult or dangerous to approach. To resolve this relative lack of representation, I interviewed others (e.g., law enforcement officers, reporters, and other residents) who had experiences with these individuals and had some knowledge of dystopic motivations and what their presence has meant for Wonder Valley.

### 3. Utopics

The third identity group is *utopics*, who perceive Wonder Valley as inherently special, fragile, and thus in need of protection from destructive uses. These residents are mostly from Southern California and San Francisco. They came to the area in large numbers in the 1990s, and their presence continues to grow. During this period, there has been a rebirth of interest in California’s desert landscape as a beautiful place, especially following the creation of the nearby Mojave Preserve and the designation of the farther-away Joshua Tree National Monument as a National Park.

After conducting interviews with 13 utopics and reviewing other materials, I realized this group incorporates three subgroups, the first of which is artists who find inspiration in the landscape and cater to art collectors. A second utopic subgroup is nature enthusiasts who enjoy living in the midst of exotic flora and fauna, while a third subgroup is real-estate opportunists who purchase and restore dilapidated houses and then resell or rent them as comfortable dwellings within a “desert paradise.” I concluded that the parties who buy or rent these renovated properties can also be considered as representing this third subgroup.

### An Existential Ecotone

American essayist Joan Didion suggested that “a place belongs forever to whoever claims it hardest, remembers it most obsessively, wrenches it from itself,

shapes it, renders it, loves it so radically that he re-makes it in his own image.”

In Wonder Valley, however, there is an overlap of three identities that struggle in claiming this place for themselves. Many communities have various groups battling for power, but Wonder Valley is perhaps unique because *this struggle is its essence*. I have termed Wonder Valley’s identity an *existential ecotone*—a community based on overlapping, competing identities held in precarious tension. Much like a natural ecotone (for example, a beach or the gradient between meadow and forest), an existential ecotone is home to a fragile diversity. One Wonder Valley resident described this delicate balance well when he said that “The place has not yet become what it is not.”

As an existential ecotone, Wonder Valley is a paradox involving a series of lived contradictions: intensity and delicateness; isolation and accessibility; diversity and ambiguity. Wonder Valley is paradoxical, yet Wonder Valley is also a home, a place, a cosmos amidst chaos. The history of Wonder Valley is singular; its present circumstances, intriguing; and its future, a shifting situation of delicate tension. The lived relationship of Wonder Valley inhabitants can be described as *paradoxical insideness*—finding at-homeness in the midst of tension. I would say, with Mr. Schooler, that this place is not only a wonder of a valley but also a wonder of geography.

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*Photograph 1: Cabins dot the Wonder Valley landscape with dry Dale Lake and its eastern boundary in the background.*

*Photograph 2: Two abandoned cabins. Hundreds of cabins like these are magnets for residents of the dystopic identity group.*

*Photograph 3: Central Wonder Valley features the Valley Mountains rising up from the creosote and sagebrush blanketed wash. The Bullion Mountains in the far background form the northern boundary of Wonder Valley.*

*All photographs by Jacob Sowers © 2014 and used with permission.*

# Favorite Places

## Spatial and Temporal Dimensions of Place Attachment

Stephen Wood

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**T**his article describes two of my favorite places and considers how my attempts at understanding my attachment to these places have matured. In moving from a quantitative to a phenomenological approach, I have found it possible to remain true to place attachment in both its spatial and temporal dimensions.

### The Public Gardens in Nîmes

*Les Jardins de la Fontaine* in Nîmes, France, were created in the eighteenth century by the king's engineer, Jacques Philippe Mareschal (Ville de Nîmes 2006). His classical construction of symmetrical aisles and balustrades dominates the gardens' plan. In the nineteenth century, the gardens were extended following a design by Augustin Cavalier, the town's mayor. He aimed to attract walkers and nature-lovers with his sensitive arrangement of Mediterranean trees (holm oak, Aleppo pine, cypress) and other plantings.

My wife had shown me the gardens in Nîmes when we started dating in the 1990s. It was with great pleasure that we rediscovered them when we came to settle in France in 2008. The gardens are anchored in her family history, her mother visiting regularly in the 1950s and bringing her daughters there in the 1970s. As part of my effort to truly inhabit Nîmes when we moved there, I thought it fitting that I should study the gardens, and what better way than via a graduate program in environmental psychology at the city's own educational facility—the University of Nîmes!

It was to the gardens that we turned as first-year master's students in our first lesson of the semester dedicated to interviewing. I was delighted. Embarking on a daring career change, I received the confirmation

that I was on the right path. Here I was for the first time in my life, developing within the context of a supportive group and a university diploma, my sensitivity to the particularities of place and person.

We master's students divided into groups of two or three and entered the gardens. Armed with a set of simple questions, we set off to gather an initial impression of people's reactions to the gardens and to practice our interviewing techniques. An hour later, we returned to discuss the experience and our interviewees' responses. Different groups had spontaneously chosen different parts of the garden, some in the lower gardens, with their typically French classical design and statuary; others in the upper gardens, landscaped in the English style, with shrubbery, alleys and lawns.

We sensed a difference in people's responses to the different characters of the gardens' two halves. The lower gardens had a more public face: People coming as a family, and the children learning to walk, to cycle or to roller skate. In contrast, the upper gardens accommodated people seeking privacy, sitting quietly, reading a book, or reflecting on things.

**I** was drawn to environmental psychology because of psychologist Stephen Kaplan's work on the restorative benefits of nature (e.g., Kaplan 1995). He described how modern work involves a great deal of directed attention and that this faculty becomes easily fatigued. He highlighted the fascination of natural places—that they attract our attention without our having to direct it and so help our capacity for directed attention to recover.

In addition to fascination, Kaplan went on to enumerate three other qualities of natural places contributing to restorativeness. First, it is important that a place offers a refuge, an opportunity to get away. This can be as much in a figurative as a physical sense in that the place provides experiencers with an occasion to step back from what they are involved in and to clear their heads. Second, a place must have a sufficient extent and coherence to provide “a whole other world,” into which one can be engaged and absorbed. Third, the place must be compatible with the activities we would wish to carry out and allow one to pursue them simply and straightforwardly.



a strong influence on their environmental preferences throughout life. The theory of spatial determinism explains how a place may have an effect on a person, such as attention restoration. A study of a forest near Paris showed that the distance that picnickers walked between the car park and where they ate was a function of their level of education.”

Environmental psychologist Kalevi Korpela’s work on the restorative qualities of favorite places awakened me to the idea of place identity—i.e., the role that places play in the maintenance of one’s sense of self (Korpela and Hartig 1996). Researching the idea of identity processes in the psychological literature, I came to recognize the related duality of insideness and outsideness. Vignoles et al. (2006) speak of six identity processes or motives, falling into two groups. *Belonging*, *self-efficacy*, and *self-esteem* contribute to identity enactment, while *continuity*, *distinctiveness*, and *meaning* contribute to identity definition. The enactment of one’s identity is linked to expansion and outward activity—the expression of one’s identity in the social sphere. The definition of one’s identity is an inner involvement, bearing on one’s sense of the distinctive meaning of one’s life over his or her whole history.

