



# Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter

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This issue is the last for 1996 and marks the end of *EAP*'s 7th year. We enclose a renewal form and ask you to respond promptly so we won't need to send a reminder. The U.S. subscription rate continues to be \$8 and the non-U.S. rate, \$10. As usual, we emphasize our precarious finances. If you can make an additional contribution, we would be grateful.

This issue includes regular features and a review of an edited collection on the soundscape. Our special feature is four discussions of geographer Edward "Ted" Relph's *Place and Placelessness*, which celebrates its 20th birthday this year. *EAP* editor David Seamon, landscape architect Douglas Paterson, psychologist Louise Million, and associate *EAP* editor Margaret Boschetti provide commentaries, while Relph discusses how the book came about and what his thoughts about it are today. *Place and Placelessness* is a seminal text for environmental and architectural phenomenology. We are pleased to be able to review its significance here.

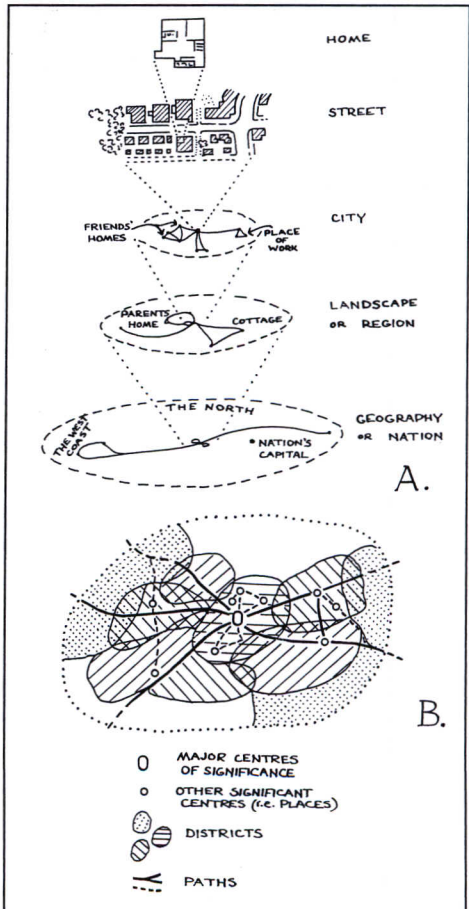
This issue also includes a cumulative *EAP* index. When the newsletter began, we explained that our aim was to provide "a forum and clearing house for work incorporating a qualitative approach to environmental and architectural experience." Statistics tallied from the index indicate that we have gone a good way in accomplishing this aim. During seven years of publication, the newsletter has provided:

- 49 feature essays;
- 22 book reviews;
- a listing of over 100 references, either as "noteworthy readings" or "citations received" (the latter are not included in the index because of space limitations);
- 22 conference items;
- 55 listings of organizations;
- descriptions of 16 refereed journals and 25 other publications;
- news from 61 *EAP* members.

These figures indicate, we believe, that *EAP* has worked well as a source of information, ideas, and news. To continue this success, we need your input.

As always, send us essays, reviews, citations, descriptions of events, and news about yourself. *Please!*

A drawing from *Place and Placelessness* illustrating the vertical (A) and horizontal (B) structures of existential space (p. 21).



## ITEMS OF INTEREST

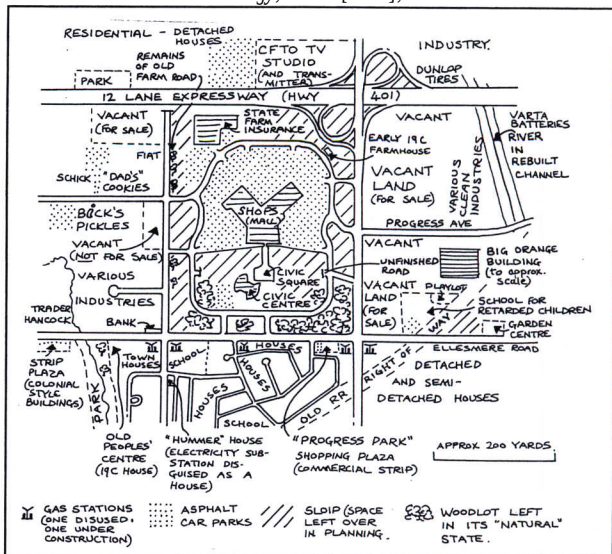
The 10th annual **International Qualitative Research Education Conference** will be held at the Univ. of Georgia, Athens, 9-11 Jan. 1997. The conference theme is "democratizing inquiry through qualitative research." Contact: Tricia Zevos, Reading Education, 309 Anderhold Hall, Univ. of Ga., Athens, GA 30692 (706-542-7866).

The **Campus Ecologist**, a quarterly, works as "an exchange of information, ideas, and resources about students and their environment." Edited by environmental psychologist James Banning, recent issues have included articles on "The Pedestrian's Visual Experience on Campus" and "Campus Design: Guidance from Voices of the Past." Address: *Campus Ecologist*, Box 9597, Ft. Collins, CO 80525.

The **Wild Duck Review**, published bimonthly, is a "voice for Northern California writers, community people, and ecologists. In it, the literary arts, ecological consciousness and activism are communicating and informing each other." This journal includes articles, interviews, and poetry that are consistently excellent in quality. One recent issue includes interviews with author Marc Reisner, poet Wendell Berry, and activist Dave Foreman. Address: 419 Spring St., Suite D, Nevada City, CA 95959 (916-478-0134).

The **Jane Goodall Institute**, established in 1977, is committed to "wildlife research, sharing knowledge through education, and conservation of the habitats that sustain life on earth." A special focus is the "unique status and special needs of chimpanzees," now an endangered species. Address: PO Box 599, Ridgefield, CT 06877 (203-431-2099).

**Poetry Flash**, published six times per year, provides reviews, essays, interviews, & poems. It is "a vehicle for audience development & the building of community in & through literature." The May/June issue



Ralph's "Subtopia": "a deliberately untidy map of an accidentally confused landscape" and based on Scarborough, a Toronto suburb (p. 108).

focused on earth day & the environment: 1450 4th Street, #4, Berkeley, CA 94710 (510-525-5476).

