



# Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology

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Several issues ago we requested that readers send course outlines relevant to *EAP*'s interests. Psychologist Eva Simms responded by forwarding the syllabus for her Duquesne University seminar, "Psychology of Place" (see *EAP*, spring 2006). Continuing this effort, we begin this issue with philosopher Dylan Trigg's outline for his seminar, "From Airports to Asylums: How Buildings Shape Our Identity," which he will teach this summer at the University of Sussex.

Next, museum worker Matt Thompson highlights the perplexing phenomenological question of how one might explore past lifeworlds, when all that remains is written and graphic traces. His focus is an 1825 document—the "Backhouse letter"—describing the opening of the world's first intercity passenger railroad—England's Stockton and Darlington Railway.

Last, we publish extracts from architect Ron Walkey's recently published *Luminous Encounters*, a book that describes his experiences of living in a Greek island village and becoming an "empathetic insider" to that place. We reproduce several of Walkey's drawings from the book.

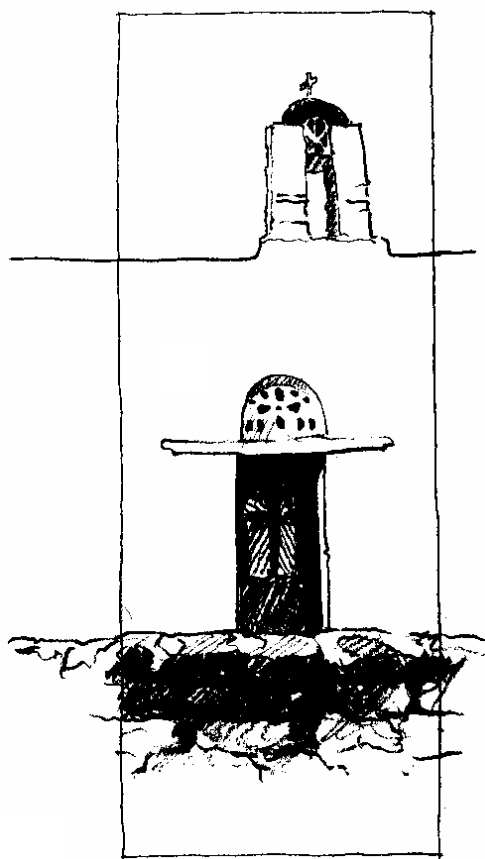
As always, we need material for future issues. Please, if you have items—citations, essays, drawings—send them along! We particularly appreciate student work.

## Library Subscriptions

One of the most effective means of disseminating the phenomenological point of view offered by *EAP* is library subscriptions. Currently, 13 institutions subscribe, and we would like to increase that number. If any readers have a role in library ordering, we would be grateful that they suggest an *EAP* subscription be added to the library's holdings. Institutions that currently subscribe are:

- Andrews University
- Bilkent University (Ankara, Turkey)
- Columbia University (Avery Architectural Library)
- Dunbarton Oaks Research Library (Washington, DC)
- Duquesne University (Simon Silverman Center)
- Judson University
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- University of California, Berkeley
- University of Michigan
- University of Montreal
- University of Notre Dame
- University of Pennsylvania (Fisher Fine Arts Library)
- University of Puerto Rico

*Below:* The cover image from Ron Walkey's *Luminous Encounters*, a first-person account of life on the Greek island of Tinos. Selections from this work begin on p. 7.



## More Donors, 2008

We are grateful to the following readers who, since the last issue, have contributed more than the base subscription for 2008.

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## EAP Conference Sessions

There will be an EAP-sponsored session on architect Christopher Alexander at the annual meetings of the **Environmental Design Research Association** (EDRA), Veracruz, Mexico, 28 May-1 June, 2008 (Alexander session is all day 28 June). Participants include: planner Karen Kho, anthropologist Jenny Quillien, and architects Michael Mehaffy and Kyriakos Pontikis. <http://www.edra.org/>

The 27<sup>th</sup> **International Human Sciences Research Conference** will be held 11-14 June 2008, at Ramapo College in Mahwah, New Jersey, near New York City. EAP will sponsor a special session on "Goethean science." Presenters include: philosopher Bill Bywater, psychologist Brent Dean Robbins, EAP editor David Seamon, & place specialist Silke Schilling. [http://phobos.ramapo.edu/~hsr08ram/index\\_new.html](http://phobos.ramapo.edu/~hsr08ram/index_new.html).