I arranged a meeting with the director of the master’s program to start preparing my research project. Before enrolling, I had been reading the lecture notes she had published on the web, and I was delighted to find reference to Kaplan and to the special qualities of certain buildings, such as Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. As she and I talked, I brought forward some of my feelings and sensitivities. Her response surprised me. In so many words, she said:

“The theory of place attachment is based on the idea, akin to imprinting in birds, that experiences in a subject’s childhood retain

Listening to these comments, I began to lose myself in a maze of theories, causal mechanisms, actions, reactions, and relations between abstract quantities. The original experience of the two faces of the gardens in Nîmes stayed with me, but my research project proposed to objectify that experience with all manner of quantitative scales and questionnaires.

Holding to the magic of the gardens, I saw a duality in the qualities of restorative places that Kaplan had identified. In offering an opportunity to get away from things and by fascinating us, we lose ourselves in a place and are able to recenter ourselves. In offering extent and compatibility, we have a place to explore, where we can engage in activities and expand out into the world again. In relation to the Nîmes gardens, it seemed to me that the upper face of the gardens encouraged users to turn inward toward the self, just as the lower face of the gardens encouraged users to turn outward toward the world (Liger 2001, pp. 63–64).

As I continued my garden research, I began to feel uncomfortable because I felt that I was betraying the phenomenon as observed. In my interviews, I had come across a group of teenagers who liked to hang out on benches at the bottom of the garden shaded by lime trees. These young people were seeking a private time and place to get away from things and to be among friends. This was more an inward-looking activity, even though they were in the part of the garden that was supposed to be associated with outward activity.

At the same time, the upper gardens—associated with an inward-looking nature—also contributed to outward-looking activity. This portion of the gardens incorporates a hill leading up to the Gallo-Roman watchtower, the *Tour Magne*. I recognized from my own ex-



perience that the hill provided a challenge to those wishing to engage in vigorous exercise—for example, running or briskly walking up to the tower and back.

In becoming more familiar with how visitors used the two portions of the gardens, I saw full well that people did not fall exclusively into wishing either private contemplation or public activity. Rather, many users sought out both modes of place experience, yet my research method required that I break the wholeness of the garden experiences into two separate parts that then could be correlated quantitatively. In other words, I was arbitrarily reducing the wholeness of the garden experiences into two separate parts via which I might locate a “counterfeit” wholeness arising from statistical correlation (Bortoft 1996, pp. 266–267).

In the end, my research project collapsed under the weight of its forced abstractions and unwieldy questionnaires and, with it, my master’s degree and daring career change. Three years later, however, I saw a call for papers on the personal experience of place, and I felt I was given permission to talk again of the gardens. The decisive moment, however, was the discovery of a new perspective that would bring my intuitions into focus.

## Systematics & a Spatial Dyad

It was through *EAP* Editor David Seamon that I was first introduced to *systematics*, an interpretive method developed by the British philosopher J. G. Bennett (Bennett 1993). Systematics is based on an appreciation of the qualitative significance of number, where each number—representing a particular *system*—offers its own unique path for understanding the experience of a particular phenomenon. As Bennett (*ibid.*, p. 16) writes, “Systematics illustrates that a particular situation can be considered in terms of several different systems, depending on one’s viewpoint and understanding.” As *one*-ness and *monad*, a phenomenon can be understood as as unity in diversity; as *two*-ness and *dyad*, a complementarity of polar opposites; as *three*-ness and a *triad*, a relation of reciprocal impulses; as *four*-ness and a *tetrad*, as transforming activity; and so on.

As I studied Bennett’s systematics method, I was completely unprepared for his description of the dyadic nature of the home. He draws our attention (*ibid.*, pp. 24–25, p. 28) to the:

inescapable quality of home: its dual function as an inward and outward place. When we mention family, shelter, and comfort, we speak of the home’s power to gather and hold. But when we speak of hospitality or departure and return, we speak of the home’s powers to relate its dwellers to the larger world....

In one sense, it is the “place” into which we enter, but in another sense, it is our “place” from which we move into the world. These two meanings permeate the content of a home and point to its significance as a dyad: Some elements relate to the home as a place of concentration and personal identity, while other elements relate to the home as a place of expansion that joins its dwellers with the larger society....

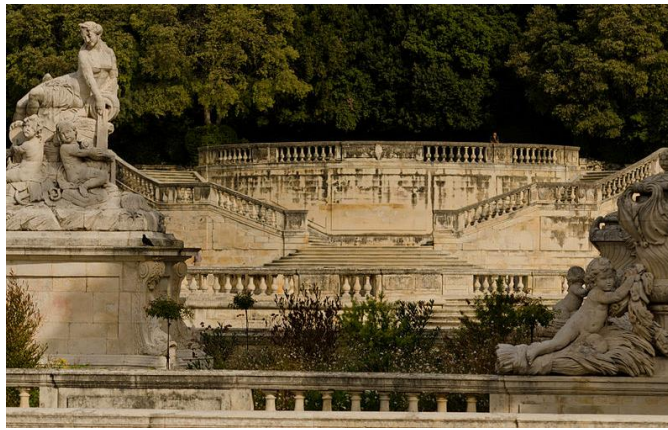
In this way, we say that a home has two *natures*, whether they be described as inner and outer or private and public. These two natures do not divide the home into two parts. One cannot say, “This part belongs to the private nature, while this part belongs to the public nature.” This statement cannot be true, because if it were, we would have two things rather than one. The home would simply divide into two parts, each of which would then become a new thing in itself.

This dyadic duality of closed/open, inner/outer, and private/public related to what I had recognized in the interviews with garden users. The complementarity of “concentration and personal identity” and “expansion ... [into] larger society” was what I had sensed in Kaplan’s account of attention restoration and in Vignoles and colleagues’ identity processes.

Bennett’s interpretation of home suggested that the comfortableness that one feels in a restorative place comes from a complementarity of enfolding and enabling. On one hand, we feel sheltered, able to rest, to get away, to rediscover a sense of meaning in our lives, our distinctness, and our continuity. On the other hand, we are given a stepping-off point into the wider world; we can expand in activities of our choice; we feel proud in our sense of self-efficacy and belonging in the larger society.

**B**ennett’s interpretation helped me understand why my master’s project had failed. In my analytical approach, I wrongly separated the public and private natures of the gardens into two separate parts. It was as if, when visiting a human home as a space alien, I was struck by the private nature of the bedroom, and the public nature of the sitting room, and decided that these were two separate places with two separate functions that would attract different kinds of people. As Bennett (*ibid.*, p. 28) explains,

there is nothing whatever that is not concerned with [the home's] nature as a private place. At one moment, the door and chairs welcome guests but, at other moments, secure the home from the public world and contribute to a place of retreat. Yet there is also nothing in the private nature of the home that is not related to its other nature as a place that belongs to the world. Even the most protective parts of the home contribute to its ability to play a public role, particularly as these parts help renew family members and give them restored energies to face again the outside world.



