



# Environmental Architectural Phenomenology

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This *EAP* completes 27 years of publication and marks the first digital-only edition of a summer/fall issue.

Shorter entries in this *EAP* include “citations received” and a brief obituary of German sociologist **Thomas Luckmann** (see next column). Longer entries begin with *EAP* editor **David Seamon**’s review of architectural historian **Peter L. Laurence**’s *Becoming Jane Jacobs*, the intriguing story of how her influential urban study, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), came to be written. Egyptian architect and designer **Tarek Wagih** writes a critical commentary on the recent death of the controversial Iraq-born British architect **Zaha Hadid**.

This *EAP* includes three essays, the first by naturalist and educator **Paul Krafel**, who draws on the experience of moving a boulder to point implicitly toward a phenomenology of how smaller, order-initiating possibilities can generate constructive, larger-scale change—in this case, erosion repair and landscape restoration.

Next, independent researcher **Stephen Wood** continues his first-person phenomenology of moving to a new home, which,

in this essay, he considers generatively in terms of six place processes. The first part of Wood’s account was published in the winter/spring 2016 *EAP*.

In the last essay this issue, environmental educator **John Cameron** writes an eleventh “Letter from Far South,” which focuses on the question of how one’s relationship with place shifts over time. He describes an intensifying experience and understanding of place that he identifies as “a deepening intersubjectivity and field of care.”

## Thomas Luckmann (1927-2016)

Sociologist **Thomas Luckmann** died on May 10, 2016, at the age of 88. Born in 1927 in Jesenice/Slowenia, he studied at the Universities of Vienna and Innsbruck and at New York City’s New School for Social Research, where he completed his doctoral work in 1956 under the direction of phenomenological sociologist **Alfred Schütz**. In 1965, he accepted a professorship at the University of Frankfurt; in 1970, he transferred to the University of Konstanz, where he was Professor of Sociology until he retired in 1994.

Luckmann was one of the most significant figures in German post-war sociology and philosophy. Though best known for *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966 and co-authored with another of Schütz’s former students, sociologist **Peter L. Berger**), Luckmann is perhaps most significant to phenomenology because he completed Schütz’s *Structures of the Lifeworld* (2 volumes, 1973 and 1983), which he finalized by filling out Schütz’s unfinished notes. The sidebar on p. 2 is a description of that work as provided by the on-line version of the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

*Below: A photograph taken on May 3, 2016, of Jane Jacobs’s ever-changing New York City’s West Village block, the site of her famous “sidewalk ballet.” Jacobs’s home, 555 Hudson Street, is the dark red three-story building, left, immediately next to the taller, six-story building. At the end of the block, right, is the White Horse Tavern, one significant “third place” that Jacobs highlighted in Death and Life. See the review of Peter L. Laurence’s recently published book on Jacobs, p. 6. Photo by Peter L. Laurence and used with permission.*



## The social lifeworld

After a more general account of the lifeworld and its relation to the sciences, [Schütz and Luckmann's *Structures of the Lifeworld*] takes up its various stratifications, such as provinces of meaning, temporal and spatial zones of reach, and social structure. Schütz and Luckmann then comment on the components of one's stock of knowledge, including learned and non-learned elements, relevances and types, and trace the build-up of such a stock.

The authors study the social conditioning of one's subjective stock of knowledge and inquire about the social stock of knowledge of a group and different possible combinations of knowledge distribution (generalized and specialized). They consider how subjective knowledge becomes embodied in a social stock of knowledge and how the latter influences the former.

In addition, the authors pursue such issues as the structures of consciousness and action, the choosing of projects, rational action, and forms of social action, whether such action be unilateral or reciprocal, immediate or mediate.

A final section analyzes the boundaries of experience, different degrees of transcendencies (from simply bringing an object within reach to the experience of death), and the mechanisms for crossing boundaries (e.g. symbols).

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schutz/>

## Citations Received

**Andrew Crompton, 2013. The Architecture of Multi-faith Spaces: God Leaves the Building. *Journal of Architecture*, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 474–496.**

This architect examines “multi-faith rooms,” in which “people of all faiths, as well as those of no faith... time-share a space that takes on one of a set of sacred modalities....” Crompton argues that multi-faith architecture typically involves “mundane spaces without an aura whose most characteristic form is an empty white

room.” So that these spaces are not meaningful “in an inappropriate way, they use banal materials, avoid order and regularity, and are the architectural equivalent of ambient noise.” Crompton examines several specific examples of multi-faith spaces and includes a good number of plans and photographs.

**Galen Cranz, 2016. *Ethnography for Designers*. New York: Routledge.**

Author of *The Chair: Rethinking Culture, Body, and Design* (1998), this sociologist and design theorist aims to help “architecture and design students learn to listen actively and deeply to clients and users. Listening is profound and simple, useful to professionals and to all of us as people. This book provides practical tips for applying ethnography to architectural and other types of design.” The book includes many case studies by Cranz’s students at the University of California at Berkeley and helpful drawings and other graphics.

**Kenny Cupers, ed., 2013. *Use Matters: An Alternative History of Architecture*. New York: Routledge.**

The 15 chapters of this architectural historian’s edited collection work to demonstrate that “interest in the elusive realm of the user was an essential part of architecture and design throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.” Some of the chapters invoke unfair, post-structural-revisionist interpretations of behavioral and experiential approaches to design—e.g. the odd claims that **Kevin Lynch** and **Christopher Alexander** “produced urban, architectural, and experiential spatial theories which begged to be further rationalized by market forces” or that “**Norberg-Schulz’s** theoretical aspirations offer the opportunity to connect a commercial intent (a form of consumer-focused avocational education) to a phenomenological experience, using architecture as a medium).”

More helpful are chapters that offer more balanced discussions of 20th-century efforts in “architectural psychology”—e.g., “*Architectural Handbooks and the User Experience*” (**P. Emmons** and **A. Mihalache**);

“*Architects, Users, and the Social Sciences in Postwar America*” (**A. Sachs**); and “*Designed-in Safety: Ergonomics in the Bathroom*” (**B. Penner**). The sidebar, below, reproduces a passage from Sachs’ discussion of first-generation environment-behavior research.

## Better understanding users

The concept of the “user” as it developed in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s has left a rich legacy, not only the buildings designed based on this approach. Many of the methods developed with EBS [Environment-Behavior Studies] scholars are still part of architectural practice and are gaining momentum in the early twenty-first century with the interest in “evidence-based design.”

This is despite the fact that the environmental design approach, like the all-knowing expert before it, was eclipsed in architectural discourse by alternate conceptions of knowledge and society. Phenomenological and critical theory, popular in the 1980s and 1990s, for example, placed individuals, their hermeneutic processes, and their interpersonal interactions at the center and describe society as an intricate web or a network rather than a system. In these formulations, the “users” have almost no shared qualities at all, not even within a group, and any general understanding of human consciousness is impossible before “all ideological and communication ‘distortions’ are eliminated.”

The environmental design approach was also questioned from within. Even in the excitement of collaboration between architects and social scientists, scholars and practitioners worried that their expectations and standards of veracity were fundamentally different. In 1971, Russell Ellis, a sociologist at Berkeley, noted that it was easier to describe what will prohibit unwanted behavior than to anticipate how to encourage wanted behavior.

This “negative” approach was instrumental in producing knowledge about human behavior, but was restricting as a source of guidance for the creative design process. Ellis’s colleagues at

Berkeley also worried that the environmental design approach did not resolve the problem of professional knowledge but rather exacerbated it, as [Berkeley Architecture professor] Roger Montgomery stated: “The architects’ real new people were not the users and the occupants, but all those who participated in and provided the context for the construction process.”

These criticisms are valid concerns, but they do not undermine the importance of the 1960s conception of the user. Ultimately, the “real” user is neither the normative individual, the group-bound user, nor the phenomenological subject, but an amalgam of them all. In times of professional crisis, when architects need to respond to new social norms, attention is temporarily focused on one aspect over the others. These formulations may seem narrow in retrospect, but it is through them that we gain a better perspective of the “user,” and of her corollary, the architect (A. Sachs, “Architects, Users, and the Social Sciences in Postwar America,” pp. 83–84).

**Robert Gifford, ed., 2016. *Research Methods for Environmental Psychology*. Oxford: Wiley/Blackwell.**

This environmental psychologist’s edited collection includes 20 chapters that are said to cover “the full spectrum of research methods” in environmental psychology and related traditions like behavioral geography, environmental sociology, and environment-behavior research. Entries that *EAP* readers may find useful include **Reuven Sussman’s** “Observational Methods”; **Cheuk Fan Ng’s** “Behavioral Mapping and Tracking”; **David Canter’s** “Revealing the Conceptual Systems of Places”; **Daniel Montello’s** “Behavioral Methods for Spatial Cognition Research”; **Arthur Stamp’s** “Simulating Designed Environments”; and **David Seamon and Harneet K. Gill’s** “Qualitative Approaches to Environment-Behavior Research.” In the sidebar, right, are Gifford’s comments on his selection of “environmental psychology,” rather than some other name, as the label for this broad, interdisciplinary field of research and practice.

## What’s in a name?

Since the 1960s, several other names for the field [of environmental psychology] have been proposed. Among these are *environment and behavior*, *ecopsychology*, and *conservation psychology*. In fact, the very first conferences that focused on these topics in the mid-1960s used the name *architectural psychology*.

Quickly, however, those involved realized that the field included questions and answers that went beyond buildings to broader concerns with the environment itself, and *environmental psychology* was chosen as the most appropriate name.

This name covers the whole field, from fundamental psychological processes such as perception and cognition of the built and natural environment to the use of everyday space by people, the design of physical settings of all kinds, understanding the impacts on people and by people on natural resources both living and not, and the climate-related behaviors and attitudes.

I suppose you can call it what you want to, but I believe that each of the other names represent pieces of the whole.... [I would argue] that we should use the inclusive name *environmental psychology* for all who are interested, regardless of our personal research interests, partly because it is the most accurate and inclusive umbrella term of all these topics, and partly to avoid the field splintering into even smaller factions, which likely would be followed by oblivion (Robert Gifford, “Introduction,” pp. 7–8).

**Stephen Grabow and Kent Spreckelmeyer, 2015. *The Architecture of Use: Aesthetics and Function in Architectural Design*. New York: Routledge.**

These architects offer ten examples of “buildings that embody the human experience at an extraordinary level” to demonstrate “the central importance of the role of function in architecture as a generative force in determining built form.” Twentieth-century, buildings that the authors consider include **Alvar Aalto’s** Paimio Sanatorium, **Frank Lloyd Wright’s** Larkin Office

Building, **Louis Sullivan’s** National Farmers’ Bank, and **Louis Kahn’s** Trenton Bath House: “Each building is described from the point of view of a major functional concept or idea of human use which then spreads out and influences the spatial organization, built form, and structure. In doing so each building is presented as an exemplar that reaches beyond the pragmatic concerns of a narrow program and demonstrates how functional concepts can inspire great design, evoke archetypal human experience, and help to understand how architecture embodies the deeper purposes and meanings of everyday life.”