**Front Porch** is a new on-line venue for comment and criticism on architecture, urban design, city planning and development issues. Its creator and facilitator are journalist Mike Greenberg, author of *The Poetics of Cities* [see *EAP*, 7, 1, for a review]. Email address: [www2.dci.com/Frontporch](http://www2.dci.com/Frontporch).

## CITATIONS RECEIVED

von Maltzahn, K., 1994. *Nature as Landscape: Dwelling and Understanding*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

This biologist examines the relation between dwelling and understanding: "We can place ourselves opposite the landscape and separate from it. We can also incorporate ourselves into the landscape and participate in it. In this case, our acts in relation to the space of the landscape may incorporate our whole existence. To be merely an impartial observer will not do. Understanding implies dwelling; in order to understand, we must learn to inhabit the world" (p. 6).



Rykwert, J., 1996. *The Dancing Column: On the Orders of Architecture*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Drawing on the body-column metaphor, this architectural historian traces the powerful and persistent analogy among columns, buildings, and the human body as expressed in the work of such writers as Vitruvius, Alberti, and later architectural thinkers.

Abrams, D., 1996. *The Spell of the Sensuous*. NY: Pantheon.

This philosopher "draws the reader into investigations regarding the fluid, participatory nature of perception, and the reciprocity between our senses and the sensuous earth."

Pocock, D. C. D., 1995. *Being There: Imagination in Human Geography*. Dept. of Geography, Univ. of Durham, Occasional Pub. No. 30.

This monograph provides a humanistic-geographical reading of two places: the medieval Galilee Chapel of the Durham Cathedral and the English mining village of Bearpark.

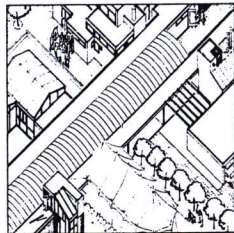
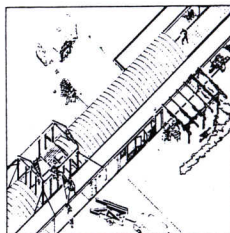
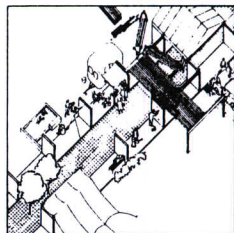
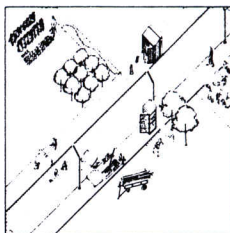
## NOTEWORTHY READING

Hertzberger, Herman, 1991. *Lessons for Students in Architecture*. Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010 Publishers. ISBN 90-6450-100-9.

Architect Herman Hertzberger is one of the Netherlands' most outstanding postwar designers. This book presents his lectures to architect students at Delft University since 1973. Hertzberger believes that the built environment should work like clothing "which must, after all, not only suit you well but also fit properly" (p. 174). Architecture, he writes, "cannot help playing some kind of role in the lives of people who use it, and it is the architect's main aim...to see to it that everything he [or she] makes is adequate to all those situations" (p. 174).

The book is divided into three parts: "Public Domain," "Making Space, Leaving Space," and "Inviting Form." Using themes like territoriality, privacy, and sociability, the first section examines the spatial and environmental dimensions of human experience, while the second and third parts consider how designed qualities, especially aspects of form, space, and formal relationships, can strengthen or weaken various kinds of environmental experiences.

*Below: Hertzberger's project for a Dutch neighborhood center, designed in such a way that it could be modified by users as their needs changed (p. 113). He points out that the project was unsuccessful but, unfortunately, doesn't thoroughly explain why. This lack of clear explication and explanation is a frequent problem of the book.*



The book is illustrated with over 750 photographs and drawings, many of which present Hertzberger's own architectural designs. These illustrations are the strongest part of the book, and many of them provide striking visual pictures of territoriality, sociability, transitions from private to public, and so forth. Unfortunately, the visual images are not conveniently identified nor is their meaning fully clarified in the text. In addition, the work is an amalgam of portions of Hertzberger's earlier books and articles.

In this sense, the book offers tantalizing glimpses of the intimacy between built and human worlds but does not present clearly how this intimacy might be

first understood and then designed. One difficulty may be that Hertzberger is an architect rather than a writer. One sees in the photographs and drawings his considerable efforts to make successful buildings and places, but he is less convincingly able to present this understanding in words. A larger problem is that his designs appear not always to work experientially in

the way he had envisioned.

Still, the photographs of people using buildings and places are often stimulating, and the book is most important for these images. One only wishes the conceptual discussion were as clear and Hertzberger's own designs as successful.

## BOOK REVIEW

Helmi Jarviluoma, editor, 1994. *Soundscapes: Essays on Vroom and Moo*. Tampere: Tampere University. ISBN 951-44-3541-9 (paperback).

This collection of eight essays, published by the University of Tampere in Finland, is the outcome of the first Nordic Colloquium on Soundscape Studies in 1992, bolstered by two contributions from composer and soundscape scholar Murray Schafer. The two longest essays, on motorbikes and music and on soundscapes in cowsheds, explain the onomatopoeic subtitle, "Essays on Vroom and Moo."

The collection is given automatic international appeal in that Schafer provides both the opening and concluding contributions. His opening essay on the soundscape designer combines a review of his early work, together with material on medieval street sounds and modern sonic design. All phenomenologists will concur with his basic injunction, "Until one begins to listen, nothing will happen. The whole body must become an ear" (p. 13).

He returns to this theme in his concluding contribution, which is in the form of an interview with the volume editor, Helmi Jarviluoma. An interesting reflection here is to link the much greater interest in soundscape research in France compared with Germany to the relative ease of translating the term into the two languages.