In a flash, I saw a link to the themes that Seamon developed in his *Geography of the Lifeworld* (Seamon 1979), namely *movement*, *rest*, and *encounter*. A place invites us to both inward stability and outward movement. The balance between the two makes possible a deepening encounter with the place, where we become more attentive to and aware of its character. In a more authentic encounter, we move from habituality to openness. The terms “closed/open” and “inner/outer” are those of a *spatial dyad*. The terms aim to convey the nature of a place's expression in space and the nature of its immediate invitations and disclosures to us.

Thanks to Bennett's systematics, I have at last been able to tease out the intuition that we as a class had in relation to the garden interviews. To talk of shared intuition may seem strange, but that was what I witnessed when we students came back from our garden interviews. Fresh from our experience in the gardens, we compared notes and a pattern emerged, a collective seeing of structure. That is phenomenology: The phenomenon spoke directly to us, disclosed itself. This disclosure refused to be split into the personal and the collective, the subjective and the objective.

## A Temporal Dyad

As I've pondered the Nîmes gardens from a systematics perspective, I've also come to realize a *temporal dyad* that complements the spatial dyad described above. In one of the garden interviews, a lady remarked that she had come to the gardens as a child, a mother, and a grandmother. In short, the gardens

played an important role in her family history (as they had in my wife's). This set me reflecting on the importance of place for me and my family when I was growing up.

In 1966 before I was born, my family moved to Bath, England. With its gentle rolling hills, Georgian architecture, and soft, yellowish, local stone, Bath is a beautiful

town. My parents had come back to London after their years working abroad in Cyprus and Nigeria. They were only too happy to swap a capital city for a provincial town.

My memories mostly start from when we moved into a large Georgian terraced house in Widcombe, located not far from where the River Avon meets a canal. Completed in 1810, the 57 miles of this canal connect the Avon in Bath to the Kennet in Newbury (British Waterways 2011). The Avon runs west to Bristol, while the Kennet flows east where it joins the Thames on its way to London. Barges were thus able to travel the 87 miles from port to port.

The canal, left disused since the advent of the railways, naturally lent itself to leisure use. Barges were originally towed from a path, by man or horse. Once restored, the towpath provided a natural footpath at the water's edge. To this day, the canal provides a pleasant setting for many different activities—boating, cycling, walking, and picnicking. Created before steam and the petrol engine, the canal retains a certain harmony with nature and indeed has become an important habitat for wildlife. The cast iron bridges and lock gates only add to the canal's beauty.

As the canal runs through the town, it offers a pleasant alternative route from one place to another. It was constructed at a higher level than the center of Bath, so gives one that sense of being away, allowing one to gain a fresh perspective on things. There is much to draw the eye: the slow movement of the water, the occasional barge passing through a lock, the reeds and waterside trees, the different stretches of water, of all different shapes and sizes, not to mention the wildlife—mallard, swans, moorhens, seagulls and the occasional heron.

Even before I was born, the Bath waterways had become an integral part of my family's daily routines. Walking home from primary school, I had the choice to take either the river or the canal home. My secondary school was not far from Sydney Gardens, the public gardens constructed over the canal. My father's work was a little farther on, so for many years we started our day walking together by the waterside on the way to our duties.

Running for miles, the canal offers a rich extent to explore, a diversity of habitats, and lends itself to trials of endurance. When we moved to Bathampton, I challenged myself first to walk all the way to Limpley Stoke, and later, as far as Avoncliff and back. With each new destination achieved, I embraced with confidence new territories of my inner landscape. It is clear that the canal is a restorative place. In its complementarity of public and private, enabling and enclosing natures, we see again the terms of the spatial dyad. It is not surprising, therefore, that we were drawn into a deep encounter with the place as a family, during the time of our 30-year association with Bath.

Let me recount some memories of the canal that became woven into my personal and family history. For instance, there was one stretch of water along the canal where we regularly watched tufted ducks diving. One day I was surprised and delighted to see that they were joined by goldeneyes. Another time, I saw a strange bird I did not recognize, looking like a duck, but perching in a tree. My sister sketched it, noting its particularities, so we could later identify it at home. I regularly saw black-headed gulls on the canal, their plumage changing from summer to winter. In summer, their heads were a lovely chocolate brown (not black, as their name would suggest!). In winter, they had just a dark spot next to the eye. One time, I saw 50 in one stretch of water. My mother said there must have been a storm at sea that day.

There were other changes related to the seasons—for instance, the male mallards emerging in spring from their dusky eclipse into their bright breeding plumage, soon to be followed by ducklings. Moorhens created their untidy stick-and-leaf nests and tended their eggs, from which their scraggly young would hatch.

There was one particular spot where, year after year, my father and I saw a swan nesting and raising her cygnets. My father was upset when the owner of the nearby house began tending the grass as his own, and the swan and her cygnets disappeared. We had some harsh winters as I was growing up, particularly in 1982. In those times, the canal would freeze over. With my sisters, we laughed to see ducks coming into land and slipping and sliding on the ice.

When my parents left Bath, one of my sisters gave my mother a watercolor of one of the cast iron bridges across the canal. For me, this painting summed up the canal and, with it, the whole of Bath. As proof of what the canal meant to her, my mother hung the painting next to one representing Cyprus, the place that had most touched her heart in her life overseas.

As this account suggests, our memories refer, on one hand, to *stability*: to the unchanging landscape, the predictable rhythm of the seasons, the recurrent changes in the plumage of birds, the arrival of mating season, nest making, rearing of young, and, finally, the turn to winter. On the other hand, our memories refer to *unusual events* punctuating the natural equilibrium: to the arrival of a less-often-seen species, a sudden abundance of another, a particularly harsh winter, the amusing behavior of ducks landing on ice. Sometimes, these unusual events rupture the previous stability and upset the recurrence of a happy event as when the homeowner annexed the grassy bank that had been the swan's nesting place.

Here, I believe we have a *temporal dyad*, with a complementary tension between *stable recurrence* and *singular occurrence*. In other words, shared memories of a place incorporate a combination of "that always used to happen" plus "remember that time when...?" This combination of repetitive and unusual events powerfully contributes to the memory of a place.

## The Mundane and the Festive

The upper gardens in Nîmes are arranged so that the walker climbing up one of the multitude of paths arrives at a number of plateaux on his way to the *Tour Magne*. Each plateau provides a contrast with the narrow paths and offers visitors a chance to admire the view of the town below. On one of these plateaux is a beautiful pond adorned with water lilies and koi carp and fed by water



trickling into it from above. This was one of favorite garden spots where, along with many local children, I enjoyed the game of spotting frogs hiding among the reeds and lilies. When we first moved to Nîmes, I came to the gardens almost every day. In spring and summer, the pause by the pond became part of my daily routine.