The 2008 meeting of the **International Association for Environmental Philosophy** (IAEP) will be held in Pittsburgh, 19-20 October, immediately following the annual meetings of **SPEP** (Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy) and **SPHS** (Society for Phenomenology and the Human Sciences), 16-18 October. EAP will sponsor a special IAEP Monday-morning session on "environmental and bodily phenomenologies." Presenters include: philosophers Robert Mugerauer and Ingrid Stefanovic and psychologists Will Adams and Eva Simms. [www.environmentalphilosophy.org](http://www.environmentalphilosophy.org).

## Items of Interest

The **Timber Framers Guild** holds its 22<sup>nd</sup> Western Conference 17-20 April, 2008, in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Several "hands-on" sessions are scheduled, including "Basic Log Building Skills," "Timber Framing in China," "Earth Lime and Timber Framing," and "Chainsaw 101 for Timber Framers." [www.tfguild.org](http://www.tfguild.org).

The journal, ***Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences***, will publish a special issue on "Dimensions of Bodily Subjectivity." The guest editors are seeking submissions. Topics might include: "The acting body, the sensing body, the affective body, the developing body, the temporal body, the spatial body, the intersubjective body, the expressive body, the enhanced body, the virtual body, the aesthetic body, the erotic body, the contemplative body, the minimal body, the perturbation/disturbance of any of these dimensions of bodily subjectivity. Submissions from any discipline, as well as under-represented approaches, will be appreciated." Submission deadline: 1 September 2008. Contact guest editor Dorothee Legrand at: [dol@hum.ku.dk](mailto:dol@hum.ku.dk)

The **Forum for Architecture, Culture and Spirituality (ACS)** is an international scholarly forum established in 2007 to support architectural and interdisciplinary scholarship, research, practice, and education on the significance, experience and meaning of the built environment. Its activities include web-based information resources, networking and discussion groups, conferences and symposia, and publications. For more information, visit: <http://faculty.arch.utah.edu/acs/>

**Pathways in Phenomenology (PIPH)** focuses on works that bring newcomers into the phenomenological tradition; works on phenomenological method and methodology (including works for beginners as well as works for specialists); works presenting the results of original phenomenological investigations; and other unusual but worthy works that may not fit easily into other book series in phenomenology but are relevant to phenomenological practice in any of its multifarious forms. For more information, go to: [www.ipp-net.org](http://www.ipp-net.org).

## Course Outline

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# From Airports to Asylums How Buildings Shape Our Identity

Dylan Trigg, Tutor  
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## Course Description

What is the relationship between buildings and sense of self? Is it possible for different buildings to elicit or repress different sides of our identities?

Drawing on an interdisciplinary approach ranging from philosophy, anthropology, and architectural theory, the course introduces students to theories about architecture and embodiment. The course will cover topics such as the distinction between space, place, and “non-place”; the relationship between history, memory, and architecture; experiencing the city in a post 9/11 era; the exchange between architecture and aesthetics; and the relation between sexual desire and architecture.

To frame the theoretical considerations, we will visit specific places, including a hotel lobby; Starbucks; a derelict factory; and a war memorial.

## Assessment

Students will be expected to write one essay for this course and give a seminar presentation. The essay (2,500 words) is due the last week. A choice of essay questions will be provided at the first meeting, but there is scope for students to devise their own question through discussion with the course tutor. The course will be taught in seminar format. Students are expected to contribute to discussion as well as give individual presentations. Assessment is as follows:

- Essay (2,500 words)—60%
- Presentation—20%
- Course report on class participation—20%

## Weekly Topics

### Session 1: From Space to Place

What is the relationship between space and place? Is it possible to dwell in place but not in space? By asking these questions, we will establish a theoretical framework for the course. Reading:

- Casey, Edward, “How to Get From Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena,” in Feld, Steven & Keith H. Basso, *Sense of Place*, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1996.

### Session 2: Place and Placelessness [Field Trip: Thistle Hotel, Brighton]

It is common to think of certain places as having more value than others. Places such as airports, supermarkets, and motorways appear, at least initially, as qualitatively deficient. We may even define some places as being “non-places.” But what does this distinction mean? By visiting the lobby of a local hotel—a location commonly understood as being insignificant—we will ask if the distinction between place and non-place is valid, and if, indeed, it is impossible to dwell in the hotel lobby. In light of our experience of the hotel, we will then move on to consider how Starbucks challenges our notions of authenticity and meaning. Readings:

- Kracauer, Siegfried, “The Hotel Lobby,” in Leach, Neil (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, London: Routledge, pp. 53–59, 1997.
- Trigg, Dylan, “Memories in Site: Toward a Renewed Understanding of Starbucks,” in *Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology*, 17 (1): 5–10.