The essay on cars, buildings and soundscapes by Stockfelt possibly suffers from its translation from Swedish. Tagg, the one English contributor, obviously experienced no such problem: quite the contrary, his essay on the sonic and socializing power of music is the most stimulating contribution. The social and subjective contextualization of heavy metal—"big boys, big bikes, big noises," followed by rap and house music of the "post-bike era"—is presented in masterly fashion. His written text fairly bubbles, as

we painlessly gain insights into how our culture works. His oral performance was presumably the colloquium highlight!

Ethnomusicologist Poysko clearly enjoyed her exploration of keynote and signal in modern Finnish cowsheds. It is one of two contributions based on undergraduate studies, and considers sounds—mechanical and musical—from the point of view of both people and cows.

The author reports that cows are "slaves of the murmur drug"—i.e. ventilator—and become alarmed when it is switched off (p. 87). She also reports that cows appreciate music if of gentle tempo. And in one cowshed, the sound of a cuckoo on the radio in winter astonished the animals: "the mouths of all the cows dropped open and chewing stopped" (p. 83)!

The second student contribution, by another ethnomusicologist, is a more conventional piece on soundscape tones from the point of view of inhabitants of one village. A short piece on music in 2002, and a subjective, even egotistical, piece on "music, soundscape and me" complete the collection. An extensive bibliography, understandably, has a bias toward Scandinavian authors, although, inexplicably, there is no reference to the Finnish proto-phenomenological geographer Johannes Granö.

In summary, slim as the volume is, it well illustrates both the geographical dispersion of, and breadth of topic incorporated within, soundscape studies. It also illustrates the common thread running through such work, namely, exploration of the nature of human experience.

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SPECIAL SECTION ON THE 20TH BIRTHDAY OF EDWARD RELPH'S PLACE AND PLACELESSNESS

## A SINGULAR IMPACT

David Seamon

Editor of *EAP*, David Seamon teaches in the Architecture Department at Kansas State University. He is editor of the volume, *Dwelling, Seeing, and Designing* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993). With physicist Arthur Zajonc, he has recently completed an edited collection, *Goethe's Way of Science: Toward a Phenomenology of Nature*, to be published, tentatively, in 1997.

For my development as a phenomenologist, Ted Relph's *Place and Placelessness* had a singular impact. The book appeared in the fall of 1976 as I was writing my dissertation at Clark University under the supervision of Anne Buttner, who had become deeply involved in the value of continental philosophies for social science (Buttner 1971). As Anne lectured on phenomenology, I grew excited because the approach seemed to offer a counter to the positivist style of research that then dominated Clark's graduate programs in geography and psychology.

The aim I had for my dissertation was to explore a rather nebulous phenomenon that I called "everyday environmental experience" (Seamon 1979). Relph's book became central to my writing because, in explaining why places were an integral part of human experience, he developed the notion of *insideness*--the idea that the more strongly an environment generates a sense of belonging, the more strongly does that environment become a place.

I realized that the phenomenological effort of my dissertation would be to explore how, through experienced dimensions like body, feelings, and thinking, the quality of insideness is expressed geographically and environmentally. As good phenomenology should, Relph's presentation provided a field of conceptual clarity from which I could embark on my own phenomenological exploration.

### THE MEANING OF PLACE

Some years before his book, Relph had published a journal article that examined the general value of phenomenology for environmental themes (Relph 1970), but *Place and Placelessness* was his first effort to use the approach in a focused way.

Relph's interest was the human experience of *place*, which he argued was a fundamental aspect of peoples' existence in the world. Places, he wrote, "are fusions of human and natural order and are the significant centers of our immediate experiences of the world" (p. 141). His book attempted to describe the essential experienced nature of place. Why and how are places meaningful for people?

To answer this question, Relph first discussed the relationship between space and place. What kinds of space does a person experience and what relation do these spatial experiences have to his or her sense of place? For Relph, the essential quality of place was its power to order and to focus human intentions, experience, and behavior spatially. The rest of *Place and Placelessness* lucidly extended and clarified several dimensions and shadings of this basic theme.

### INSIDENESS AND OUTSIDENESS

Probably Relph's most original contribution to the understanding of place was his discussion of *insideness*, which I mentioned above as so helpful in my own dissertation work. If a person feels inside a place, he or she is here rather than there, safe rather than threatened, enclosed rather than exposed, at ease rather than stressed. Relph suggested that the more profoundly inside a place the person feels, the stronger will be his or her identity with that place.

On the other hand, a person can be separate or alienated from place, and this mode of place experience is what Relph called *outsideness*. Here, people feel some sort of division between themselves and world. The crucial phenomenological point is that outsideness and insideness constitute a fundamental dialectic in human life and that, through varying



## MODES OF INSIDENESS & OUTSIDENESS

### 1. EXISTENTIAL INSIDENESS

A situation involving a feeling of attachment and aliveness. Place is "experienced without deliberate and self-conscious reflection yet is full with significances." One feels this is the place where he or she belongs. The deepest kind of place experience and the one toward which we probably all yearn.

### 2. EXISTENTIAL OUTSIDENESS

A situation where the person feels separate from or out of place. Place may feel alienating, unreal, unpleasant, or oppressive. Homelessness or homesickness would be examples. Often, today, the physical and designed environments contribute to this kind of experience *unintentionally*—the sprawl of suburban environments, the dissolution of urban downtowns, the decline of rural communities.

### 3. OBJECTIVE OUTSIDENESS

A situation involving a deliberate dispassionate attitude of separation from place. Place is a thing to be studied and manipulated as an object apart from the experiential. A scientific approach to place and environment. Ironically, the approach to place often taken by planners, designers, and policy makers.

### 4. INCIDENTAL OUTSIDENESS

A situation in which place is the background or mere setting for activities—for example, the landscapes and places one drives through as he or she is on the way to somewhere else.

### 5. BEHAVIORAL INSIDENESS

A situation involving the deliberate attending to the appearance of place. Place is seen as a set of objects, views, or activities. For example, the experience we all pass through when becoming familiar with a new place—figuring out what is where and how the various landmarks, paths, and so forth all fit together to make one complete place.