After I started the master's program in environmental psychology, I still returned to the pond. One day I had a surprise. Two snakes emerged from reeds on the far bank and glided over each other before slipping back into the water. I was amazed. Never before had I seen water snakes there. For me, they were a rarity and here they were slithering in shimmering silver right before my eyes.

I could simply cite this experience as another example of an unusual occurrence standing out against a stable background of recurrence. But the experience had an additional quality that points to its richer significance. I felt honored that the gardens had offered me the gift of seeing the water snakes. I felt special, with a renewed sense of my personal being. The gardens had spoken to me! Here was a moment of standing back, of wonder, of celebration. To use the terms of phenomenological psychologist Bernd Jager, my experience had crossed the threshold from *the mundane to the festive*.

Jager (1997) described the mundane and the festive as two complementary qualities of experience that he first recognized in the rural Holland of his childhood. He observed that, on the day of rest from work, his father joined the local farmers as they returned to their fields to survey, to discuss, and to enjoy their lands. He noticed their very gestures changed, their posture, even their dialect. He could never quite believe the conventional explanations he was given of the necessity of this day of rest—to recharge and to return rested and refreshed to the fields. These explanations seemed to imply that rest was simply a reduction of the quantity of work and would allow the body, as with a machine, to recover its capabilities. Jager sensed that there was a deeper reason. He related how Sunday was different *experientially* from the regular workdays of the week.

For a more appropriate explanation, Jager turned to the biblical account of Creation in Genesis. At the end of each day of Creation, there is a pause: "And

God saw that it was good." This phrasing marks a threshold between the day of work and the moment of standing back and celebrating that work. The Sabbath then becomes the completion of these moments, marking off the time of ordinary work from a time of contemplation and rejoicing.

Even if people are charged with the duty of mundane work, as stewards of the land, it is in the festive that individuals come into their own. A baby feeds, but a child eats. Jager explained that weaning is the moment when the infant enters fully into the human community. Feeding is simply the mechanical act of eating; the chewing, digesting, and assimilating is the very essence of the transformation of nature that takes place during mundane work. When the weaned child is invited to take part in eating, there is a shift to grace and ceremony, attention to others, and conversation. In experiencing a meal, a host prepares and the guests share, each welcomed and celebrated as a unique person. In turn, the infant's sucking becomes the child's speaking; and the infant's grasping, the child's greeting.

The festive does not seek to remove the mundane but infuses it with deeper meaning. The manual and mental dexterity that allows us to "come to grips" with the quotidian world, shaping it to our needs, is balanced with the sense of the festive that respects and cherishes the world (Jager 1997, pp. 13–14, p. 15). The modern world, however, seeks to abolish the festive and absorb it into the mundane world of science and technology: "Eating becomes fueling a biochemical organism, sexuality becomes an exchange of bodily fluids, host and guest relations become a mask for what in reality are power relations that grow out of the biological need to survive" (ibid., p. 7).

In mundane terms, the Nîmes gardens were simply a stable background—a place that accompanied me in my daily activities. In the moment of revelation, when I saw the water snakes, I felt suddenly that I was the gardens' guest and they my host. In this festive moment, the gardens made themselves known to me personally. I felt renewed in my sense of personal being. It is only from the threshold of the festive that persons and things appear as actively manifesting themselves. No aspect of reality comes fully into its own until it has been greeted, contemplated and blessed; until it has been given the space and time to fully appear and be present (ibid., p. 12).

As the spatial character of natural surroundings is restorative for human beings, so is their temporal character. The structure of quotidian and unusual events leads to an experience of the festive, where place and person come into their own. The fact that certain species of plants and animals are common and others rare adds to the temporal fabric, where certain species will be more regularly seen than others. Environmental activist George Monbiot (2013) criticizes conservation efforts that attempt to make rare species common. We can see in such efforts the spread of the mundane. The common is more readily assimilated to the mundane, but the rare remains wild, aloof. In the mundane, everything is to be tamed. Nothing is wild, nothing is “other.” In the festive, distinctions are celebrated. Self and other are each appreciated as different and in that difference seen as giving value to each other.

Jager makes clear that our desire for inhabitation, which I felt so strongly in Nîmes, can only be fulfilled by being open to this dimension of the festive:

It is ultimately by virtue of this festive light that we feel invigorated in our desire to inhabit the earth, and that it becomes possible for us to feel truly at home in the world. It is this light of the festive that gives a unique presence to whatever it illuminates. It is what makes a particular landscape unforgettable and irreplaceable. We may long for a garden, a house, a landscape of our youth, the same way that we long for a person we once knew and loved, because both once welcomed us, and both made their appearance within the light of the festive. By opening the register of the personal, the festive makes it possible for us to recognize a landscape as we would an old friend, it permits us to experience trees as offering us their shade, as paths inviting us to explore the hills, or cool streams as bidding us to take a rest at the water's edge (ibid., p. 36).

## The Mundane & Festive as Renewal

Bennett's systematics is an interpretive method that aims to be true to the richness of the phenomenon as it discloses itself as a sequence of systems each characterized by a different number—oneness, twoness, threeness, and so forth. In this essay, I have suggested how a systematic understanding of the dyad helped me to understand my intuitions concerning my favorite places. The spatial character of a place—its open and closed areas, its inner and outer qualities—contributes to its restorativeness. The temporal character of place—a relatively stable background of recurrent situations punctuated by singular events—provides

the basis for an experience of the mundane and the festive, which leads to a renewal of personal identity. A favorite place, in other words, facilitates a restoration of one's identity.

These spatial and temporal dyads were both contained in the initial experience of the Nîmes gardens, shared with my fellow students, in that first interviewing exercise. The spatial character of the gardens was revealed via the different responses that participants gave depending on whether they were queried in the lower or the upper gardens. The temporal character of the gardens was intimated via the lady who described how she had come to the gardens as child, mother, and grandmother. The two dyads were both present in one place, on one morning. This was, to quote Goethe, “an instance worth a thousand, bearing all within itself” (Bortoft, 1998, p. 292).