**Tony Hadland and Hans-Erhard Lessing, 2014. *Bicycle Design: An Illustrated History*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.**

These historians provide “an authoritative and comprehensive account of the bicycle’s technical and historical evolution, from the earliest velocipedes (invented to fill the need for horseless transport during a shortage of oats) to modern racing bikes, mountain bikes, and recumbents.”

**Nigel Hiscock, 2007. *The Symbol at Your Door: Number and Geometry in Religious Architecture of the Greek and Latin Middle Ages*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.**

This architectural theorist argues that “the historical context of medieval religious architecture suggests that churchmen would have had every reason to express number and geometry in their architecture as part of a programme of intended Christian Platonist symbolism. It will be shown that, in some instances, there is evidence that they did, which in turn indicates that this would also have been the practice in other cases for which no evidence has so far been found.

“Accordingly, the investigation will attempt to suggest what symbolic intentions could lie behind religious architecture and art, and how these could have been interpreted by others, whether intended or not. In so doing, care will be taken to ensure that any possible meanings that are proposed can

be supported by literary and documentary evidence, and that the possible means of achieving them fall within the known competence of the parties involved” (p. 8).

This work is an important contribution to the phenomenology and hermeneutics of sacred architecture and sacred space. Hiscock’s central argument is reproduced in the sidebar, below and right.

### “A perceived natural order”

To summarize, the number theory of Pythagoras and the geometry of Plato’s cosmology, which explained the principles of a perceived universal order, were adapted by the early Church in the form of Christian Platonism and taught in monastery schools through the programme of liberal arts. The need of the Church to teach these truths to its students and to a populace that was largely illiterate led to their transmission in school treatises and their portrayal in religious architecture and art.

The evidence of popular culture indicates that some of the rudiments of this teaching were understood by ordinary laypeople, presumably including masons and other artisans involved in the building process, who were able to make simple religious associations with the meaning of numbers and, to some extent, the figures of geometry.

It is clear that architects early in the Greek Middle Ages would have been able to receive and implement a patron’s brief, sometimes by way of a drawing or a plan, whilst early in the Latin Middle Ages, some reforming abbots and bishops were regarded as architects of their own building projects and conveyed some form of architectural programme to their builders. They certainly had the means to do this in a way that could include symbolic content, and their builders likewise had the means to implement it.

From the twelfth century onwards, architects in the West are depicted beside their building work, taking instructions from their patrons. Before graduating, their apprenticeship had been shared in the lodge with masons who were trained in practical geometry and who commonly used quadrature for devising

their constructional details, work which evidently depended on first receiving the plan and a key dimension from the architect.

How the ground plan embodied the patron’s requirements is not known, but it is likely to have been derived from some form of *schema* provided by the patron or commissioning body. It would have been a relatively simple matter for it to have defined the size and architectural form of the work, the layout and positioning of altars and chapels, the location of the chancel in relation to the nave, along with particular numbers of architectural elements....

The manner of achieving this would have been left to the builders under the supervision of the architect or master builder according to their own practices. This suggests a two-stage process involving a schematic design, incorporating the patron’s programme in some form or other, as exemplified possibly by the Plan of St Gall and Villard’s Cistercian plan; and the constructional design, which was the builders’ work in raising it according to current practice.

Thus, the *schema* might ensure the transmission of tradition, authority, and the unchanging truths of the universal scheme, whilst the constructional design would be progressive, following current practice in building, and current style in the fashioning of details....

Whilst the form might remain constant, along with such meaning as embodied in the form, each [church] was nevertheless built in the style of its day, whether Byzantine, Carolingian, Romanesque, or Gothic... (pp. 48–49).

### Marianne E. Krasny and Keith G. Tidball, 2015. *Civic Ecology: Adaptation and Transformation from the Ground Up*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

These authors define civic ecology as the “transformation of broken places.” Examples of broken places include Detroit, New York after 9/11, and New Orleans after Hur-

ricane Katrina. Drawing on case-study examples throughout, the authors outline “ten civic ecology principles,” examples of which include: (1) civic ecology practices emerge from broken places; (2) these practices foster well-being; (3) these practices provide opportunities for learning.

### Patricia M. Locke and Rachel McCann, eds., 2016. *Merleau-Ponty: Space, Place, Architecture*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio State Univ. Press.

This collection’s 12 chapters, mostly by philosophers, “work to consider how we live and create as profoundly spatial beings.” In her introduction to the volume, co-editor Patricia Locke explains that the general theme of the volume “is the experience and expression of space on multiple levels, addressing questions central to the work of philosophers, architectural theorists, and readers in a range of creative fields. Contributions include Edward Casey’s “Finding Architectural Edge in the Wake of Merleau-Ponty”; David Morris’s “Spatiality, Temporality, and Architecture as a Place of Memory”; and Rachel McCann’s “Through the Looking Glass: The Spatial Experience of Merleau-Ponty’s Metaphors.” See Casey’s discussion of Merleau-Ponty’s “flesh” in the sidebar, below.

### Architecture and “flesh of the world”

What does flesh and especially the flesh of the world have to do with architecture...? [B]uilt places belong to the world’s flesh, despite their origins in the particularities of human design and their often highly contrived means of construction.

I would go further and say that architecture, far from being a merely artificial and conventional factor in human life, belongs intrinsically to the flesh of the world and that, still more radically, it inheres in human flesh—is inseparable from it. To be human is to live flesh in such a way as to exist in a built environment, however minimal (a shelter, a tent) or elaborate (a skyscraper, a stadium).

When not in such surroundings, human creatures miss them, need them, and crave them—hence are always in the process of seeking and setting up built structures of some sort. Whether made from rock or wood, steel or aluminum, such structures are not merely external but are lodged in the world’s flesh—flesh of its flesh—and are part of our own flesh, too, thanks to their incorporation into the daily lifeworlds animated by moving bodies (Edward Casey, 86–87).

**Jeff Malpas, ed., 2015. *The Intelligence of Place: Topographies and Poetics*. London: Bloomsbury.**

This edited collection includes 16 chapters (one of which is a poem) discussing the concept of place from a range of disciplinary and conceptual perspectives. Contributors include: **Edward Casey** (“Place and Edge”); **Joshua Meyrowitz** (“Place and Its Mediated Re-Placements”); **Juhani Pallasmaa** (“Place and Atmosphere”); **Alberto Pérez-Gómez** (“Place and Architectural Space”); **Edward Relph** (“Place and Connection”); and **Malpas** (“Place and Singularity”). See sidebars, below, for selections from the chapters by Pallasmaa and Relph.

**“An open sense of place”**

Whatever occurs in a specific place is always implicated in broader geographical and ontological processes. To ignore this is to close the door and shut out the world... An open sense of place connects to our origins and experiences in particular places with the intelligence that understands how these are effected by and influence what goes on elsewhere in the world.

Of course, there is always the possibility that [place] can be distorted to ferment the worst sorts of human traits, especially when narrow-minded convictions are reinforced by participation in virtual self-selected communities on the Internet.

My view is that an open sense of place is a concomitant of modern mobility,

multi-centredness, re-embedding and tele-technologies. It promotes shared experiences and an appreciation of diversity. It is increasingly how people everywhere connect with the world. It is also an increasingly urgent necessity for the politics of place beyond place.

The emergent world problems of the present century—climate change, persistent poverty in the shadows of excessive wealth, the loss of biodiversity, ragged wars and terrorism, and epidemics of infectious diseases—all have causes and effects on particular lives in particular places yet are spread-eagled around the globe.

It is a nice conceit to think that an open sense of place, regardless of whether it is explicitly recognized or called that, might be a necessary condition for mitigating such problems” (Edward Relph p. 200).

**The secret power of architecture**

Today’s urgent call for an ecologically sustainable architecture also suggests a non-autonomous, fragile, collaborative, and intentionally atmospheric architecture adapted to the precise conditions of topography, soil, climate, vegetation, as well as to the cultural traditions of the region. The potentials of atmosphere, weak gestalt, and adaptive fragility will undoubtedly be explored in the near future in the search for an architecture that will acknowledge the conditions and principles of the ecological reality as we as of our own bio-historical nature.

I suggest that in the near future we may well become more interested in atmospheres than individually expressive forms. Understanding atmospheres will mostly likely teach us about the secret power of architecture and how it can influence entire societies, but at the same time, enable us to define our own individual existential foothold. Our capacity to grasp qualitative atmospheric entities of complex environmental situations, without a detailed recording and evaluation of their parts and ingredients, could well be named our sixth

sense, and it is likely to be our most important sense in terms of our existence, survival and emotional lives (Juhani Pallasmaa, p. 151).

**Daniel Paiva, 2015. *Experiencing Virtual Places: Insights on the Geographies of Sim Racing*. *Journal of Cultural Geography*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 145–168.**

This geographer examines “place experience in virtual spaces, taking the sim racing virtual spaces as a case study and endeavoring to build a bridge between theory and empirics.” The study draws on participant observation and 20 in-depth interviews to consider “the virtual geographies of two sim racing videogames: Gran Turismo and rFactor.”

**Aya Peri Bader, 2015. *A Model for Everyday Experience of the Built Environment: The Embodied Perception of Architecture*, *The Journal of Architecture*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 244–267.**

This architect and architectural theorist focuses on a phenomenology of the “lived experience of the built environment.” She argues that “there is insufficient compatibility between the prevalent professional understanding of the perception of architecture, and how architecture is in fact perceived in everyday life.” Her aim is to “investigate the ‘inattentive experience’ of architecture” and “to clarify its structure and components, their interrelationship with physical built environments, and their impact on the user-perceiver.” One of her conclusions is that “most of the impact architecture has on users is not a result of focused attention on the architecture object; rather, the object is ‘absorbed’ in a state of habitual indifference.”

## Book Review

# A New System of Thought on the City

Peter L. Laurence, 2016. *Becoming Jane Jacobs*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Reviewed by David Seamon



As we move more deeply into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, urban writer Jane Jacobs's 1961 *Death and Life of Great American Cities* continues to grow in conceptual and practical significance. One can safely say that this book—a remarkably perceptive picture of how real-world cities work—is the great 20<sup>th</sup>-century explication of urban experience and situations, continuing to have profound theoretical and practical significance for urban policy, planning, and design.

In relation to environmental and architectural phenomenology, Jacobs's work is central because it can accurately be described as a phenomenology of the city and the urban lifeworld [1]. Methodologically, her major aim was to allow citiness to reveal itself in the course of everyday, taken-for-granted life and to use these firsthand discoveries as a starting point for identifying more general

principles and structures that make the city what it is essentially.