### 6. EMPATHETIC INSIDENESS

A situation in which the person, as outsider, tries to be open to place and understand it more deeply. This kind of experience requires interest, empathy, and heartfelt concern. Empathetic insideness is an important aspect of approaching a place phenomenologically.

### 7. VICARIOUS INSIDENESS

A situation of deeply-felt secondhand involvement with place. One is transported to place through imagination—through paintings, novels, music, films, or other creative media. One thinks, for example, of Monet's paintings of his beloved garden Giverny or of Thomas Hardy's novels describing 19th-century rural England.

combinations and intensities of outsideness and insideness, different places take on different identities for different people, and human experience takes on different qualities of feeling, meaning, and action.

The strongest sense of place experience was what Relph called *existential insideness*, a situation of deep, unself-conscious immersion in place and the experience most people know when they are at home in their own community and region. The opposite of existential insideness is what he labelled *existential outsideness*—a sense of strangeness and alienation, such as that often felt by newcomers to a place or by people who, having been away from their birth place, return to feel strangers because the place is no longer what it was when they knew it.

In his book, Relph discussed seven modes of insideness and outsideness (no doubt there are more) grounded in various levels of experiential involvement. The value of these modes, particularly for self-awareness, is that they apply to specific place experiences yet provide a conceptual structure in which to understand those experiences in broader, more explicit terms (see box, left).

## AUTHENTIC AND INAUTHENTIC PLACES

In the last half of the book, Relph examined ways in which places may be experienced *authentically* or *inauthentically* (terms borrowed from phenomenological and existential philosophy). An *authentic* sense of place, in Relph's words, is "a direct and genuine experience of the entire complex of the identity of places—not mediated and distorted through a series of quite arbitrary social and intellectual fashions about how that experience should be, nor following stereotyped conventions" (p. 64).

Individuals and groups may create a sense of place either unself-consciously or deliberately. Thus, because of constant use, a nondescript urban neighborhood can be as authentic a place as Hellenic Athens or the Gothic cathedrals—the latter both examples, for Relph, of places generated consciously.

Relph argued that, in our modern era, an authentic sense of place is being gradually overshadowed by a less authentic attitude that he called *placelessness*: "the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes that results from an insensitivity to the significance of place" (Preface).



Relp suggested that in general, placelessness arises from *kitsch*--an uncritical acceptance of mass values, or *technique*--the overriding concern with efficiency as an end in itself. The overall impact of these two forces, which manifest through such processes as mass communication, mass culture, and central authority, is the "undermining of place for both individuals and cultures, and the casual replacement of the diverse and significant places of the world with anonymous spaces and exchangeable environments" (p. 143).

### A LACK OF CONCEPTUAL SOPHISTICATION?

Since Relp's book was published, there has been a spate of popular studies on the nature of place. In addition, thinkers from a broad range of conceptual perspectives--from positivist to neo-Marxist to poststructuralist--have drawn on the idea of place, though understanding it in different ways and using it for different theoretical and practical ends.

In his commentary in this issue of *EAP*, Relp suggests that, in hindsight, one of the major weaknesses of *Place and Placelessness* was its lack of conceptual sophistication, particularly its use of dialectical opposites as a way to conceptualize place experience--insideness/outsideness, place/placelessness, authentic/inauthentic, and so forth. One result is that critics have often misunderstood Relp's point of view, claiming that he favored places over placelessness, insideness over outsideness, and authentic over inauthentic places.

If, however, one reads the book carefully and draws on his or her own personal experiences of place for evidence and clarification, he or she realizes the extraordinary coverage and flexibility of Relp's conceptual structure. Especially through the continuum of insideness and outsideness, he provides a language that allows for a precise designation of the particular experience of a particular person or group in relation to the particular place in which they find themselves. Relp also provides a terminology for describing how and why the same place can be experienced by different individuals (e.g., the long-time resident vs. the newcomer vs. the researcher who studies the place), or how, over time, the same

person can experience the same place differently (the home and community that suddenly seem so different when one's significant other dies).

One of the greatest values of phenomenological insights is that they provide a conceptual language that allows one to separate from taken-for-granted everyday experience--the *lifeworld* as it is called phenomenologically. Too often, researchers lose sight of the need to move outside lifeworld descriptions and terminology, and the result is confusion or murkiness as to what exactly the central phenomenon they want to understand is.

An example. A few years ago I attended a conference session on negative and traumatic images of place (Rubenstein 1993). One topic of discussion was how family violence regularly generated homes where people felt victimized and insecure. The postmodern conclusion was to call into question the entire concept of home and place and to suggest that they might be nostalgic notions that need vigorous existential and political modification--perhaps even substitution--in our postmodern society.

In fact, the problem here is not home and place but a conceptual conflation for which Relp's language provides a simple corrective: the victim's experience should not be interpreted as a lack of at-homeness (as some of the panelists seemed to suggest) but, rather, as one mode of existential outside-ness, which in regard to one's most intimate place--the home--is particularly undermining and distressing.

Relp's notion of existential outside-ness allows us to keep the experiences of home and violation distinct. Through his language, we can say more exactly that domestic violence is a situation where a place that typically fosters the strongest kind of existential insideness has become, paradoxically, a place of overwhelming existential outside-ness. The lived result must be profoundly destructive.

The short-term phenomenological question is how these victims can be helped to regain existential insideness. The longer-term question is what qualities and forces in our society lead to a situation where those responsible for the very continuity of the home's existential insideness transform that place into an everyday hell. Something is deeply wrong, and



one cause of the problem may be the very problem itself--the growing disruption of places and insideness at many different scales of experience, from home to neighborhood to city to nation.

How today to have insideness and place when change is constant and so many of the traditional "truths" no longer make sense is one of the crucial questions of our age. *Place and Placelessness* provides no clear answer, but it does provide an innovative language for thinking about the question from a viewpoint considerably different from the conventional political points of view of Left and Right.