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*Photographs of Les Jardins de la Fontaine, Nîmes, France:*

p. 11, *The upper gardens; wooded alleys create a sense of intimacy and enclosure. Photograph by Ian Biggar and used with permission; available at: <http://motorhometripphotos.blogspot.com>.*

p. 13: *The lower gardens; the classical features of balustrades, statuary, and grand staircase create an open space of spectacle and display. Photograph by Olivier Accart; available at the Wikimedia Commons: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nimes\\_Jardins\\_de\\_la\\_Fontaine\\_4.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nimes_Jardins_de_la_Fontaine_4.jpg).*

# Fire in the Water

## Ninth Letter from Far South

John Cameron

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*This essay is one of a series of “occasional letters” that retired environmental educator **John Cameron** writes from his home on Bruny Island, just off the southeastern coast of Tasmania, the island state to the south of mainland Australia. For earlier letters, see EAP, winter and fall 2008; spring 2009; winter and fall 2010; spring 2011; and winter and fall 2012. [jcameronblackstone@gmail.com](mailto:jcameronblackstone@gmail.com). © 2014 John Cameron.*

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For the first time since we have been on Bruny, I’ve had a month on my own at Blackstone. Even though we often spend much of each day separately, it’s different when Vicki is not here at mealtimes to discuss the condition of the fields or the wildlife we have seen. Through her absence, I realize it is a mundane but vital aspect of inhabiting the place jointly, this daily exchange of events and talking through what needs doing. Sense impressions seem so much more acute and encounters with animals so much more intense without Vicki’s mediating presence.

I can also take advantage of being solo by acting more spontaneously. One evening, though it was cool, cloudy, and windy, I lit a fire on the beach and had a simple dinner. I took my oyster-collecting gear (gloves, rusty screwdriver, and collecting bowl), an old grill rack, two lamb chops, a billycan to heat water, and a loaf of bread. Because Little Blackstone beach is nestled in a small shoreline indent, conditions are often calmer and warmer than up at the house. I gathered some oysters, driftwood, and three large stones on which to balance the grill.

One of the simpler pleasures of life is sitting by a campfire with a billycan boiling for tea, dinner sizzling on the grill, and bread toasting over the fire. Not that it was pure pleasure—the breeze shifted at times to give me an eyeful and lungful of smoke, and I managed to blacken rather than toast my first slice of bread. These, however, are minor matters. After the food was cooked, I built the fire up to a merry blaze and settled down with my dinner to watch the flames burn down.

As the light faded on that grey evening, I mused over the number of times I had gazed into the

embers over the years. As a teenager escaping the tedium of middle-class life in Canberra, I went hiking and camping in the Brindabella Ranges, returning feeling revitalized and wilder, less tamed. That set a pattern for my adult life, to “go bush” whenever I could. When I taught my “Sense of Place” course at university, I took my students on overnight trips into the Blue Mountains and, on one occasion with Vicki, a three-week trek into Central Australia. Conversations after dinner when we were clustered around the fire under a sandstone overhang or sprawled on a dry riverbed were more wide-ranging and reflective than those in the classroom. It was far easier to talk of connection with “country” and to give voice to place.

One of the luxuries of having a beach fire is not having to worry about flames spreading to surrounding grass or trees, so I laid some lengthy pieces of driftwood across the fire. As evening darkened into night, I still had quite a bit of wood half-burned, and I began to feel fidgety about how long this would take. I had a good book back at the house, it was getting late, why not pour water on the fire and call it a night? But I felt curiously reluctant to kill the flames, so I watched as their flicker edged in blue gradually gave way to deepening red embers. I hunched down closer to the warmth of the little pile of coals. When I sensed another source of light on the horizon, I looked up and felt a reverse sense of vertigo as my field of vision expanded rapidly from a small glowing circle two feet away to the entire night sky with a rising crescent moon skating between the clouds, and slender eucalypt branches steeping above me.

As the coals winked into greyness and a bank of cloud obscured the moon, I stirred myself and took my billycan to the water’s edge. As I dipped it into the sea,



greenish sparks ignited in the water. Phosphorescence! We had seen it only twice before, but never this early in the year. I fetched a stick, gave it a vigorous swirl and saw long lines of light in the inky water.

After dousing the fire, I deliberated. Do I go up, fetch the kayak paddle and head out onto the water as Vicki and I had done once before? It was late now, I was sleepy, the heavier cloud had brought a stiffer wind, it was cold, it might rain, if anything happened to me out on the water, I was really on my own....

**S**till vacillating, I went up to the house, retrieved the paddle, released the kayak from its tethering chain, and slid it into the water. The first few strokes told me that I had made the right choice. On the upstroke, emeralds dripped off the blade. As I accelerated, luminescence streamed off both sides of the prow, startling in its brilliance against the black sea and sky.

After ten minutes, I stopped paddling away from the shoreline. Out here in the Channel, the wind had stirred up choppy water. Every wavelet, as it broke, emitted a spurt of luminous foam. As the kayak rocked from side to side, I was surrounded by breaking patches of light in every direction. This remarkable sight stirred a memory in me. The night after a big bushfire had burned right down to the water directly opposite us, Vicki and I went down to the shore and watched the reflections in the water as spot fires flared and died in the smoky gloom right along the peninsula. Fire in the water.

Seeking calmer water, I paddled to Woodcutter's Point. As soon as I steered into the lee, the choppiness subsided and I paddled slowly, appreciating the stillness after the tumult and the light show in the middle of the Channel. As I eased closer to shore, I could make out what looked like cloudy luminosity in the depths of the water. Even when I stopped the kayak directly above it, my eyes couldn't focus. It was a stark contrast with the sharply defined emerald light arcing through the dark that I had earlier encountered. Was there something luminous below the surface or was I imagining it?

Tentatively, I reached out with my paddle and dipped it below the surface. It contacted something heavy yet yielding. I pulled upward sharply and there was an explosion of emerald light like fireworks in the night sky, then long strings of light that extended down

into the water, slowly fading. After a moment's stunned incomprehension, I recognized a large clump of seaweed on the end of my paddle. The phosphorescence must have accumulated in its long strands and luminesced brilliantly when I shook it, but otherwise gave off a soft light as it moved in the currents of the sea.

I peered entranced over the side of the kayak. Even though I had an explanation of what I was seeing, it seemed as though I was looking into the night sky, with strings of nebulae spread across the expanse with vast cloudy constellations reaching into infinite space. The wind dropped completely, and I sat motionless, suspended over the cosmos. It was late, pitch dark. I was lost in wonder, alone on a length of uninhabited coast.

I was shaken from my galaxy gazing when the prow of the kayak struck an oyster-encrusted rock. I looked up and again had the vertiginous sense of rapid readjustment of my visual field. What seemed like fathomless depths was probably only a meter of water. I pushed myself back out and lingered, drawn again into the web of ghostly points of light. Eventually, I collected my scattered wits and paddled back close to the shore, musing.

**S**everal aspects of the evening invite further reflection. One is that I very nearly missed out on witnessing this phenomenon. There were two key choice points when I almost decided to return to the house. In both moments, it would have been a reasonable decision because it was late, cold, and windy. I remember telling myself it was silly to watch the fire die right down just on principle—that I should take account of the conditions. If I look a little more closely at my wanting to stay longer around the fire or to take the kayak out, part of it has to do with being on my own and taking risks. Even more significant, however, was my not wishing to cut across a natural process already underway. It felt somehow disrespectful to the fire to pour water on the sticks when they had more heat and ruby light to offer.