Jacobs (1916–2006) came to realize that the most central lived structure of the city is a small-scaled functional and physical diversity that generates and is generated by what she called the “street ballet”—an exuberance of place and sidewalk life founded on the everyday comings and goings of many people carrying out their own ordinary needs, obligations, and activities. In turn, Jacobs identified four key environmental qualities that typically sustain street ballets: short blocks, sufficient density of users, a range in building types, and primary uses—i.e., anchor functions like housing and workplaces.

In the last decade, a solid interdisciplinary field of “Jacobsean” studies has developed, and many books and edited collections have been published, discussing Jacobs's life and work [2]. One superb new addition to these studies is architectural historian Peter L. Laurence's just-published *Becoming Jane Jacobs*, which provides a careful, eye-opening reconstruction of the events, experiences, and influences in Jacobs's personal and professional life that led to her writing *Death and Life*. Laurence explains that he tells “the story of the ‘first half’ of Jacobs's career” to reveal “a previously underestimated intellect.” He continues:

*By shedding light on experiences that led to Jacobs becoming one of the most important American writers on cities already before Death and Life, I seek to dispel the stereotype that Jacobs was an amateur when it came to understanding cities and their redevelopment.*

*In contrast to the dilettante whose “home remedies,” as the great writer Louis Mumford called them in anger, were limited to a woman's view of a local, domestic urban*

*routine, I show that Jacobs, who was anything but a stereotypical 1950s housewife and no more of an amateur than Mumford, was a professional writer [on cities and urban development]... Neither accidental nor modest in ambition, a depth of experience was the foundation of Jacobs's desire to offer a wholly new vision of cities, not some shortsighted “remedies” (pp. 6–7).*

In seven chapters, an introduction, and conclusion, Laurence masterly demonstrates how Jacobs's personal and professional life, partly via a good amount of serendipity, unfolded in such a way to set the stage for *Death and Life*, which Laurence summarizes as “creating a foundation of knowledge about how the city works” and “rebuilding twentieth-century planning theory from ground up” (p. 270, p. 271).

## Becoming an Urban Expert

In chapter 1, “To the City,” Laurence recounts Jacobs's leaving her hometown of Scranton, Pennsylvania, in 1934 and moving to New York City, which provided the robust city experiences that would fuel her urban understanding in *Death and Life*.

By late 1935, Jacobs had found success as a free-lance writer, publishing in *Vogue* the first of four essays on Manhattan's working neighborhoods—its fur, leather, diamond, and flower districts. These four articles, Laurence incisively demonstrates, book-marked “the decades between the start of Jacobs's writing career and her first book on cities.” Laurence sees in these essays the kernel of awareness that would eventually blossom into *Death and Life*: “Jacobs found the spirit of New York and its hope for the future in these working neighborhoods, where diverse city functions and people lent each other ‘close-grained and lively support’” (p. 29).

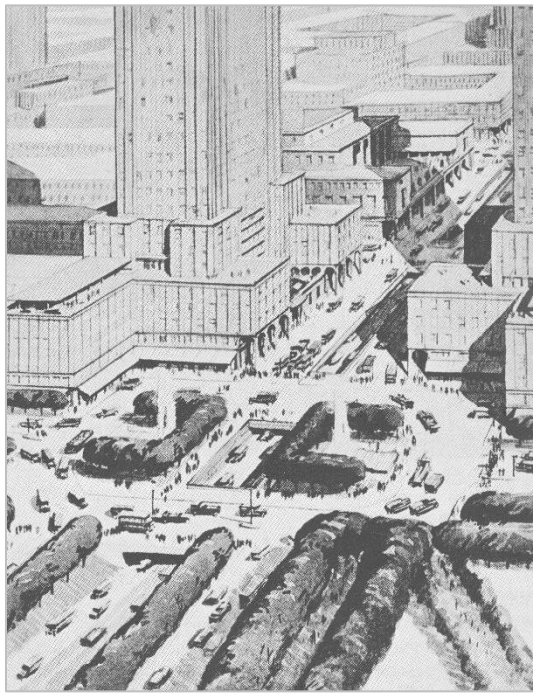
In chapter 2, “The Education of a City Naturalist,” Laurence overviews Jacobs’s two years as a full-time general studies undergraduate at Columbia University, taking courses that would have led to a major in geography if she had finished her degree (which she did not because she had taken too many classes as an extension student and had a weak high-school record that precluded her entrance into the formal undergraduate program).

In one of the economic geography classes she took at Columbia, Jacobs read Belgian historian Henri Pirenne’s 1925 *Medieval Cities Their Origins and the Revival of Trade*, which Laurence describes as “one of the single most influential books on her thinking about cities” because it helped her understand how “cities grew and how they failed” (p. 53).

In chapter 3, “‘We Inaugurate Architectural Criticism,’” Laurence details how, after working as a writer for the Office of War Information and the State Department during World War II, Jacobs eventually became a journalist and editor at *Architectural Forum*, a Time, Incorporated, magazine. In the six-and-a-half years that she worked there (June, 1952 to October, 1958), Jacobs “learned to be an architectural and urban design critic” (p. 93).

Under the direction of Douglas Haskell, the able but demanding editor of *Forum*, she rapidly became, “with Haskell’s support, its expert on urban development and, according to him, its best writer on the subject.... Building on *Forum*’s editorial agenda for architectural and urban criticism, Jacobs turned critiques about architectural functionalism into a new conception of the functional city” (p. 94).

Much more interested in practical, working design solutions than in utopian visions like Le Corbusier’s much-lauded “towers in the park,” Haskell and Jacobs both emphasized “a building’s participation in larger contexts: with its users, with the city, with the ‘world’ that they contributed to building through their writing” (p. 98). More and more doubtful about the dominant aesthetic claim that the city should be a work of art, Haskell and Jacobs “came to share a belief



that architecture must be imagined in the ‘real world’” (p. 107).

In chapters 4–6 (“Advocating the City-Planner Approach,” “‘Seeds of Self-Regeneration’ for City Deserts,” and “Urban Sprawl, Urban Design, and Urban Renewal”), Laurence overviews Jacobs’s writings, projects, public presentations, and community efforts that marked her time with *Forum*, and how these various experiences set the stage for *Death and Life*, which she began writing in 1958 but did not finish until early 1961.

Although originally an advocate for modernist design, Jacobs over time pinpointed major problems with the standard functionalist-modernist approach to architecture and planning. For example, in evaluating one such design for elderly housing, “she criticized the architect for knowing nothing about the ‘people it will house, how long they are apt to live there (he never heard anybody bring that up), whether they bring or would like to bring anything with them, etc. They are numbers, one to a bed, it is a barracks’”. Her remarks anticipated the criticisms she would later make of public housing projects then on the architects’ drawing boards” (p. 122).

Eventually, Jacobs came to see that a much more accurate and practical approach to architecture, planning, and urban design was direct observation and understanding of particular urban places and their residents

and other users—what she sometimes called “pavement-pounding”:

*[S]he saw better planning as the result of a habit of thought that stemmed from a curiosity about the “living city.” Walking and good planning, she wrote, “are two sides of the same attitude, two sides of the pavement pounder’s fascination, on an intimate level, with all details of city life and city relationships, of his consuming curiosity about the way the city develops and changes, of his endless preoccupation with the living city, and—at the bottom of it all—of his affection for the city.”*

*As compared to the Olympian planners, who studied statistics and traffic patterns and “then waved their clearance wands,” the pavement pounders were those “who want to change and rebuild the city not out of fundamental disgust with it, but out of fascination with it and love for it” (p. 182).*

## Creating a Seminal Work

In chapter 7 and the conclusion (“A New System of Thought” and “A *Vitae Activa* and *Contemplativa*”), Laurence details Jacobs’s experience in writing *Death and Life* and overviews critical reactions to the book. He begins with a discussion of Jacobs’s article, “Downtown Is for People,” her first comprehensive critique of urban redevelopment and suggestions for constructive alternatives.

Against the wishes of Haskell, who wanted the article for *Forum*, “Downtown” appeared in the April, 1958 issue of *Forum*’s sister magazine, *Fortune*, and shortly after was republished in the best-selling *The Exploding Metropolis* (1958), edited by urban writer and researcher William Whyte, who would later write *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980), another seminal work on the city. “Downtown Is for People” synthesized Jacobs’s growing understanding of how real cities worked and laid out, in preliminary form, topics and themes much more thoroughly developed in *Death and Life*. Foreshadowing one of its central arguments, she wrote:

*[A] sense of place is built up in the end, from many little things..., some so small people take them for granted, and yet the lack of them takes the flavor out of the city: irregularities in level, so often bulldozed away; different kinds of paving, signs and fireplugs*

*and street lights, white marble stoops.... The remarkable intricacy and liveliness of downtown can never be created by the abstract logic of a few men” (p. 240).*

The professional and public attention given this article played an important role in Jacobs’s receiving a series of research grants from the Rockefeller Foundation that would provide the time and financial support for her writing *Death and Life*. In her book prospectus, she wrote that her aim would be to describe and explain the big city’s “marvelously intricate, constantly adjusting network of people and their activities. This network makes all the unique and constructive contributions of the great city possible; it also makes possible the social controls that have to be effective for people, communities and enterprises within the big city if we are to maintain a high standard (or even a decent standard) of civilization” (p. 252).

Though Jacobs originally envisioned that she could complete her book in “about nine months” (p. 252), the project quickly expanded in time and effort and would not be finished until January, 1961, thus taking two years and four months to write, “three times longer than she had expected” (p. 277). Laurence provides an in-depth explication of Jacobs’s writing process, including reasons for delay—originally overestimating the thoroughness of her understanding of the city, learning how to write a book, and fighting urban renewal projects in Greenwich Village and East Harlem proposed by powerful New York City planner Robert Moses.

Laurence emphasizes that Jacobs’s role in trying to improve housing in East Harlem was particularly important for her deepening urban understanding. The neighborhood design proposed by the New York City Housing Authority would evict from the East Harlem neighborhood some 900 families, 60 stores, five churches and several factories and warehouses employing local residents, all to be replaced by 21-story apartment towers. Jacobs became involved with an ad hoc group of architects and community representatives to propose a neighborhood alternative: a “mixed-use, mixed-building housing model” that would support and invigorate East Harlem’s everyday neighborhood life.