## DWELLING AND JOURNEY

Another complaint that some critics made of *Place and Placelessness* was that it favored home, center and dwelling over horizon, periphery, and journey. As Relph mentions in his commentary, he was accused of emphasizing the positive qualities of place and ignoring or minimizing negative qualities--e.g., the possibility that place could generate parochialism, xenophobia, and narrow mindedness. Again, a close reading of the book reveals a flexibility of expression--a recognition that an excess of place can lead to a provincialism and callousness for outsiders just as an excess of journey can lead to a loss of identity or an impartial relativity that allows for commitment to nothing. My broader point is that, in the book's lived dialectics (center/horizon, place/placelessness, and so forth), there is a wonderful resilience of conceptual interrelationship that is the hallmark of the best phenomenology.

In his commentary, Relph also points out that critics mistakenly read the book as a nostalgic paen to pre-modern times and places. How could the kind of authentic places that he emphasized exist in our postmodern times of technological change, human diversity, and geographical and social mobility?

This criticism, of course, ignores a central conclusion of *Place and Placelessness*: that regardless of the historical time or the geographical, technological, and social situation, *people will always need place* because having and identifying with place are integral to what and who we are as human beings. From this point of view, the argument that postmodern society, through technological and cultural correctives, can now ignore place is flagrantly wrong

existentially and potentially devastating practically, whether in terms of policy, design, or popular understanding.

Instead, the crucial question that both theory and practice should ask is how a strong sense of place and insideness can be made *even in the context of* our relativist, constantly-changing postmodern world. Twenty years ago, Relph was one of the first thinkers to broach this question. Today, due to a small coterie of thinkers and practitioners like Christopher Alexander, Bill Hillier, Dennis Kemmis, Paul Murrain, and Robert Mugerauer, we have the start of an answer to this question.

Unfortunately, the great majority of academics and professionals, as well as the producers of popular media, continue to ignore the importance of place both as a powerful conceptual structure as well as as an integral part of everyday human life. I do not mean to suggest here that the world must return to a set of distinct places all different and more or less unaware of each other. Clearly, the importance of place and locality must be balanced with an awareness of other places and global needs. The point is that an empathetic and compassionate understanding of the worlds beyond our own places may be best grounded in a love of a particular place to which I myself belong. In this way, we may recognize that what we need in our everyday world has parallels in the worlds of others.

In many ways, the continuing dissolution of places and insideness helps to explain the escalating erosion of civility and civilization, in the West and elsewhere. Relph's *Place and Placelessness* first pointed to this dilemma 20 years ago and is today more relevant than ever.

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## PLACE AND PLACELESSNESS: FABULOUS FRUSTRATIONS

Douglas D. Paterson

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In 1976 I was a partner in a 50-person interdisciplinary environmental planning firm that faced many problems. We had just been fired from a large design-planning project by a brewery because we objected to the fact that, while they advertised their product in a natural landscape, they seemed unwilling to make their own places anything more than was needed to meet their functional needs. Involved in some major visual-resource analyses for federal and provincial agencies, we were required to undertake our work according to "new analytical techniques" devoid of any sense of ecology, beauty, or place.

Perhaps worst of all, virtually every planning change and mitigation measure we recommended was ignored by most of our clients. Landscapes, places, and the people responsible for their care were fragmented in their values and actions, more concerned with technique than problem-solving, more dominated by a growing corporate mentality, and more interested in appearances than in action.

A world that purported to be rational was anything but. My optimism as a graduate in 1967 was thoroughly squashed little more than ten years later!

### A GOOD CHOICE

By 1979 my dissatisfaction led me to leave my profitable job. I found myself in a tenure-track appointment at a new program in landscape architecture at a Canadian university. I was hired for my consulting experience but told I must become an academic. By the spring of 1981 I had my classes and studios sufficiently underway. I began to investigate what the "thinkers" were doing. I spent an intense few days gathering readings. After scrutinizing tables of contents, I selected *Place and Placelessness* as my first adventure. The choice was good.

I immediately felt "opened" to a huge range of ideas and possibilities. The text was exciting to read. I found myself exclaiming "yes," "right on," and sometimes "no way!" I covered margins in questions,

counter arguments, assertions, and endless exclamation marks. More than anything else, I felt a pleasant, thought nervous, sense that I was being lead through an argument that I was doomed to accept despite my natural tendency to be a sceptic.

Ralph's book was important to me for a number of reasons beyond the delight of a provocative text. First, the discussion allowed me to situate myself and my experiences in the world. This situating applied equally to my childhood sense of the world as well as to my adult experiences as both citizen and designer.

Second, Ralph's focus on a sense of dwelling in and valuing landscapes and places prompted me to reflect upon and write extensively and personally about my experiences of home, special landscapes, and everyday places.

Finally, and perhaps most important of all, the book developed an argument for dwelling and place that merged the poetic and pragmatic. It seemed to me that the text could also have been titled "On Sensibility and Senselessness." In retrospect, I realize that my writings, my teaching focus, and my respect for the work of designers like Christopher Alexander stem from my engagement with *Place and Placelessness*.

### SATISFACTIONS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

There are other aspects of Ralph's book that are important to the general discussion of place. His integration of planning, design, geography, anthropology, philosophy, literature, and cultural criticism gave a comprehensiveness to the discussion that few texts of the time were able to match. His elaboration of authentic place making moved the discussion on the complexities of professionalism, historic preservation, and the emerging corporate world into a serious commentary on how we live and make our world. His analysis of the extent of placelessness in North American society surpassed what many similar works today have yet to discover.



There are also aspects of the book that leave me dissatisfied and wondering. I have read the text several times and invariably find that there are areas of discussion that I wish Relph had decided to pursue further. I'll note two areas of concern.

First, the central issue in the text for me lies in Relph's categories and definitions of dwelling--on the dialectics of insideness and outsideness. I wish he had given this issue greater attention. For example, are his categories complete? What is the role of fear, novelty, or imagination in these kinds of insideness and outsideness? Is it not somehow too harsh to define existential insideness as a condition of dwelling "without reflection"? Are the categories of dwelling, from existential insideness to existential outsideness, also describing degrees of, or categories of, goodness in dwelling? Are there not occasions when existential outsideness is a "necessary good"?