Susan Murphy writes of "accepting all offers," a phrase that originates from improvisational drama, and is the way of Zen itself [1]. Life is continually providing invitations to enter more deeply into a situation, which one can either accept or reject. Most of her examples come from human interactions and often involve acceptance of suffering, but surely the same is true of the more-than-human world. I was invited to remain with

the fire. Accepting that offer led to the subsequent invitation to go out onto the water.

Accepting this second opportunity, I then entered into the gift cycle, in which what might have been merely an attractive sight when viewed from the shore was transformed into something more mysterious that is still working its magic on me. From this perspective, it is a different sort of choice. If I see it as a matter of rationally choosing one action over another, my decision refers solely to my own needs and wants. If I ask what place-based processes are occurring that include me, then it is more a matter of letting go—looking to see where the situation leads me. It is still a choice *I* make, of course, but there is a qualitative difference when I choose to let go, because it is more inclusive of other beings.

I am left wondering. How many other occasions have I not recognized as an invitation? Or the possibility occurred to me, and I sensed that a door might open, but it was not convenient because I had other things to do? Probably thousands. They may not necessarily have led to such wondrous experiences as the phosphorescence, but I'll never know. All I can do is be as open as I can to unexpected invitations offered from unlikely sources.

Another aspect of my beach experience was disruption of my perceptual scale. When I was huddled over the fire, my entire focus was on a small bed of coals. For several hours, this was my world, steadily deepening red, shot through with flickers of flame, tiny jets of gas, and charred sticks segmenting into embers edged in ash. The moonlight breaking through the clouds shifted my

visual field instantly to a vaster scale—the entire night sky with the moon and stars filtered through the looming trees. Out on the water, I experienced abruptly shifting scales from several feet of water to vast depths of space.

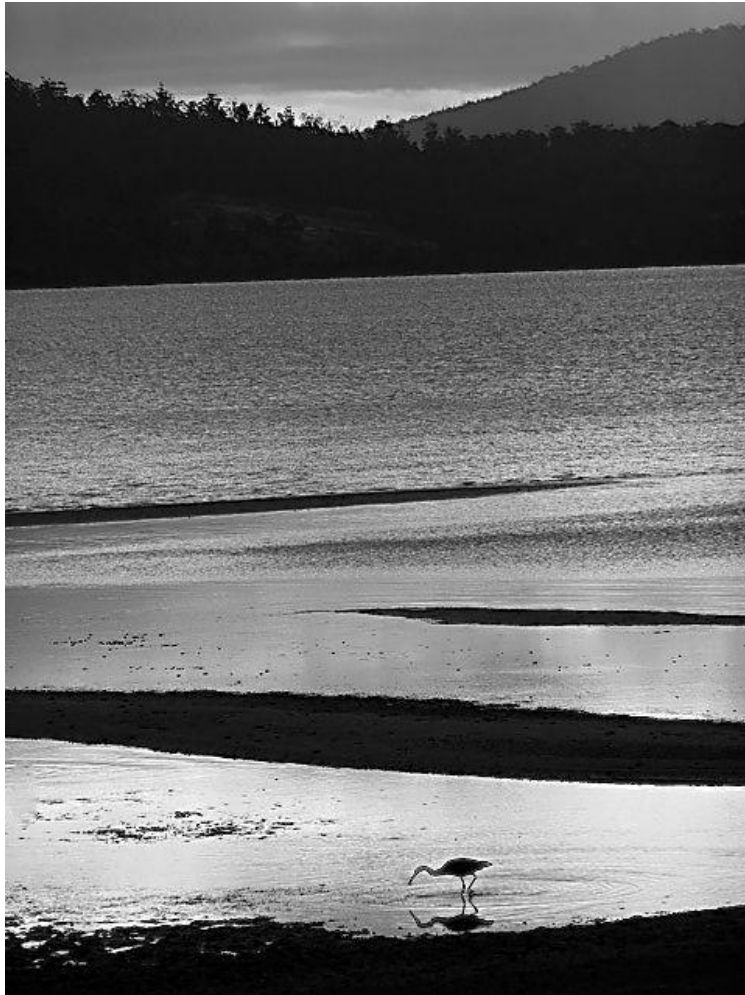
In *The Spell of the Sensuous*, philosopher David Abram writes of a related, but more disorienting, experience. Standing at night in Bali amidst a patchwork of rice paddies, he finds himself surrounded by star-studded space and its reflection:

Between the constellations below and the constellations above drifted countless fireflies, their lights flickering like the stars.... I felt myself at times falling through space, at other moments floating and drifting. I simply could not dispel the profound vertigo and giddiness; the paths of the fireflies, and their reflections in the water's surface, held me in a sustained trance [2].

It may not be coincidental that bioluminescence, this time in the form of fireflies, played a pivotal role in disrupting normal perception. The power of experiences such as these propelled Abram into his phenomenologi-

cal exploration of sensory reciprocity with the more-than-human world. The latter part of my evening was characterized by the play between explanation and a sense of wonder, which brings together elements of both choice and scale. Because of everything that had happened previously, my initial realization of the phosphorescence in the seaweed didn't entirely dispel the feeling that I was gazing into clouds of constellations. Having sat for hours by the embers, I was perhaps more open to sitting in reverie out on the water.

I am reminded of the dynamic between *eros* and *logos* in relation to gifts of place [3]. Although poet and writer Lewis Hyde



warns that being too concerned with explanations and causes (the domain of *logos*) can overwhelm the imaginative and mysterious powers of *eros*, it seems to me that the two were co-existing nicely that night. As I “saw” the depths of the cosmos beneath my kayak, I didn’t forget that it was luminescent seaweed. Rather, I responded to the invitation to enter more deeply into the phenomenon as perceptual experience. Perhaps more to the point, I willingly entered into the play between the two. After the initial shock of my kayak’s hitting the rock, I stayed on, fascinated. Indeed, was it precisely because of the disjunction between sensory appearance and physical reality that I was so intrigued?

I looked up bioluminescence in my *Encyclopedia Britannica*. The article’s author noted the difficulties in discerning what the function of luminescence might be in simple organisms such as the dinoflagellates that cause phosphorescence in ocean waves. “It has been suggested,” he writes, “that the bioluminescent reaction was originally used to remove oxygen toxic to primitive types of bacteria that developed during a time when oxygen was absent or very rare in the Earth’s atmosphere” [4]. These protozoans have subsequently developed ways of using oxygen but have retained the luminescent capability for reasons unknown. If this suggestion is correct, it means that phosphorescence is a very ancient phenomenon, since oxygen entered Earth’s atmosphere in abundance two and a half billion years ago.

Far from dispelling a sense of wonder, I find this possible explanation of phosphorescence’s original function quite astounding. The thought that, for the past several billion years, these simple creatures have been emitting light when agitated stirs my imagination, especially when I consider that it might literally be an afterglow of an era when what is essential to life today—oxygen—was originally toxic. It is a reminder of the barely conceivable antiquity of protozoan life on Earth, and it added another dimension to my reflections. Not only was I peering into apparent expanses of space, I was looking back into deep time [5].