In her public presentation laying out this alternative, Jacobs explained that the major flaw of public housing was its “disregard of the social structure of the city neighborhoods, particularly poor neighborhoods. The projects are designed for a kind of sophisticated family individualism, which is beyond the inner resources and the financial resources of their tenants, and which is the opposite of the highly communal and cooperative society among families in the old slums” (p. 265). She wrote to landscape architect Grady Clay (March 3, 1959) that, via the East Harlem experience,

*I began to see that the most important thing in life in [that neighborhood] was relationships of all kinds among people—that these relationships, many of them very casual, were the means of keeping the peace, of assistance in time of trouble, of squeezing some fun and joy out of the slum, of avenues to opportunity and glimpses of different choices in life, and of any sort of political participation. I saw that many people in east Harlem were of true importance in their circles and had the dignity that comes of having some influence and mastery, however little, on their environment....*

*I began to get a glimmer of the idea that the workings of the city were based on mutual support among a great variety of things, and that this principle was totally missing from the rebuilt city [of the modernist designers]” (p. 269–270).*

## **A “New System of Thought”**

For an urban phenomenology, perhaps what is most interesting about Laurence’s account is Jacobs’s gradually consolidating recognition that what her book could be is “a new system of thought” for understanding and thus strengthening cities (p. 274). In

a July, 23, 1959 letter to Chadbourne Gilpatric, associate director of the Rockefeller Foundation, she wrote:

*In my book, I am not rehashing old material on cities and city planning. I am working with new concepts about the city and its behavior. Many of these concepts are quite radically opposed to those accepted in orthodox and conventional planning theory. I think I am proving the validity of these new concepts and giving evidence, from experience in the city itself, which shows that the alternative to ignoring them is not the rebuilding of some improved type of city but, rather, the social, economic, and visual disintegration of the city. I am trying to get theory and practice of city planning and design started on a new and different track....*

*My contribution is the organizing of these observations and ideas into workable systems of thought about the city, and in indicating the new aims and tactics which planning must adopt to catalyze constructive and genuinely urban city behavior” (pp. 274–75).*

Jacobs summarized her new system of thought on the city as “organized complexity,” by which she referred to an intricate place ensemble of environmental elements, functions, and people intimately interacting in synergistic relationship (p. 303). In an earlier letter to Gilpatric (July 1, 1958), Jacobs presented a particularly lucid picture of successful urban places:

*Within the seeming chaos and jumble of the city is a remarkable degree of order, in the form of relationships of all kinds that people have evoked and that are absolutely fundamental to city life—more fundamental and necessary than safety, to convenience, to social action, to economic opportunity, than anything conceived of in the image of the rebuilt [modernist] city.*

*Where it works at all well, this network of relationships is astonishingly intricate. It requires a staggering diversity of activities and people, very intimately interlocked (although often casually so), and able to make constant adjustments to needs and circumstances; the physical form of the city has also to be full of variety and flexibility for people to accommodate it to their needs (p. 254).*





Phenomenologically, what is so central about Jacobs's understanding here is that the parts of urban place only work together as a whole when they facilitate and are facilitated by an appropriate togetherness of people, activities, situations and environmental elements unfolding dynamically to foster and be fostered by human attachment to a particular sense of urban place. What she provides is a strikingly thorough and grounded description of urban being-in-the-world.

One reason why completing *Death and Life* took so much longer than Jacobs had envisioned was that, only through the effort of writing and rewriting, was she able to locate clearly how citiness actually worked and how various urban elements and processes intermeshed to generate (and be generated by) robust urban districts.

In an August 18, 1959 letter to friend Saul Alinsky, also writing a book, Jacobs agreed with what he had earlier explained about his own writing problem: "I've got so damned much to say and everything is so interrelated with everything else" (p. 276). A few weeks before, in a July 23, 1959 letter to Gilpatric, she highlighted directly the difficulty of accurately locating and understanding the complexity of parts and whole: "the logic of every part is a portion of the logic of the whole, done in the light of the whole" (p. 274) [3].

In the last chapter of his book, Laurence relates how, three weeks after Jacobs completed *Death and Life*, the New York City Planning commission released their plan to include her West Village neighborhood in urban renewal and how Jacobs became a major player in opposing and eventually stopping this threat. Laurence ends the chapter with a discussion of reactions to *Death and Life*, emphasizing the point that

"parts of her inclusive vision of the city were quickly embraced by an ideologically broad spectrum of readers" who ranged from progressive and liberal, on one hand, to libertarian and conservative, on the other (p. 279). He also briefly relates the perspective of *Death and Life* to some of her later writings, including *The Economy of Cities* (1969), *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (1984), and *Systems of Survival* (1992).

Covering these links to her later work, however, is not one of Laurence's major aims, and clearly that discussion could be pursued further. Also missing is an in-depth discussion of *Death and Life*'s longer-term impact on urban thinking, planning, and design, and in what positive and negative ways Jacobs's ideas are regarded academically and professionally today.

These criticisms are quibbles, however, since the great value of Laurence's book is its thorough, year-by-year, writing-by-writing account provided of Jacobs's serendipitous progress toward creating the great urban study of our time. As he writes, "*The Death and Life of Great American Cities* was not a book that Jacobs had planned at the outset; she learned about cities by writing it. But she had been writing it for almost thirty years, since her first essays on the city and through her work for *Architectural Forum*" (p. 280).

## Notes

1. David Seamon, "Jane Jacobs's *Death and Life of Great American Cities* as a Phenomenology of Urban Place," *Journal of Space Syntax*, vol. 3 (fall 2012), pp.139–49; David Seamon, "Lived Bodies, Place, and Phenomenology," *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment*, vol. 4 (2013), pp. 143–66.
2. These works include: Alice Alexiou Sparberg's *Jane Jacobs, Urban Visionary* (Rutgers Univ. Press, 2006); Timothy Mennel, Jo Steffens, and Christopher Klemek's *Block by Block: Jane Jacobs and the Future of New York* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2007); Anthony Flint's *Wrestling with Moses: How Jane Jacobs Took on New York's Master Builder and Transformed the American City* (Random House, 2009); Glenda Lang and Marjory Wunsch's *Genius of Common Sense: Jane Jacobs and the Story of The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (David R. Godine, 2009); Roberta

Brandes Gratz's *The Battle for Gotham: New York in the Shadow of Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs* (Nation Books, 2010); Stephen A. Goldsmith, Lynne Elizabeth, and Arlene Goldbard's *What We See: Advancing the Observations of Jane Jacobs* (New Village Press, 2010); Sharon Zukin's *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2010); Christopher Klemek's *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2011); Max Page and Timothy Mennel's *Reconsidering Jane Jacobs* (APA Planners Press, 2011); Sonia Hirt and Diane Zahm's *The Urban Wisdom of Jane Jacobs* (Routledge, 2012); and Dirk Schubert's *Contemporary Perspectives on Jane Jacobs* (Ashgate, 2014).

For a helpful collection of Jacobs's less known written work, including a sampling of her letters and some of the *Vogue* articles, see M. Allen, ed., *Ideas that Matter: The Worlds of Jane Jacobs* (Owen Sound, Ontario: Ginger Press, 1997).

3. On the parts-whole relationship understood phenomenologically, see philosopher Henri Bortoft's *The Wholeness of Nature* (Lindesfarne Press, 1996).

## Image Captions

p. 7: A drawing encapsulating the modernist rendition of the city that Jacobs eventually came to question; note the "sunken road for fast vehicular traffic" (from T. Adams et al., *The Building of the City, Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: William F. Fell, 1931; reproduced in Lawrence, p. 17).

p. 8: A photograph of East Harlem's Stephen Foster Houses included in Jacobs's June 1956 article, "The Missing Link in City Redevelopment." She wrote: "New Housing developments like this one... take into account little beyond sanitary living space, formal playgrounds, and sacrosanct laws" (*Architecture Forum*, June 1956, p. 132; reproduced in Lawrence, p. 217).

p. 9: Jane Jacobs at her typewriter, ca. 1961, (Jane Jacobs papers; reproduced in Lawrence, p. 304).

*David Seamon is the editor of Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology.*

# Mourning Zaha Hadid

Tarek Wagih

**Wagih** is an Egyptian architect and designer. He specializes in contemporary Islamic architecture infusing minimalism and traditional themes. His writing explores the possibility of understanding and renewing traditional concepts in light of current world architecture. [tarekwagihhamdy@yahoo.com](mailto:tarekwagihhamdy@yahoo.com). Text © 2016 Tarek Wagih.

**Z**aha Hadid is dead. The world's most famous and only female "starchitect" suddenly died at age 65 at the apex of her career. Dead is a leading figure who thought outside the box, defying all norms. Dead is the Iraqi-born British architect who deconstructed the box, defying all norms. She was a genius with complete mastery of the design tools via which she was able to imagine and build complex, out-of-the-ordinary structures.

Is that enough? My answer is no. For the architect, technical mastery and imaginative strength are one thing, but the philosophy that inspires and drives creative work is something else. As much as Zaha Hadid's designs speak to her architectural mastery, they also speak to her struggle with the natural order of things. Her work expresses a belief in blind progress and technological advancement. Her work projects the fashionable trend of "deconstruction," a mode of envisioning much different from deconstruction as philosophy.

One cannot be a deconstructionist philosopher who believes in progress because the very philosophy of deconstruction calls progress into question. To be progressive is to follow norms and to have a telos grounded in some better future. In contrast, deconstruction defies norms, leaving one in a conceptual abyss. From my perspective, "deconstructivist" architecture is an unsacred blend of progress and rejection propelled by a hectic search for novelty.

Zaha Hadid's work expresses a *wild* novelty, coupled with a dismissal of tradition and a dissonance with nature. Consider her deconstruction of the box, which remains the predominant form of most buildings. It is true that many box-shaped buildings are lackluster and even boring, but it is also

true that many of the most pleasant houses and many of the most aesthetically powerful buildings are box-shaped.

More accurately, however, it is the perpendicular angle that is questioned when "box" is used unflatteringly. The perpendicular angle has two significant features: first, it follows the force of gravity; second, it suggests, by its simple vertical division, a balance between what is present on either side. There is no escape from the perpendicular because the ground on which we build is perpendicular to the force of gravity. This quality is unique to the ninety-degree angle, and even our human bodies stand perpendicular to the ground. In this way, the right angle is the angle of balance and, existentially, the one angle binding earth and sky. It is the angle of the *betweenness* of earth and sky—a "natural"

angle derived from the given physical order of things.

Through variations on the perpendicular, architects can produce endless buildings, both prosaic and beautiful. The problem is not a limitation of the perpendicular, but an acceptance of the natural order of things. The problem is abiding in a right set of rules. One can argue that even Hadid's buildings incorporate perpendicular angles, but they struggle to defy the invisible gravitational forces lurking within as structure rises above the ground toward the sky in a more encompassing perpendicularity.

Hadid had succeeded in taming—or at least disguising—this perpendicular force, but for what purpose? For the titillating purpose of producing new shapes, defying limits, and making unusual, challenging spaces. But what is novelty? What is progress? What is delight and the unruly architecture her buildings provoke? What if progress and innovation are a myth? The word often used for innovation is "original," which means "relating to a certain origin." "Original" intimates a return to some foundational realm lost over time. To refute progress is to claim that all human creation can ever do is to *represent*—that is, to "re-present" this foundational realm in continuously new ways via *renewal*. I suggest that renewal is the architect's aim—not progress and certainly not Hadid's unsettling novelty.