My sense is that had Relph elaborated further upon this focus of the text (for me, the real theory in the work), then his subsequent discussions on authenticity and placelessness would have been less important to the text and more obvious to the reader.

Second, I wish Relph had placed more emphasis on the nature of what he terms "peak experiences" (p. 123). When and why do they occur? To what extent can we accentuate such experiences in place? What aspects can be manipulated of the physical setting, the activities in that setting, and the meanings and values that people bring to that setting? Do certain ways of doing things (policies, programs, and the like) improve the likelihood of creating more varied and intense peak experiences?

Ultimately, I believe we need to know more about what it means to realize good places and less about why so much of our landscape is placeless. We need stronger, more informed imaginings.

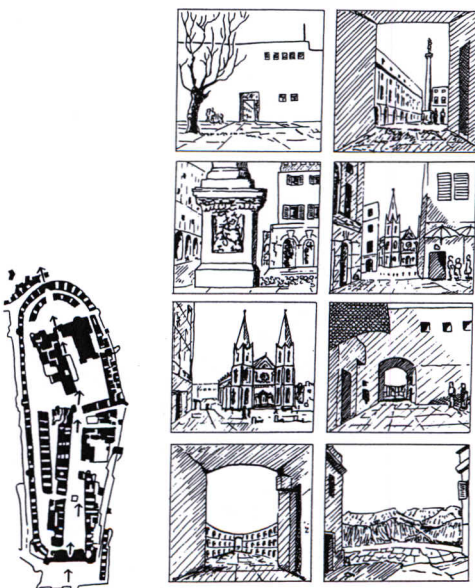
### "AN AMAZING EYE OPENER"

For many of my undergraduates, the first time they read *Place and Placelessness* is an ordeal. The text is "thick," the photographs muddy, and the overall appearance of the book uninteresting. One or two years after graduation, however, the same students inevitably come up to me with the admission that they finally "really" read the text and found it to be inspiring or, as one student recently exclaimed, an

"amazing eye opener". One wonders what would have happened had the book been less modest, more sweeping in its images and assertions, more comprehensive in its theoretical descriptions. I suspect readership might have exploded.

These quibbles aside, *Place and Placelessness* is a classic--as important today as when first published. My only real regret is that I haven't yet had the opportunity to meet Ted Relph--to have a long discussion, for there is much still left unsaid. Until such time, I remain in a state of fabulous frustration. The least I can do, however, is offer my sincere thanks for his inspiration.

*Below: an image from Gordon Cullen's The Concise Landscape (Architectural Press, 1971, p. 17), used by Relph to exemplify one way of representing space-as-experienced: "Existential space as experienced in serial vision and from the perspective of the person in the street" (p. 19).*





## A WORLD OF MANY PLACES

Louise Million

Louise Million is a Canadian psychologist who lives in Edmonton, Alberta. She has a private practice that focuses on adult survivors of trauma, especially aboriginal people. She is also an avid gardener and grandmother. Her dissertation (see *EAP*, 3, 3:8-9) drew in part from themes in Edward Relph's *Place and Placelessness*. Address: 10707 60 Avenue, Edmonton Alberta T6H 4S7 Canada.

I live in Edmonton, Alberta. I am travelling to Toronto on Air Canada flight 126. The pilot announces flying altitude, arrival time, and Toronto's January 24th temperature, considerably warmer than what I am leaving behind. I gaze out the window, reflecting on the experience of being in between places, of being nowhere.

My home is back there while my destination lies somewhere ahead. For the next three hours, my well being rests in the hands of Air Canada pilots and crew. I am suspended, literally and experientially, out of place and its daily habits, routines, and responsibilities of caring for myself and others. For the moment, I can forget about my car, the snow shovelling, the washer and dryer, and the planning for a granddaughter's birthday party.

My pleasure at being temporarily displaced is made possible by three things: the plane is safe and the crew is competent, my home is in good hands, and a friend will collect and deliver both my bags and myself to her place in Chesley, a small town three hours' drive north of Toronto. I am not lost. I know where I have come from and where I am going. I know who will greet my arrival and that we will work together for a week before I return home. I relax and enjoy the freedom of movement--of being temporarily out of place.

### ON THE MOVE AND PLACELESS?

Modern writers like Roland Barthe and Joan Dideon propose that movement by way of cars and planes defines modern existence. As I understand their thinking, modern life is essentially placeless. Our attachment to a specific part of a geography and, consequently, our care and concern for the specific place we inhabit are no longer essential to our way of life. We are always on the move. Everyone on board Air Canada 126 readily illustrates this point. We are increasingly mobile in ways our grandparents would

not have dreamed possible. Does this necessarily mean, however, that we are placeless?

Traditionally, nomadic peoples understood journey as part of being and living in place. Because modern life is increasingly constituted by movement between journey and home, I would have liked Relph, in his *Place and Placelessness*, to explore in greater depth the relationship between home and journey. Most importantly, I would like to hear his thinking on how we might journey with respectful caring for both the homes we pass through and leave behind.

There is limited value in lamenting the passing of a way of life where places were built over decades, even centuries, by people who inhabited them--people with deep "roots." There is a need to understand how places that have meaning and nourish the spirit of individuals, families, and communities were, and can be, built and maintained. *Place and Placelessness* speaks to such an understanding. I worry, however, that Relph's overlooking the relationship between journey and home contributes to his work's not receiving the attention it deserves.

Fundamental to Relph's thinking is a way of seeing that variously can be called *phenomenological*, *hermeneutical*, or *interpretive*. Drawing a fine distinction on method is an issue for academics more than for those who go about living daily life. For that reason, I am not greatly concerned with method in this commentary. What is important is that all of Relph's work is based on the premise that the "objectification" of both the natural and human sciences has turned everyone and everything into objects that, by definition, are devoid of meaning.