The following month, Vicki and I visited Tasmania’s recently-opened Museum of Old and New Art (MONA), the largest private museum in the Southern Hemisphere and home to a stunning collection of antiquities provocatively juxtaposed with contemporary paintings, sculptures, and art installations. I

was intrigued by Gregory Barsamian’s sculpture *Artifact 2010*, a huge metallic human head laid on its side with small apertures so that the viewer can peer into the workings of the “brain.” Inside were flashing lights illuminating images of books with pages turning that became yellow-winged birds. Falling ripe apples changed into nuts that liquefied and flowed through disembodied hands. Colors filled and emptied out of hats, and wire spooled everywhere in the flickering, confusing interior.

Every visitor to MONA is given an iPod that has information and commentary, so I clicked on an audio conversation with Barsamian, who discussed the relationship between sensory experience and explanation. I was so struck by his words that I looked around in the cavernous space for somewhere to sit and listen:

Rational thought is a very slow-moving activity; it happens at about the speed of speech, which is about 15 to 20 bits per second, when the senses are pouring 20 *million* bits per second into your mind. You’re processing huge amounts of it and acting on a lot of it without ever being remotely conscious of it.... If you have an idea and you can explain it, by all means just explain it, but so much happens outside that realm, that’s beyond explanation, that can come into you directly through your senses.... [People] think they’re the operator sitting in the driver’s seat of this “flesh buggy” [the body] and directing it to do things, when there is this mile-wide river of information flying by, and they are experiencing a large amount of it, but their consciousness is only dipping in a finger here and there, and claiming to know what’s happening in the river or, with further conceit, to be in control of what’s happening in the river. And it’s really nonsense [6].

It’s not news we are bombarded with a vast amount of sensory input. As I viewed Barsamian’s installation, however, I was strongly affected by the comparisons he was making, especially as it was the very topic I had been pondering so recently. MONA’s setting contributed to the effect—three stories underground in a vast open space with flickering, flashing lights emanating from the apertures of the giant metallic head juxtaposed (at the time) with slabs of hanging raw meat, an enormous snake mural, a bulbous red sports car, and exquisite display cases of Greek and Egyptian antiquities. An equally diverse medley of clicks, thumps, machine noises, muffled music, and rhythmic swooshing of an interrupted fall of water bounced off the rock walls. I felt dazed. The puniness of my conscious mind to make sense of this bewildering array of sensory material was sobering.

Mechanically-produced flashing lights in a metal sculpture are considerably different from the natural

phenomena of phosphorescence and the flickering of fireflies, yet there is one essential element in common—rapidly alternating flashes of light can induce an altered state of consciousness. It is one of the ways used for hypnosis—aspects of waking consciousness are bypassed. Writers like Aldous Huxley have noted that the resultant trance-like state is sometimes an opening of a door that normal consciousness keeps closed, though this is a matter of some dispute [7].

I returned to Blackstone with relief, letting my eyes rest on the patterns of tidal currents on the Channel and relaxing into the sound of the softly breaking waves. My thoughts, however, were stimulated by my visit to MONA. For one thing, I began to think differently about the relationship between imagination and explanation, or between *logos* and *eros*. Lewis Hyde views it as a dynamic between two equal, or at least commensurate, opposing forces at work in the world. The implication of Barsamian's perspective is that the force of *logos* is very slow, operating on a "narrow band width." *Eros*, with its connection to the unconscious and the imaginal realm, is more directly in touch with sensory experience, which is a million times faster, on a broader band width and, therefore, vastly more powerful [8].

From this point of view, I could say that, during my kayaking experience, I pulled myself out of deeper immersion in the vast flow of the senses, slowed things down to thinking speed and "caught my breath" before plunging back in. There is a trap, however, in Barsamian's use of the million-fold difference in speed between rational cognition and sensory experience. It makes logical thought seem insignificant, almost irrelevant. In fact, part of his argument as an artist is to overthrow the hegemony of the intellect, particularly the tendency of critics to over-analyze an artwork, thereby diminishing its experiential power.



I'm more interested in the positive dynamic between explanation and imagination, even after the former is put in its place as being much slower and having access to less information. In "Seventh Letter from Far South," I argued that Hyde takes an overly negative view of the interaction of *logos* and *eros*, and Barsamian continues this oppositional perspective:

And so the conscious mind is more an impediment to experience than anything else, this intense filter, it's kind of pathetic, really. It's pathetic in that people think it's so powerful and in control, but it's this chauvinism of consciousness that's kind of evolved [9].

Ironically, it was the synergy between my experiencing *Artifact 2010* and hearing the artist's explanation of his thinking that had affected me powerfully. If I had read Barsamian's interview in the *New Scientist*, I doubt it would have stayed with me. If I had viewed his work without hearing him explain his ideas, I wouldn't have connected it so directly with my own experiences and reflections. As it is, his concepts take their place alongside the possible explanations of the function of phosphorescence as ways of thinking that have fuelled my sense of wonder, long after the event.

Barsamian goes on to contend that "we are first and foremost blockers of experience. That's how we survive, we take 20 million bits per second and narrow it down to 15 bits, and that's how your mind can cope with it, at least on a conscious scale" [10]. The phrase "blockers of experience" troubled me, since the phenomenological enterprise is concerned with attending closely to one's experience of the phenomenon in question. The Goethean scientist strives for openness to the entity in all the ways that it reveals itself—sensorily, emotionally, intuitively, and cognitively. My whole approach to living and working on Blackstone is not to block experience.

Maybe, however, both things are true. The way that human cognition works is to be very selective in processing sensory input, just as Barsamian described. That doesn't mean that conscious



attempts to broaden and deepen human experiencing are a waste of time. It's one of the difficulties of using mechanical language to describe the functioning of the brain—bits per second, band widths, information-processing capacity and so on. The implication is that the limitations are hard-wired into the brain, and there's little that can be done about this arrangement.

Here, I'm moving into the knotty and much-disputed "mind-brain problem." Scientific knowledge of the neural pathways of human thinking, feeling, and action is being revolutionized [11]. Among the many new discoveries, it appears that in response to a situation, the centers that govern emotions and physical action are activated before those that govern cognition. We may feel things and act upon them before we have time to think about them. The activity in the brain concerned with developing a narrative sense of what happened occurs even later. There's even the suggestion that the existence of a coherent will deciding to act in a situation is a convenient illusion, one of many useful self-deceptions carried out by the conscious mind [12].

A key question is how much the new understanding of the detailed physical and chemical processes occurring in the brain tells us about human consciousness and the mind. Raymond Tallis, a leading clinical neuroscientist, notes the "present epidemic of neuro-prefixed pseudo-disciplines" such as neuroeconomics, neurosociology and neurophilosophy [13]. Tallis has coined the term "neuromania" to describe the view that everyday human behavior can be entirely understood in neural terms [14]. While recognizing that neuroscience has made it possible to treat brain disorders affecting the personality, he shows that it cannot provide an adequate description of basic human characteristics such as intentionality, will, memory, and integrated awareness of perceptions, thoughts and emotions.