Renewal recaptures the genuine presence sustaining authentic dwelling in and around a building. Designing via renewal is impossible without understanding architectural tradition and envisioning new designs accordingly. This approach to architecture is not historicism or naïve postmodernism. It is not the act of mimicking old buildings or replaying their architect-





tural vocabulary. The aim of an architecture of renewal is not architectural edifice but architectural *presence*.

If architectural renewal has a temporal aspect, it also has relationship to place. Like any other human endeavor, architecture is bound by time and *space*. We build in particular locations that relate in some way to particular traditions. We consider a building's geographical context, including climate, landscape, elements of nature, and appropriate building materials and construction methods. How, via renewal, are these various environmental and architectural dimensions to be integrated suitably, even harmoniously, with the place where the building is to be?

I would suggest that novelty is another myth that parallels the myth of progress. Some people are greatly drawn to the novel, even if it is kitsch, irrelevant, or even aggressive. Often, today, novelty is described by the ambiguous label "cool." The architect's primary aim, however, is not the new or the uncommon. For designers with strong imaginations and technical mastery, novel architecture is easy as Hadid's oeuvre demonstrates. The more difficult, *real* kind of architecture relates to renewal, which in turn relates to what one believes. It is always easier to abandon rules or rebel against them than to abide by those rules and, as a result, be *truly* innovative.

Another significant matter is technology, which does not necessarily contribute

to human happiness (as demonstrated by the current consumerist society too often severing individuals from their deeper selves). As a means to an end, technology is not to be celebrated for its own sake or claimed as a signpost of progress. The Alhambra, the Barcelona Pavilion, Fallingwater—these buildings utilize relatively modest technologies yet are some of most stunningly beautiful architecture ever accomplished. Related to technology is nature, which should not be a background of buildings but an encompassing "container" for all architectural work. Buildings should not simply coexist with nature but interpenetrate the natural world, bringing nature inside buildings and bringing buildings outside into nature. A good building incorporates the presence of nature.

Nature also teaches about scale. By studying how the natural world draws on a remarkable range of environmental scales, we discover new forms and structural possibilities. Buildings can only harmonize with nature if architects respect and adopt the specific environmental scale of which their buildings are a part. A building that looks like a plant cell under the microscope will most likely not blend well environmentally, if it looks like a building at all! Zaha Hadid claimed to be inspired by nature but, in her jumbling inappropriate environmental scales, she produced buildings that might make sense as microscopic metaphor but appear odd and disjointed at human scale.

Zaha Hadid was strong enough to realize projects that, for most architects, would be impossible. She fought for what she believed in and serves as an inspiration, especially for young female architects. At the same time, however, her actual buildings demonstrate a way of designing that mostly ignores the *presence* of architecture. Her designs undermine the authentic ways of building manifested in endless ways throughout human history. This way of building continues to be revealed via genuine renewal, provided we are not distracted by design fads like deconstruction or the myths of progress and technological salvation.

I have written this essay as a reaction to the Western architectural press's exaggerated, deceptive praise of Hadid's work in recent obituaries. Seduced by her bewitching, out-of-the-world buildings, these writers speak of her architecture as "extraordinary" and "soaring" when, too often, it is rash, indulgent, and impractical (the uncouth walls and violent angles of her German fire station were so vexing that the firemen moved out and the building became an exhibition space!). Zaha Hadid may be dead, but the awkward, inappropriate, self-satisfied results of deconstructivist design continue via the work of architects like Frank Gehry, Daniel Libeskind, and Rem Koolhaas. May architecture someday return to the call of an authentic architectural renewal

## Images

p. 10: Zaha Hadid, fire station, Vitra Campus, Weil am Rhein, Germany, 1993; photograph by Peter Traub ; <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:VitraFireStation-pjt1.jpg>

p. 11: Zaha Hadid, Library and Learning Center, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Vienna, Austria, 2013; photograph by Peter Hass (note: rust-red building complex on right is the university's Department 1 and Teaching Center, designed by architect Laura Spinadel, 2013); [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Campus\\_WU\\_LC\\_DI\\_TC\\_DSC\\_1440w.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Campus_WU_LC_DI_TC_DSC_1440w.jpg).

# Moving a Boulder

Paul Krafel

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An old ranch road traverses the upper regions of the California watershed in which I live. The ruts of this road capture the many streamlets of water coming downslope and channel their flow toward the main watershed drainages. As I illustrated in *Seeing Nature* (1998), I look for places to lead this runoff away from the ruts and onto lower slopes where rainwater can slow down, spread, and be absorbed into the earth.

It is hard, however, to find these intervention locations. The old ranch road was shaped by a road grader that scraped rocks and dirt into a berm defining the road's downhill side. In the backbone of this berm were large boulders that I could not move. I found one likely spot where I might be able to open a narrow channel between two of these boulders but, unfortunately, I was not strong enough to move them alone.

A few days later, I returned with a crowbar, expecting that I would easily be able to pry one of the boulders out of place. But I couldn't. The boulders' centers of gravity were down too deep; I could lift one of the boulders only an inch. No matter what angle or position I tried, the crowbar could lift the boulder no farther. I did not expect this situation and felt stymied.

Eventually, I realized the problem. I was trying to move the boulder with only one pry. I gathered small stones. I pried up the boulder and slipped one stone under. Now the boulder was unable to return to its original position, and I could slide the crowbar underneath a bit farther. I lifted the boulder again, sliding another stone under its other side. I could slide the crowbar even farther in and lift the boulder a bit higher.

I continued this action, moving around the boulder, prying from different angles and slipping stones beneath until the boulder's center of gravity was above the mire into



which it had sunk. Then, with just my hands, I rolled the boulder out of the berm.

This process seems a metaphor for how smaller changes can accumulate into a larger change seemingly impossible at the start. Each time I pass this boulder on my "rain walks," the memory of the "play" of getting it to move inspires a smile. Just as important, the new channel I have cut directs a significant amount of water off the rutted road back onto the gentle slope below. I am amazed by how that downward slope absorbs the stream of water now redirected away from the road ruts. After a month of thirteen inches of rain, the water flowing through the channel spreads out and flows for only about twenty yards until it has all been absorbed into the earth. The ground was thirsty!

Before I cut the channel, the water moved as one large flow along the old ranch road's ruts to the main drainage and probably reached the Sacramento River within an hour. Now, because my intervention breaks it into smaller flows, the water settles in, absorbed by the ground, a mile upslope of the river. Ever since this old dirt road was graded decades ago, this downslope area has been deprived of the small flows of runoff that the road ruts have shunted away. Because of my simple intervention, this downslope area receives runoff once again.

I see this kind of "play" with micro-topography as creating possibilities. Runoff that previously contributed exponentially to erosion, carrying soil particles to a lower-energy state, is now able to rise up through the plants back into the sky to fall again. On its upward way, this water fuels photosynthesis that generates more plant surfaces, allowing the larger landscape to absorb more solar energy into the biosphere so that even more possibilities arise. I am curious to see what over time will emerge in response to my "play."



# Moving and Ongoing Place Processes

Stephen Wood

*Wood is an independent researcher in phenomenology and the environment. He studied systematic zoology at the University of Cambridge and has held an honorary fellowship in the Theoretical Physics Research Unit at Birbeck College, London. Wood and his wife recently purchased their first house, and this essay continues Wood's efforts to explicate a "first-person phenomenology of moving and making a new home." Wood's earlier essay on the topic was published in the spring 2016 issue of EAP. [s.w.wood.88@cantab.net](mailto:s.w.wood.88@cantab.net). © 2016 Stephen Wood.*

In an earlier essay, I introduced a first-person phenomenology of moving to a new house in Avignon, France (Wood 2016). I emphasized the lived significance of embodied emplacement in a new environment's becoming a home.

The present essay is a complement to that earlier work. My aim is to interpret the experience of moving house as an ongoing process. Drawing on David Seamon's efforts to describe place generatively (2012, 2014), I describe the delicate balance of the six place processes he identifies—*interaction, identity, realization, release creation, and intensification*. I consider how these six processes conflict or mutually reinforce one another in relation to my experience of making a new home.

During the first six months in our new house, my wife and I worked hard to create a home that spoke of us and was comfortable and welcoming. We are a French-English couple and bought the house from an English teacher, who had purchased it from another French-English couple. We realized that the house has existed for many years before us and incorporated a certain "English" ambience that we have tried to respect. When we first viewed the house, a friend who accompanied us was struck by this ambience and told us that the house was for us. He particularly liked the ivy-covered garage with its look of a potting shed from a lost country garden. Other visitors pointed to the sash windows and to the house's "cottagey" feel.

We can see how the house's unique ambience has guided our efforts for a certain "English" coziness—for example, covering the ground floor's old-fashioned French tiling with oak or selecting a kitchen woodwork that contrasted with black hob and sink and hinted at a traditional English range. Unfortunately, we had to remove the garage ivy because it had not been cared for properly. Adding to that unfortunate event

was our inexperience in gardening and cold February winds. Our sense of place suffered and our hope of "fitting in" was not as strong as when we first occupied the house.

We are proud of our efforts at renovating the kitchen but remain uncertain as to how we might adapt other rooms for our everyday needs. For example, an awkward bedroom niche cannot accommodate our wardrobe with the result that we are still unsure as to how we dispose our clothes. The ground-floor sitting room is pleasant in warmer weather, but a lack of insulation means that we mostly abandon the space in winter. We still wonder if the room would work better for dining. In short, this room is not yet fully part of us, and we are not yet able to appropriate it for its most suitable use.

In some ways, the house works well but, in other ways, less so. We feel pleasure and accomplishment but also disappointment and uncertainty. In this essay, I seek to clarify some of the reasons why our experience of the new house has involved so many "ups and downs." Specifically, I use Seamon's six place processes as a framework to discuss our successes and difficulties. I consider the six processes in pairs: interaction/identity; creation/intensification; and realization/release. I briefly describe each place process in relation to our "making a home" experience, including responses from my wife, whom I asked a set of questions relating to each place process.

## Place Interaction & Identity

Seamon defined place *interaction* as the everyday lived dynamics of a place, including all actions, events, and situations involving contact among people or between people and material aspects of the place. One example is my getting used to our new kitchen, in which I found myself trying out various spatial and environmental relations. On one

hand, I developed some relations consciously—for example, I reminded myself that we had installed deep drawers for our saucepans so I should look for them there when cooking. On the other hand, other kitchen relations unfolded with minimal conscious attention—for example, a "natural ergonomics" of the space immediately supported particular habitual situations like cutting vegetables next to the range because our glass cutting boards were on either side of the cooktop. In our former home, there had not been space for them there, but now they could have their "natural" place.

One variation on these more habitual interactions with place was situations of "trial and error" whereby practices we had taken for granted in our former kitchen remained the same or shifted. Through a lifeworld testing of various interaction potentials in our new kitchen, we have adjusted to the new situation. One might say, with Merleau-Ponty (1962, pp. 138–39), that the kitchen has "become part of us."