As a graduate student who was interested in understanding how people experience building and living in their home places, I wish to credit Relph as one of those scholars who provided clear and concise guidelines for such a project (Million 1993). His short article, "Seeing, Thinking, and Describing



Landscapes" (Relph 1984) encouraged me to get on with looking, listening, recording, describing, and trusting my capacity to intuitively grasp and come to a comprehensible experiential whole called a dissertation. Relph is a methodologist who knows what he is doing and, equally important for students, he is able to speak what he is doing in a concrete and natural way. Sadly, I have not seen this aspect of Relph's contribution recognized by the academic community.

### THE MEANING OF PLACE

Air Canada 126 landed and my friend was there to meet me. That was yesterday. This afternoon, I write on Vera's kitchen table, sipping coffee, glancing out the window onto flat fields blanketed in snow, dotted with occasional stands of maple trees, two-story stone houses, and large hip-roofed "bank barns," a phrase I've never heard before. But then, out West barns are seldom built into earthen banks. We have very few stone houses or maple trees where I live either. Our houses are made from lumber. We call them "frame" houses. We also have many poplar and pine forests. As Relph would have us notice and remember, each place—in this instance, perhaps more accurately, each region—has its own geography, its own natural and built character. Each place, albeit large or small, embodies a different spirit.

Vera and I met out West—Edmonton, to be exact. She is an Ojibway woman who married a Canadian of English decent. I am a Canadian woman of French decent who married a Cree man. Professionally, Vera

is a "cultural therapist" and I, a "psychologist." Vera and I are friends and working companions.

Several years ago, Vera felt pulled back to Ontario. Today she lives one hour's drive from "Nayaash-iinigmiing," her birthplace on the shores of Georgian Bay and known to those of us who speak English as "Cape Croker." Here, in Ojibway country, the names, the weather, the trees, the buildings, the daily routines—all are familiar to her. Here, the sights, sounds, and smells hold her safely and comfortably. Here is where she belongs. Vera is home.

And I, who am a visitor, will also be on my way home once our work together is done. Relph's great contribution, and one that I would like to hear his reflections on, is a deep understanding of the meaning of identity, home, and community:

The basic meaning of place, its essence, does not come from locations, nor from trivial functions that places serve, nor from the community that occupies it, nor from the superficial and mundane experiences—though these are all common and perhaps necessary aspects of place. The essence of places lie in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centers of human existence (Relph 1976, p. 43).

I thank Relph for thinking through the importance of places as centers of human life that give meaning and, in turn, demand involvement from us for their on-going life. The giving of his work has meant that I cannot take for granted the places I live in or pass through. I do not live alongside a collection of objects whose sum is the environment. I live in a world of many places, each unique, each deeply meaningful to those who live within and, consequently, each necessary to us as a community of earthly beings.

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## SEEING FAMILIAR THINGS IN NEW WAYS

Margaret Boschetti

*Boschetti is Associate Editor of EAP and an Associate Professor of Interior Design in the School of Human Environmental Sciences at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. One of her research interests is how elements of the material environment—for example, furnishings and personal possessions—contribute to place identity and attachment. This commentary is an edited version of a letter she wrote to David Seamon after reading Relph's following commentary on Place and Placelessness.*

In reading Relph's reflections on *Place and Placelessness* (Relph 1976), I wonder if he really doesn't realize how important the book has been to the development of the place concept? He criticizes the book as simplistic, but I believe it was seminal, fueling the work of many researchers who used his organizing conceptual framework. Here, I include my own research, for which Relph's ideas provided conceptual clarification and structure, especially his discussion of the different modes of insideness and outsideness (Boschetti 1984, 1990, 1993).

Also, simplicity is not necessarily negative. Often, it is the clarity that simplicity brings to one's perception and understanding of phenomena that allows one to move beyond confusion and to see old things in new ways. This is how breakthroughs in thinking and theory development push human efforts forward.

Some postmodern problems are not the fault of conceptualizing place as positive and placelessness as negative but the reverse: Understanding place and placelessness as a lived-dialectic helps to interpret problems in a way that doesn't judge the world but generates understanding from a personal perspective so that solutions can have "hands-on" meaning.

We have to remember that "place" can have different dimensions of meaning for different people; nevertheless, that places have meaning for people is a universal truth. What appears to be "placelessness" to an outsider may, in fact, be a place with meaning for the insider.

While new technologies are changing the world at a dramatic pace, I do not think these developments excuse the human need for satisfying a feeling of being "at home" in the world, though the manifestations of this satisfaction may take on new forms and occur through new situations and experiences.

I also think that creation of place is a personal

process, not something that can be accomplished by the group or society for the individual; and that we are constantly recreating place as we move from one place to another, whether it be our home, work place or temporary places experienced in transit. This is not to deny that groups may have a communal sense of place or that community can convey a sense of place for its members.

Yet it is not the domain of society to create places for people but to make it possible—through policy and design—for people to create their own places. Or, to put the point another way, it is society's responsibility neither to prevent people from creating places nor to create placelessness inadvertently through ignorance or lack of care.

It is very difficult to think about these ideas devoid of personal values and even ideological persuasions. I remember the notion, "thesis begets antithesis, which in turn leads to synthesis." In this light, the best new ideas interpret and integrate rather than reject those from the past, moving the whole forward in transcendent fashion.

From the perspective of 20 years since Relph's book, we may be now at the point of antithesis; the potential exists for a new synthesis to crystallize. It is to Relph's credit that his ideas have been powerful enough to generate antithesis, making possible the emergence of new ways to think about place.

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## REFLECTIONS ON PLACE AND PLACELESSNESS

Ted Relp

Ted Relp teaches geography at Scarborough College, the University of Toronto. Besides *Place and Placelessness*, his books include *Rational Landscapes and Humanistic Geography* (London: Croom Helm, 1981) and *The Modern Urban Landscape* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1987). Address: Dept. of Social Sciences, Scarborough College, 1265 Military Trail, Scarborough, Ontario M1C 1A4.