This debate intersects in interesting ways with the place literature on which I have drawn. For example, David Abram's emphasis on the emplaced body makes sense if much of our apprehension of a place through our senses bypasses cognition and enters the body directly. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of body-as-subject gains further potency if our bodily responses occur before we are cognitively aware of them. As Tallis points out, however, "Physical science is thus about the marginalization, and ultimately the elimination, of

phenomenal appearance. But consciousness is centrally about appearance" [15]. It is a dangerous business, in other words, to use neuroscientific measurements to bolster one's position, as Barsamian arguably does, if the ultimate aim of the measurements is to provide an explanation of what is happening in the brain that dismisses qualitative experience as being secondary [16].

Warily, therefore, I find myself returning to the question: "What difference do these ideas and experiences make for how one lives and acts in the everyday world?"

This being the summer season, I swim in the sea every few days. I can scarcely enter the water without recalling my encounter with the phosphorescence. More precisely, the experience is affecting how I feel in the water. There is more than meets the eye. The tiny protozoa are presumably still there, though in lesser concentrations. In the daylight, of course, I can't see them luminesce. Nor have I come across a repetition of that night's splendor, just an occasional twinkle in a breaking wave as a faint reminder.

I have had a lifelong affinity for immersing myself in water. My mother told me that when I was barely able to toddle, she took me to a neighborhood park beside a small lake. She turned away briefly, and when she looked back I had crawled straight across the beach into the water. She hauled me out spluttering, but I was undeterred. I made a beeline for the water at every opportunity that afternoon. Thereafter, every river, lake, and sea was an open invitation to dunk myself, regardless of temperature. On bushwalking trips I always sought to camp by water, and the hike was not complete without a swim.

Because of the phosphorescence experience, the waters by my home feel more mysteriously alive, more of a communicative medium. Late on a hot, languid afternoon, I floated on my back after swimming. With my arms and legs outstretched, head back, I felt physically supported, my skin tingling in the cool water. Then I had the unsettling feeling that there was an unspoken conversation unfolding between my limbs and the enclosing brine. It was more reciprocal than previous experiences of feeling invigorated and renewed [17]. Why was it unsettling? Perhaps because the sense of my body's communication, or communion, with the waters meant my understanding of what water was capable of was now in

question. Perhaps it was the presence of mystery where before there was uncomplicated physical enjoyment.

My two experiences—phosphorescence and *Artifactual 2010*—commingle in my mind. The apparently limitless depths of the cosmos I saw in the strands of phosphorescence seem to symbolize the extent of the sensory world presenting itself to me every second. When I swim, I'm now more aware that my skin's nerve endings are in contact with the sea water. My whole body is immersed in sense impressions and responding to the water.

I'm musing again about attention [18]. For all my reservations about Barsamian's ideas and mechanical metaphors for the mind, his representation of the limited nature of conscious thought in the face of the vast sensory flux has stayed with me. There is only so much attention to go round. It is limited and slow unless one can develop the all-encompassing attention of an accomplished spiritual practitioner. Where we place that attention becomes even more critical in view of the "mile-wide river of information flying by." Relaxed multi-focussed attention centered in the body is important, but is it still only the equivalent of dipping several fingers into the river at once?

Is it a paradox to say that my attention is drawn to the vastness I cannot directly apprehend? Perhaps, but surely people have always sought to peer beyond the apparent limits of human consciousness. It's not an esoteric concern. The relationship between sensory data and conscious perceptions of the world is all about the experience of physical reality. If the body receives and responds to a flood of sensory impressions below the conscious level, anything that opens the gates of this part of the unconscious, even slightly, assumes greater significance. My efforts in Goethean science can be seen as one way among many for developing one's capacity to experience a natural phenomenon more fully—to complement rational thought with imaginative and intuitive faculties that are not usually accessed by consciousness.

**I**t is a warm afternoon. The southwesterly breeze has dropped. The waters are calling, or so I imagine. The memory of the phosphorescence lingers, the impossibility of it, the sense of play. The power of

one mysterious night of illumination has infused my everyday feeling for water. I wonder about all the other realms of Blackstone—the land, the winds, the invitations from all the life forms of this place that pass me by each day. The opportunities are endless.

## Notes

1. S. Murphy, *Upside-Down Zen* (Melbourne: Lothian, 2004), p. 221.
2. D. Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (NY: Vintage, 1997), p. 4.
3. See my "Seventh Letter from Far South" for a discussion of Hyde's views on the dynamic between *logos* and *eros*.
4. *Encycl. Britannica*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed., 1982, vol. 2, p. 1028.
5. This is true for looking into outer space as well, which is a picture of the cosmos as it was millions of years ago because of the finite speed of light.
6. G. Barsamian, "This Flesh Buggy" [interview]; [www.mona.net.au/theo](http://www.mona.net.au/theo).
7. A. Huxley, *Heaven and Hell* (NY: Harper, 1956).
8. In contrast, Hyde (see note 3) was concerned that the force of *logos* was overwhelming the erotic power of the gift cycle through the logic of the market. The two views can be reconciled by observing that, in the domain of the human psyche, *eros* may well hold sway, whereas in material transactions the opposite is true.
9. Barsamian, *ibid*.
10. Barsamian, *ibid*.
11. For useful overviews, see S. Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (NY: Norton, 1997); and V.S Ramachandran, *The Tell-Tale Brain* (NY: Norton, 2011). For a practitioner account, see P. Broks, *Into the Silent Land* (London: Atlantic, 2003).
12. R. Tallis, "What Neuroscience Cannot Tell Us About Ourselves," *The New Atlantis*, no. 29, Fall 2010, p. 3.
13. R. Tallis, *Aping Mankind* (Durham: Acumen, 2011).
14. Tallis, 2010, p.10 (note 12).
15. Using explanation reductively to marginalize alternative accounts based on human experience is the opposite of using science to build a story, such as the possible evolution of phosphorescence, or the origin of the sea-green line, that complements and enhances qualitative experience. There is a related difficulty in apparent explanations of the experience of selfhood. Buddhist teachings on the contingent and, ultimately, illusory nature of the self, which spring from direct observation of the mind, appear to receive support from neuroscientists referring to the self as simply a useful illusion. Tallis (note 13) points out, however, that it is really only a case of neuroscientists' inability to provide a satisfactory explanation for the self, and therefore supposing that self doesn't exist.
16. Tallis, 2010, p. 10 (note 12).
17. My earlier experiences described in "Eighth Letter from Far South" were of my receiving beneficial effects from being in the water, but it was uni-directional. Now I have a dim sense of two-way interaction, albeit one that is utterly mysterious to me.
18. See "Eighth Letter from Far South" for a discussion of differing perspectives.