The unfolding chain of interactions whereby my wife and I familiarized ourselves with our new house contribute to our growing attachment to place—what Seamon called place *identification*. Via this process, there are forged affective links between people and place. In simple actions like cooking, watching television, fetching things from garage storage, cycling to the train station, we and our new place become experientially interwoven and inseparable. Through these continuous interactions, we identify with our house and neighborhood, which become a home. One notes how this intensifying lived connectedness is pointed to in my wife's responses to questions I asked regarding place interaction and identity as follows.

## Place Interaction

*Describe a day in the life of this house. What are the interactions that take place, the regular routines? How have these changed since moving in? Have they stabilized or not?*

Shutters to be opened every morning. Shutters are very important, they protect the house, they block out lights, sunshine. Closing them at night, feeling protected from intruders or from intrusive eyes.

Airing the bedroom and other rooms for five minutes in the morning. Important to renew the air. Putting the heating on in the morning, turning it off at night.

Taking the garbage bins out, taking them in. Picking up litter that has blown into the garden. Going to the garage, to take the bike into town. Checking that the doors are locked. Routines have settled, taken shape. The study couldn't be used before, but now it can so its shutters are important. Opening them signals starting the day. Windows are the eyes of the house.

## Place Identity

*What makes you feel attracted to this house? With which aspects do you identify? Which aspects express who you are? Is this house beginning to feel a part of you? If not, what do you think is stopping the process?*

Fell in love with the gardens, especially the creepers. Sacrificed the overgrown ivy, feel sad, too bare now, orphaned. Hopes of creating something else.

Feel the house belongs to the bank. Mortgage interferes with feeling at home. Bedroom and clothes storage are still not working and don't quite feel right. Wish could organize them better.

Books put out—projection of me, my past, my intellectual wanderings. No dining table. Two sitting rooms, one of which is hardly used. Arrangement not what I would like—made me unhappy for a long time. Would like have the dining room next to the kitchen.

I feel safe. I feel I can study, work on my project. I come up to the highest room, to the tower. I can separate the daily chores from study, house projects. Looking forward to the garden in the spring. Want it to be a project for both of us. Feel it would help me—

the therapeutic aspect interests me. Not exactly my house—just put there by mistake. Takes me time to feel at home, about a year.

Proud to clean the house. Buying things—for example, chairs, garden furniture—has been great. Don't feel I've relaxed yet, despite conscious efforts.

## Place Realization & Release

Seamon defined *place realization* as the process whereby a physical environment gains a lived quality of ambience and character—a situation that is slowly unfolding for our new house. One example is my shifting vision of what the sitting room could be. When we purchased the house, the sitting-room walls were coated in rough-plaster relief and painted orange. Because the room was dark, I envisioned its far end as a TV area, with our sofa across the facing wall, opposite the television. Helpful friends replastered the walls and painted them a light rose with the result that light now floods the room and draws attention to the outside garden greenery. When the movers brought in our sofa, they automatically placed it facing the window, an arrangement that immediately felt right. In turn, our beautiful oak sideboard-bookcase found its place behind the sofa and our piano at right angles to it.

We had considering making a music room upstairs for the piano but ultimately decided that it should be in the sitting room where I could play and entertain guests. Placing the piano against the wall across from the sitting-room door shaped an open space underlining the value we place on live music and its role in communal gathering. The unexpected result was that the two main axes of the room came into being naturally—sofa to window and piano to door. At least partly, the sitting room realized itself!

Seamon also identified *place release*, which relates to the environmental serendipity that a robust place can evoke. Thanks to the good disposition of space and window in our sitting room, the piano has found its place. I have since played better than ever, discovering new songs and understanding old ones with an unasked-for clarity. I also greatly enjoy my new study that provides a dedicated workspace contributing to an invigorated creativity of thought. In this sense, the strength of place realization has encouraged place release, allowing us to move more deeply into ourselves via unexpected

moments of insight, understanding, and pleasure.

## Place Realization

*What is it about this house that we can't change, that has resisted over time? Is this quality strong? Does it need cultivating? Is there something you could point to that expresses the palpable presence of this place?*

Orientation: Traditionally built, south facing, few windows on the north side, appropriately sized garden with respect to the house. Protects the house from the strong mistral winds, creates a sheltered courtyard. Should respect the intelligence of the original design, not creating openings on the north side.

Two houses in one, two logics. High ceiling, tall windows vs farmhouse, smaller rooms. Maybe incorporated older buildings that weren't meant to be inhabited? The staircase in the middle has been added later. Maybe it was a barn. Bathroom was formerly a bedroom—hence it is large for a bathroom. Large shower, no bath. North wall is a corridor, so the bedroom doesn't abut the north wall. There is insulating air between the north wall and the bedroom.

History: Where the hair salon is now there was formerly a dairy called *Le Bon Lait*. The shop has existed for a long time. Our occupation is part of a continuity.

Location: Within walking distance of the town, proximity, don't feel far from the city walls. 7–10 minutes on foot, 4 minutes by bike.

## Place Release

*What are the happy accidents that have happened in this house, unexpected pleasures, surprises? What has made you feel more "you" in this place?*

The cat that came in, even upstairs. We live in the cat's house. Looking at the rose bush from the kitchen. Working in the study, feeling free to launch my business project. Piano sounds good, has its place. Ivy, but now it's gone.

## Place Creation & Intensification

*Place creation* involves efforts whereby people intentionally intervene in some way to improve place, while *place intensification*

refers to the active way that physical aspects of place, being one way rather than another, can make that place better or worse. One house example is the movers' placing a metal TV cabinet beneath the sitting-room window. At first it seemed right there, though it wasn't usable for the television because of its window location. Unfortunately, the cabinet collected a bric-a-brac of objects, and we never knew what to put in it. Eventually, I removed the cabinet and substituted, under the window, a set of oak shelves that complemented the oak sideboard-bookcase on the other side of the room. The oak shelves made sense *in* the room and made sense *of* the room.

Both place creation and place intensification are at work in this example. The movers' placing the metal cabinet beneath the window was an attempt at place creation but turned out to be a poor design decision because of ill-fitting parts that interfered with the room's ambience. We had not been sensitive to the spirit of the room and had "misread" its needs and ours.

Our second attempt at creating place was replacing the metal cabinet with the oak shelves, which contributed to the room's ambience and enlivened the place experience. These shelves intensified place in a positive way, offering themselves as a means to improve the room's convenience and beauty.

In this sense, place intensification is the test of place creation. If, on one hand, the environmental element undermines place, then it can be judged as unhelpful rather than creative, and the element is best rethought and changed. If, on the other hand, the environmental element strengthens place, it can be judged creative in that it integrates itself into place and contributes to its sustenance.

## Place Creation

*How have we actively improved the house?  
How have we made it more practical and strengthened its charm and attractiveness?  
Are there any improvements or ideas for improvements that didn't work and why?*

Focused on two rooms. Kitchen was not practical, dark. Erased previous owners' input on the walls, what was fashionable 20

years ago. Needed more work surface, more light, not convenient. Modern look, more work surface, more cupboards. Removing the overhead cupboards, removing the claustrophobic feel, bringing in more light. Rationalized previous changes, improved the plumbing, brought it up to date. Light, airy, enjoy the view of the garden. Hygienic, removed decking that covered an old septic tank. No risk of cockroaches.

Would like a wood stove—so far hasn't worked. Possible solution to knock through beneath the staircase and put the stove there, with the flue exiting on the north side, reusing the placement of the original stove.

Friends and family insist on a conservatory, to be able to benefit from the winter sun and be protected from the *mistral* wind. But it would disrupt the balance of the garage, garden, and the house. Each takes up one third of the plot.

## Place Intensification

*What features of the house, as we have improved it, lead us and our guests to live and enjoy the house better?*

Wooden floors downstairs create an inviting warmth. The contrast of off white tones in the kitchen and living room—sable, rose—are restful, calming.

Seeing our books—our personalities—displayed in the study invite discussions with fellow book lovers. Table in the middle of the study, for special dinners, creates an impression

## Garden Coda

Now in April, spring has come to our garden. Bulbs are producing flowers, buds, and small leaves are sprouting on the bushes. The plum tree has blossomed and the wisteria was the first in the neighborhood to flower in beautiful watercolor shades of purple. The wild rose with its delicate pink flowers adorns the kitchen window.

With warmer weather, we have been working in the garden. I have removed the last remains of dead ivy from the garage wall. A new vine brings forth striking wine-red flowers, and a bushy peony has filled in some of the space left by the removed ivy, making the garage wall less bare. My wife

has cleared dead leaves and sown seeds for a Japanese meadow.

In the evening, we frequently sit in the garden and watch the visiting birds. I observed a blackbird singing from the top of a tree next door and, for the first time, associated this bird with its song. Three sparrows squabbled in a nearby tree before flying off to the neighbor's garden. We laughed at the uncanny ability of the finches to spot recently planted patches and feast on freshly sown seeds.

The renewed charm of the garden has been an unlooked-for gift. Our sense of losing the ivy has lifted. We feel able to relate to the garden and to develop skills to tend it. We are understanding the constraints of the garden's realization—the constraints of drainage, of soil depth, of sun and shade.

We have made our first garden purchases—a cherry tree, an eggplant, a camellia, local aromatics—and planted them as our fancy takes us. We wait to see if the earth confirms or opposes our creations. Thanks to the garden, life is good and we are released into better versions of ourselves.

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# A Deepening Intersubjectivity

## Eleventh Letter from Far South

John Cameron

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The stages of place-making are not always clearly defined, but it seems that the initial phase of establishing ourselves at Blackstone and almost exclusively committing ourselves to a life of custodianship here has ended. We have had a growing involvement in activities on the island that has taken us beyond our single focus of the early years. This sense of an ending prompts to me to ask: In what ways has our relationship with Blackstone changed over the eight years that we have been here?

We moved to Bruny with high expectations that we would be able to put into practice what we had taught, with high ideals about living a more sustainable, low-impact lifestyle and with high hopes for a quieter, more retreat-like existence. I wrote in my diary in the first month after our arrival:

“The place demands it of us, that we lead strong, clean, simple lives.”

Some of these aims have been met, but there have also been arduous challenges that we had not anticipated. Living more within our ecological means has entailed a sober assessment of our physical and psychological limitations masked by our enthusiasm for the project. The discipline that would have been required for a contemplative retreat has instead been needed for sustained attention to mind, body, and place while working on the land each day.

Paying more attention to the workings of my mind has made me more aware of habitual patterns of thought and attitude that get in the way of deeper relationship with Vicki and with the more-than-human world. The more I let myself become overwhelmed by



what needed to be done at Blackstone and my sense of technical incompetence, the more I saw the land as a never-ending source of problems and tasks rather than as a gathering of living entities with which to engage, and the less emotionally accessible I was to Vicki.