The conception of *Place and Placelessness* was largely a product of chance. I was studying the symbolic landscapes of the Canadian Shield because its lakes and forests are supposedly central to Canadian identity. As the research progressed, I encountered numerous references to the importance of place and sense of place but was unable to find any substantial definition of these ideas. I therefore began to develop my own.

At about this time, I was also caught up in an academic debate about methodologies in geography, much of it revolving around the supposed benefits of quantitative techniques. For my purposes, these methods were trivial and limited in scope. I had, however, come upon phenomenology as a philosophical method that acknowledged the importance of meanings and symbols. It made sense to apply phenomenology to place (although in retrospect I did not do this as rigorously as I should have), and my attempts at definition expanded. The symbolic landscapes of the Canadian Shield receded into the background and then disappeared into a file drawer.

In time, I realized that the newer landscapes I encountered in my travels revealed as much evidence of uniformity as they did of diversity. I also realized that a comprehensive account of place should consider the reasons for this increasing homogenization. The result was the argument of *Place and Placelessness*, which takes the form of a straightforward presentation of opposites, though these can be stated in various ways—place vs. placelessness, phenomenology vs. positivism, vernacular vs. modernist, diversity vs. uniformity, authentic vs. unauthentic.

My recollection is that this argument was not intended to be a defense of the good qualities of places against the trivializing incursions of placelessness, though it seems to have been often interpreted

this way. Instead my aim was to describe some important features of the geography of the late-20th century that had been overlooked in the rush to apply statistical measures to everything. I also wished to point out that these geographic features related to some deeply significant aspects of human existence.

### AMBIGUITIES OF PLACE & PLACELESSNESS

In the book, my sympathies were perhaps on the side of places, but I know I enjoyed the elaboration of some of the extreme instances of placelessness, and they were certainly easier to photograph.

This argument by opposites now appears to me to have been unduly simple. I realize that place and sense of place, which I then represented as mostly positive, have some very ugly aspects. They can, for instance, be the basis for exclusionary practices, for parochialism, and for xenophobia. There is ample evidence of this in such things as NIMBY attitudes, gated communities, and, more dramatically, the political fragmentation and ethnic cleansing that beset parts of Europe and Africa and that are sometimes justified by appeals to place identity.

On the other side of the argument, I have come to realize that, while placelessness suppresses local meanings, it also has cosmopolitan and liberal aspects that help to facilitate shared understanding, tolerance and the acceptance of difference.

Twenty years ago the main threat to place identity seemed to be from imposed uniformity. Since then the corporate forces that once promoted sameness have discovered that distinctive place identities help to sell houses, holidays and other products. These identities do not, however, have to draw on the intrinsic qualities of a location, except perhaps some sanitized and distorted versions of local history.

In 1993 I almost attended a conference in Las



Vegas where some precise ways to make place distinctiveness were to be discussed. I regret missing it because this would have been an excellent chance to explore an attitude that I find puzzling in the very city where this attitude has been made most visible. Along the main strip there are landscape fragments of ancient Egypt, ancient Rome, Easter Island, Oz, medieval England, Japan, the Mississippi River; there is a real Hindu shrine in the grounds of Caesar's Palace and a fabricated tropical paradise at the Mirage (with some real and some fake palm trees, fake bird songs and a fake volcano).

### THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE 1990S

Clifford Geertz suggests that one of the key questions for modern culture is "What happens when reality is shipped abroad?" Las Vegas offers one answer. It is a paradoxically distinctive and very popular place made up of fragments obviously copied from elsewhere. It is a metaphor for the geography of the 1990s, a geography in which place identity is readily available for export and reassembly.

In the borderless world of electronic information and with the unprecedented scale of recent global population movements for both migration and tourism, it has become clear that conventional ideas about sense of place, location and context no longer apply. It is as though almost everywhere has been uprooted, along with customs, culture and landscapes, and these are now available for topological transformation and relocation anywhere.

In contrast to these complexities, the placelessness associated with modernism was largely straightforward. And for all its standardization, modernism at its inception was a confident attempt to redress problems of injustice and to use new technologies for the benefit of everyone. The results may be placeless but they are also explicit and honest. In contrast, post-modern place invention and manipulation seem to be exercises in duplicity. They are superficial acts of plagiarism that reveal a lack of confidence, a lack of originality, and uncertainty of any purpose except the one of making money.

### PRACTICING THE ACT OF IMAGINATION

When I wrote *Place and Placelessness*, I expected that things would become clearer as I got older. In

fact, they mostly have become murkier. I don't think this is just because I am now more perceptive or critical or crotchety than I was 20 years ago. Social, political and geographical processes really have become more complicated and difficult to understand.

To make matters worse, this shift has happened at precisely the time that methods for understanding these processes have been brought into doubt. The status of former privileged discourses, including science and phenomenology, has weakened, and a multitude of different voices now clamor to be heard.

As we try to find a procedure to adjudicate these competing claims and to make some sense of the confusions of post-modern place identity, there is yet another huge paradox to be considered. Global processes such as climatic change, persistent and intensifying poverty and unemployment associated with the world economy, ethnic conflicts, and the continuing human inclinations for cruelty and war—all impact the lives of individuals in specific places.

Efforts to confront these problems by acting locally are necessarily fragmented and weak; they also have the appearance of furthering narrow self-interests. On the other hand, policies and practices that are not based in specific actions in particular places are likely to be ideologically oppressive, undemocratic, imposed and placeless.

At the moment there seems to be no obvious way to resolve this paradox. From the perspective of my small patch of academic turf, I can only suggest that the positive aspects of *both* place and placelessness somehow have to be combined, and perhaps from this integration some proposals for careful and sustainable ways of living can develop.

The first stage to accomplish this aim might be to practice the act of imagination that enables us to relate the immediacies of our lives in particular places to larger environmental and social issues. After that I know no alternative to the hard discipline of keeping my eyes and mind as open as possible—being what the Canadian novelist Mordecai Richler calls "an honest witness to my time and place."

This is what I believe I tried to do in *Place and Placelessness*. It is what I continue to attempt.