When I resisted seeing the weeds that were right in front of me and resented Vicki for pointing them out, I blinded myself to what the land had to show me. I finally admitted to her and to myself that I was in just as much a mess emotionally as the land was physically. I could see the parallel between what happened in the paddocks when the suppression of sheep grazing was lifted and what happened to my mental state when the structure of full-time employment and a semi-suburban lifestyle was removed. The

result has been a beneficial messiness in both cases, richer biodiversity in the fields and a more open and realistic relationship with Vicki whereby we can both acknowledge our hopes and fears.

In this sense, being more responsive to the land has opened up more rewarding opportunities for our life together. Out of our dismay over the grazer shooting wallabies on our land came the rewarding project of providing sanctuary for wildlife. Taking up what the place has offered in physical terms—seaweed and hay for the veggie bed, driftwood for Vicki’s sculptures, earth pigments for her paintings, old fencing materials for reuse—has led to a far more satisfying relationship with the material world than simply being consumers. Taking ownership of the “sod hut” land has given us a more meaningful sense of being custodians.

The more I opened myself to the sorrow and past ill-treatment of the land and the Nuenone people, the more I felt the connection between our human frailty and the vulnerability of the place to climate change. The deeper our affiliation with Blackstone, the richer our creative lives together have been, with new avenues for visual and written expression opening up all the time.

There have also been changes on the land. Last winter was wet and mild, the grass has grown phenomenally and crowded out the thistles. I realized how thick the grass was when I was diverted from my close inspection of the fence by a sudden movement in front of me. A tiger snake had been sunning itself on a branch above the chest-high grass in a gully through which I had been wading, and in its



efforts to escape from my approach, it slid over the top of the grass.

It was an arresting sight, reminding me of desert snakes traversing sand dunes in which there is as much sideways movement as forward progress. After my pulse rate settled down again—tiger snakes are highly venomous although they seldom attack—I examined the dense grass at ground level and could understand why the snake had made its getaway over the grass rather than through it. The grass stalks were so coarse they were like a thicket of sticks. I would not want to try to wriggle my way rapidly through them. Nevertheless, I trod more carefully thereafter.

It has been a mixed story with our planted trees. More than half have flourished in such a good season, but the rest are a painful sight up close. The eucalypts have been savaged, the main stems snapped off or dangling forlornly in half, red sap oozing from the wounds. Aphids, ants, and tiny beetles swarm over the gashes, feasting. The leaves are covered in an amazing assortment of caterpillars, beetles, spiders, and leaf gall insects. I collected one four-inch long *Eucalyptus ovata* leaf that had fifty-one galls on it covering more than ninety percent of the surface. Some of the trees did not have a single intact leaf left.

It took me a while to piece the story together. The trees are now large enough for a possum to climb up to reach the tender tips but not strong enough to bear a possum's weight. Once a stem or branch broke, wallabies reached up and browsed on the leaves, opening the wound further for sap-sucking insects. The moist and mild season promoted insect growth, and once their natural defenses were weakened, the trees were more vulnerable to attack. The planted areas are by definition some distance away from the native bushland where insectivorous birds, the insects' natural predators, live [1].

I felt a spurt of rage at the "bloody possums"—it really did look like wanton destruction of my six years of hard work. On reflection, however, I realized that, like all creatures, the possums were merely looking for food. Nature is

not sentimental, and I could not have it both ways. Sometimes the forces in the land could work together to support our endeavors (see letter 6), but equally those forces could combine to broach any weakness in the system.

I had other reasons for shaking my fist at the possums. We noticed that our fruit trees were slow to come into leaf and our newly-planted vegetables were looking distinctly chewed. Then one morning I saw pale grey fur where a possum had clearly got caught in the fence while climbing over it. Reluctantly, we concluded that the floppy fence protecting our fruit and vegetables for several years was no longer working.

Months of frustration ensued. I added another thickness of chicken wire. We raised the height of the fence. I put a metal contraption around one tree that the possums had been using as a launching pad to leap over the fence. I put a solar panel and electrical wire around the veggie bed. All to no avail. Every time our fruit trees put out a few new leaves, they would be eaten back and another slender branch would be broken.

Local friends nodded sympathetically. "It takes possums a couple of years, and then they work out how to get in. You have to trap them and relocate them. We all do." It was sorely tempting. The veggie bed had been a source of great pleasure and one of our favorite things to do outside together.

Yet possums are part of the wildlife, just as much inhabitants of Blackstone as we are.



Transporting a territorial creature to another terrain was cruel and possibly fatal. Our decision not to trap was confirmed when it emerged that quite a few people on South Bruny were trapping possums and releasing them up north, probably passing on the road North Bruny drivers taking their trapped possums south. Faced with the absurdity of this mass transport, we decided only to plant those vegetables that the possum did not eat, a plan that we are still fine-tuning.

Fortunately, we continue to have wholly unproblematic sightings of Blackstone fauna to keep up our spirits. After lunch one day, Vicki noticed an unusual congregation of cormorants on the shore, and we approached quietly for a closer look. Normally, we would see at most three cormorants emerge from the water at any one time, holding their wings outstretched to dry like ragged black laundry on a crooked clothesline. This time Vicki counted thirty birds sunning themselves on a rock platform, sitting and lying about in a very relaxed fashion. Among them were a Pacific gull and "our" heron (see letter 1). The sight brought a delighted smile to our faces, suggesting an avian tableau that might be entitled, "After the Feast." I surmised that the birds had entrapped a large school of fish and all had gorged themselves to contentment.

One morning I was resting on the steps of the uppermost shed when a peregrine falcon glided above my head, breezed over to the big white peppermint gum on the crest of the slope. He started chattering and kept it up as I worked my way down the fence line, putting in wooden stakes to keep the wires taut.

The peregrine began calling "waak, waak, waak," and I heard an answering "chuck-chuck" in the distant sky. Call and response ensued: "Waak-chuckchuck," "waak-chuckchuck." Male and female falcons met in midair, circled each other, and swooped off westward. I felt exalted by this pair who inhabited the heavens so effortlessly. When I described the experience to Vicki, I associated it with the two of us meeting and inhabiting this extraordinary place.

In response to our deepening sense of affiliation with the birdlife here, Vicki's studio practice has evolved further. Her

driftwood birds have always been accompanied by occasional human-like spirit figures, but she has begun to fuse them into what she calls her “bird-women.” I have been carrying a succession of found-wood sculptures to the top shed because there is no more room in her working studio. There are now several dozen bird-women gathered there, taller than I, and powerful presences neither simply human nor avian but with the qualities of both: spare, focused, soaring yet grounded.

Among the paintings she works on currently is a pair of Masked Owls (*Tyto novae-hollandiae castanops*) that stop me in my tracks every time I pass them. Eerie, lit from within, they are distinctly *people*, while remaining owls. I was struck the other day that they and the bird-women make tangible the phrase “the more-than-human-world.” They eloquently convey the realm where boundaries between species blur, where birds have human-like qualities and vice versa, and people contain all the voices and images of the denizens of the earth they encounter.

There have also been changes in how we relate to our “familiar,” the creatures that frequent the area immediately around and underneath our house. Tree



delightful sequence of a little dark quoll exploring my Wellington boot and falling inside. The images were circulated on the Internet, and we had a stream of inquiries from people who never knew that such a marvel as a polka-dotted marsupial cat existed.

A family of pademelons (*Thylogale billiardieri*), small rounded macropods that bounce about like rubber balls, took to grazing each evening on the luxurious grass below the water tank next to our house. An unlikely friendship developed between one of our resident quolls and a young pademelon. One day I rounded the

corner to see the two of them leaping about together near the front steps. The next week we heard a strange skittering sound on the veranda and looked out to see the pademelon hopping about on the wooden decking, with the quoll close by, presumably having persuaded his friend to explore this new territory together.

As they grew more comfortable on the deck, the pademelon began grazing on our straw welcome mat, and the quoll rubbed its back against the leg of our wooden bench in a very feline manner. These interactions have a very different quality from our earlier wildlife encounters in the field—more do-

Two young Eastern quolls, normally nocturnal animals, started coming up onto our deck while it was still light [2]. I discovered the faint trail that one quoll took to the house through the grass and *Xanthorrhoea* leaves, and a small hole up from under the house where the other lives. Vicki photographed a

Two young Eastern quolls, normally nocturnal animals, started coming up onto our deck while it was still light [2]. I discovered the faint trail that one quoll took to the house through the grass and *Xanthorrhoea* leaves, and a small hole up from under the house where the other lives. Vicki photographed a





mestic and everyday, but still evoking wonderment. We are not trying to tame the quoll or the pademelon, since they are wild creatures with their own will and agency. But we are delighted that they are including us and our home in their habitat. It seems somehow appropriate that, at a time when I am thinking more about human family and place relationships, some of our animal companions are becoming more familiar with us.

The greatest changes in recent years have been our growing participation in environmental activities involving the whole island. We helped organize BIEN's first Bruny Island Bird Festival, which was by far the most ambitious event our little group had undertaken [3]. Bruny Island is home to ten of the twelve species of endemic Tasmanian birds, including the highly endangered Forty-spotted pardalote (*Pardalotus quadragintus*). Being an island with substantial areas of relatively intact native vegetation, Bruny provides good bird-watching opportunities.

We wanted to celebrate the unique bird-life on Bruny, so a group of us under the leadership of Marg Graham, the Secretary and a mainstay of BIEN, put together a packed three-day program with birding trips, local wildlife walks, talks by specialists, a gala festival dinner, and bird-kite making for children. Vicki coordinated a bird-themed art exhibition in the Adventure



Bay Hall, the main festival venue, and I had plenty of work to do on the festival organizing committee. We had no idea how many people would attend but, with the support of Birds Tasmania and Birds Australia, we spread the word widely [4].

It was wonderful being part of a team of islanders working together for a major environmental event, and the Festival was a great success. Several hundred people from Tasmania, mainland Australia, and even overseas came to the opening, overwhelming the caterers who had prepared a low-key barbecue.

Vicki used her curatorial experience to assemble a marvelous exhibition, juxtaposing photographs of soaring eagles with intimate drawings of scrubwrens, funky mosaic sculptures of penguins, luminous oil paintings of parrots, and a wealth of children's art. The exhibition generated a calm, celebratory space at the heart of the Festival that manifested the spirit of Bruny, its inhabitants, and wildlife.

When I was master of ceremonies for the festival dinner several nights later, I looked out over the faces of islanders and visitors from afar surrounded by images of birds on the walls and had a palpable sense that what had started very locally in the love of a place



and its wild inhabitants was spreading farther and farther afield. Our speakers from Birds Australia commented that it was the best regional bird festival they had been to and urged us to make it a regular event.

In various ways over the last three years, BIEN has promoted a discussion of climate change on Bruny Island. I had conducted a survey of islanders' attitudes toward the effect of global warming on island life. I wrote up the results in an article in the *Bruny News*, the local newspaper.

We generated enough interest to organize a follow-up workshop covering the likely effects of rising air and sea temperatures on island life. As one of the outcomes, a group of us explored the possibility of installing solar hot-water heating on more houses on the island to reduce electricity bills and carbon footprint.

After lengthy discussions with suppliers and installers, we presented our information and results to a gathering of forty islanders; twenty attendees signed up for installation. I was gratified to see new faces present and spoke with them at lunch afterward.

Wary of the divisions that had been caused by past environmental conflict on the island, they had avoided other BIEN events but had been attracted this time because of the practical focus and sense of collective effort. A few months later, we received an unexpected acknowledgement when a well-known conservative islander rose to his feet

during a community meeting and proposed a vote of thanks to BIEN for their constructive efforts.

Soon after, we organized an evening in conjunction with the Bruny Island Film Society in which we showed a film about the Transition Towns movement, a community-based response to global warming and peak oil that has spread worldwide in the past seven years [5]. I had been sufficiently interested in the combination of local practical action, fostering resilience and skill-building to attend the first Transition training weekend held in Tasmania, where I found many ideas and group processes in common with Social Ecology. Subsequently, I visited the headquarters of the movement in Totnes in Devon, UK [6].

After the film, I outlined what I knew of the Transition movement and my impressions of Totnes. Following, there was a lively commentary on the differences between the old English market towns where Transition was flourishing and a sparsely populated Tasmanian island. While there is a culture of self-reliance on Bruny and to some degree a rejection of consumerism, it is difficult to function without a car on an island sixty kilometers long with very few on-island shops and services and no public transport.

Many people were concerned about the lack of a critical mass of concerned citizenry and a dedicated core group to generate public events, coordinate working groups, and liaise with local council and community groups. On the other hand, BIEN was already undertaking some of these activities, such as the solar hot-water project, the workshop on global warming, informal discussions with local council, and involvement in carpooling and food-buying cooperatives. At the end of the evening, we decided to “put our toe in the water” and indicate our interest in joining the Transition Network.

I left the meeting with mixed feelings. It had been a stimulating event, but I was troubled by absence of any mention of non-human life. This dimension of the problem was of course implicit in the motivation for action on climate change. I knew that many of our colleagues in BIEN shared our concern



over the already visible effect of warming on Bruny environments and their non-human inhabitants.

Part of what I learned on Blackstone, however, was that human actions are best undertaken in partnership with natural forces, and a place will make it clear what needs to be done if one is quietly attentive to it. It is inextricably part of daily life, extending well beyond questions of general motivation. “It’s not just all about people,” I muttered to myself. Would the evening’s conversation have benefited from consideration of such matters, even if I had known how to introduce them?

Now that we are entering a new phase of our life on Bruny, involved in many more island-wide activities, I carry with me the questions of what I have learned about place relations from our time on Blackstone so far and to what extent it has relevance for the work of BIEN on climate change and broader environmental advocacy. There is also the question of how I might communicate these various understandings meaningfully.

When I began these essays, I understood that Vicki and I were participating in an unfolding three-way relationship with this

place that had many dimensions—physical, spiritual, affective, and creative.

This no longer feels like an adequate description. It does not do justice to the depth and mysterious aspects of these interwoven relationships. Our resident heron has been a powerful if elusive figure in our lives ever since it guided us to Blackstone. The fact that, unlike many other creatures, it has shown no sign of letting us approach more closely is part of its power.

There have been many numinous occurrences and a strange alchemy among the rocks, waters, plants, wild creatures, and ourselves while we have been on Bruny. Even the prosaic matter of aligning our efforts with Blackstone’s regenerative forces through observing growth and regrowth patterns has given rise to the feeling that the source of our own vitality is being restored as well, and our mutual partnership is intertwined with partnership with the land.

At the same time, however, recent events have shown that there is no room for sentimentality in this venture. The combination of seasonal factors, animal browsing, and insect attacks led to setbacks in our project of restoring trees, just as our sense of well-being was sapped.

If “three-way relationship” is no longer a good description, then what is? Rereading philosopher David Abram has given me a way forward in my thinking. He notes that the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, thought of all interactions between a person and the world that surrounds them as occurring between subjects. In Abram’s words: “That tree bending in the wind, the cloud drifting overhead: these are not merely subjective; they are *intersubjective* phenomena—phenomena experienced by a multiplicity of sensing subjects” [7].

This perspective is a radical interpretation of intersubjectivity, which usually refers to shared meanings and consensus between people or the process of psychological energy moving between people. An intersubjective space can occur within a group of people working intensely together in which

individual identities and personal boundaries may blur, and a sense of collectively-held purpose and identity emerge.

Philosopher Val Plumwood takes the issue further. In her view, “earth others,” as she terms them, are not merely “sensing subjects.” They have intentionality and communicative powers but not necessarily human-like agency and communication.

**W**hat does it mean—agency and the capacity to undertake purposive action that is not necessarily human-like? This is rephrasing a question I have grappled with ever since the heron first “guided” us here. There can be little doubt that, motivated by her own curiosity, the wedge-tailed eagle was investigating me, and I shifted from my human-centeredness when I recognized that I was the object of a large wild creature’s gaze.

On a different scale, the Eastern quolls clearly consider us to be worthy of interest now that they have become more accustomed to us. They do not have human-like agency; the power of the interaction comes from their being Other, being non-human. They are approaching us of their own accord, albeit clearly being pleased to partake of our oyster shells and lamb bones [8].

When Plumwood writes of the “etiquette of interspecies encounter” and the “offering of relationship to earth others,” she offers a fruitful way of thinking about relations between species [9]. Leaving aside the vexing question of whether certain species have subjectivity as humans understand it, I think there *can* be an intersubjective space between people and non-human place inhabitants [10]. If two people are open to each other and to the life around them, with mutual attention and respect over time, boundaries blur; it sometimes becomes less clear and less important which person or creature caused events to occur. A sense of something larger than any one being emerges, a field of care encompassing all inhabitants,



human and non-human, sentient and non-sentient.

**T**his field of care is a more satisfying description of what has transpired for Vicki and me at Blackstone, which seems not so much a collection of beings and locations but, more so, a nexus of relationships in which we participate and are continually changed. Much of the time we all go about our business as usual, but with a subtly developing feeling of interconnectiveness.

During pivotal encounters, however, it becomes impossible to say where intentions, actions, and identities of eagles, herons, quolls, humans, wind, and waters begin and end. It is the realm that Vicki evokes powerfully with her paintings and sculptures. I am now ready to relinquish the phrase “three-way relationship” in favor of a “deepening intersubjectivity and field of care” between all who dwell on Blackstone, human and non-human alike.

Has our life together been enriched, as Plumwood suggests, by adopting such a “recognition stance” toward nature? Unquestionably so, and not only because we may not have stayed together if it were not for our immersion in the more-than-human world on Bruny. The more we have opened ourselves to a reciprocal relationship with herons, eagles, and the other inhabitants of Blackstone, the richer and more meaningful

our lives here have become. The manifold gifts of place continue to flow and grace our lives.

**O**ur resident quolls are becoming bolder. Last week on our veranda, three of us from BIEN had a meeting with the local council environmental-services manager. We were deep in discussion of invasive weed control when a fawn-colored quoll came around the corner, head down, sniffing for anything edible until she came within a foot of us and froze. She stood on hind paws, nose twitching, then scampered away.

My visitors were astounded that a normally nocturnal quoll would venture out in the middle of the afternoon, unfazed by the sound of our voices. Several evenings later, she reappeared when Vicki and I were sitting out after dinner. Again, she came within a foot of the table and halted. We exchanged glances and remained motionless as she skittered closer and stood up, putting a paw on my foot that was only clad in a light sock. Contact! It was an edgy sort of contact, delight at feeling that touch of a wiry claw tinged with the knowledge that those razor-sharp teeth could make mincemeat of my toes.

As the quoll stood up, Vicki noticed small abdominal bumps. Our quoll definitely was a “she” and carrying young in her pouch. No wonder she was so hungry. Our more-than-human family is growing. I cherish the fertile intersubjective relationships we have with this place, and I trust that they will continue to sustain and challenge us as they have done ever since we followed a heron in a canoe on the waters of the d’Entrecasteaux Channel.

## Notes

1. This is ironic, bearing in mind that the major purpose of planting these trees was to provide food and shelter for the endangered insectivorous birds. Our experience highlights the hazards of intervening in any ecosystem, introduced or not.

2. The Eastern quoll, *Dasyurus viverrinus*, is a polka-dotted cat-sized carnivorous marsupial that is common in parts of Tasmania, including North Bruny Island but extinct in mainland Australia. There are two color morphs; fawn with white spots, and,

less commonly, black with white spots.

3. BIEN, the Bruny Island Environment Network, began a few years ago when a group of islanders organized an island-wide network for coordinating local environmental activities. I am currently Deputy Convenor of the Network.

4. Australia's leading bird conservation organization.

5. "Transition" refers to the phased transition to a low-carbon economy via an Energy Descent Action Plan negotiated with local governments and other stakeholders accompanied by efforts toward community resilience. From its base in Totnes, the Transition Network now includes several hundred initiatives in dozens of countries; see [www.transitionnetwork.org](http://www.transitionnetwork.org).

6. In fact, the weekend was facilitated by two Social Ecology graduates.

7. D. Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (NY: Vintage, 1996), p. 38.

8. Unlike domestic animals, which have

very different types of relationship with humans, based on dependence, interdependence, control, working partnerships, or exploitation.

9. She is not the only prominent eco-philosopher to consider such matters. Freya Mathews writes of "the revelatory effects on individual consciousness of intersubjective contact with the world at large" (*For Love of Matter* (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 2003), p. 43.

10. Plumwood considers that they do, but philosopher Jeff Malpas argues that they do not (J. Malpas, *The Experience of Place*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999, p. 96 and pp. 138-56). There are cogent arguments on both sides of this question, depending upon what exactly is meant by "having subjectivity," and either claim is difficult to demonstrate or disprove definitively. Ravens, dolphins, and many primates have demonstrated behavior consistent with self-recognition, which is often considered to be part

of subjectivity, but this interpretation is contested. Surely, there is a spectrum of subjectivity within nature, just as there probably is a spectrum of consciousness.

## Images by Vicki King

p.16: Tasmania Masked Owls, oil on wood panel, 2015.

p.17: "Birdwomen" I, 2015.

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# Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology

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# Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology

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

One key concern of *EAP* is design, education, and policy supporting and enhancing natural and built environments that are beautiful, alive, and humane. Realizing that a clear conceptual stance is integral to informed research and design, the editor emphasizes phenomenological approaches but also gives attention to related styles of qualitative research. *EAP* welcomes essays, letters, reviews, conference information, and so forth.

## Exemplary Themes

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

## Editor

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