### Session 3: Remembering the Home—Bachelard

We examine a seminal text by the French thinker Gaston Bachelard. In the process, we will be led to consider the importance of the childhood home in our understanding of place. Reading:

- Bachelard, Gaston, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996 (chaps. 1 & 2)

### Session 4: Monuments, Testimony, and Memory [Field Trip: The Chattri War Memorial, Patcham]

We explore the issue of how buildings embody the past. What do we intend to *do* when we visit a monument to commemorate the dead? How does built material interact with memory? And, finally, to what extent does architecture relieve us of the burden of remembering? By visiting a local Indian War Memorial, we will put these questions to the test. Readings:

- Connerton, Paul, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Donohoe, Janet, “Rushing to Memorialize,” in *Philosophy in the Contemporary World*, 13, 1 (2006).
- Nora, Pierre, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire” in *Representations*, 26 (1989):7–24.

### Session 5: Dwelling in Place—Heidegger

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger has played a central role in bringing philosophy and architecture together. By spending some time attending to Heidegger’s thoughts on building, we consider the significance of the term “dwelling.” Reading:

- Heidegger, Martin, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Krell. NY: Harper & Row, 1977.

### Session 6: Aesthetics, Ruins, and Place [Field Trip: Shoreham Cement Works]

We look at the exchange between aesthetics and architecture. Does “good” architecture have to be visually attractive? In what sense is dereliction “uninhabitable?” Through visiting the derelict remains of a cement works and watching a short film regard-

ing a derelict asylum, we will consider how ruins challenge our notions of dwelling, memory, and accessibility. Readings and viewing:

- Ginsberg, Robert, *The Aesthetics of Ruins*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004 (chapters, 1, 4, & 7).
- Picon, Antoine, “Anxious Landscapes: From the Ruin to Rust,” in *Grey Room*, 1 (2000):64-83.
- “The Poetics of Decay,” [http://www.art-architecture.co.uk/insideout\\_archive/?location\\_id=7](http://www.art-architecture.co.uk/insideout_archive/?location_id=7)

### Session 7: Taboo and Transgression—Architecture and Desire

We explore how the sensuality of architecture relates to desire and transgression. Why do certain spaces appear to prohibit sexual desire while other spaces encourage desire? Is this a property of space or an order superimposed upon buildings? What is the relationship between sex, place, and the bodily libido? By considering how environments such as bedrooms, alleyways, peepshows, and shopping malls challenge our notions of taboo and transgression we will spend some time pursuing these questions. Readings:

- Colomina, Beatriz, *Sexuality and Space*, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997.
- Pile, Steven, *The Body and the City: Psychoanalysis, Space, and Subjectivity*, London: Routledge, 1996.

### Session 8: Cities of Panic—Place and the Politics of Terror

Increasingly, the contemporary city has become a battleground of control, fear, and surveillance. In Session 8, we will explore the political and experiential ramifications of the city amid the current “politics of terror.” In the process, we will point to the limitations of phenomenology. Readings:

- Foucault, Michel, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” in Leach, Neil (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, London: Routledge, 1997, pp. 350–356.
- Virilio, Paul, *City of Panic*, trans. Julie Rose. Oxford: Berg, 2005.

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# Reading an Historical Text Phenomenologically: The Backhouse Letter

Matt Thompson

*Thompson is the Volunteering Coordinator at the National Railway Museum (NRM) in York, England. He trained as an archaeologist before employment in the museum sector. His major research interest is studying the coming of the railways and their impact on people's everyday lives. The letter by Englishman John Backhouse referred to in Thompson's interpretation is part of the NRM letters archive. The main body of the letter deals with family matters; the passages that Thompson interprets are drawn from are the letter's first few sentences, which describe the opening of the first intercity passenger railroad—the Stockton and Darlington Railway (SDR), which ran between the County Durham towns of Stockton-on-Tees and Darlington and included branch lines to several local collieries. The railway began operations in 1825 and continued as the SDR until 1863 when it was absorbed by the North Eastern Railway.*

*Backhouse's drawing and passages from his letter are used with the permission of the National Railway Museum. © 2008 Matt Thompson. [matt.thompson@nrm.org.uk](mailto:matt.thompson@nrm.org.uk).*

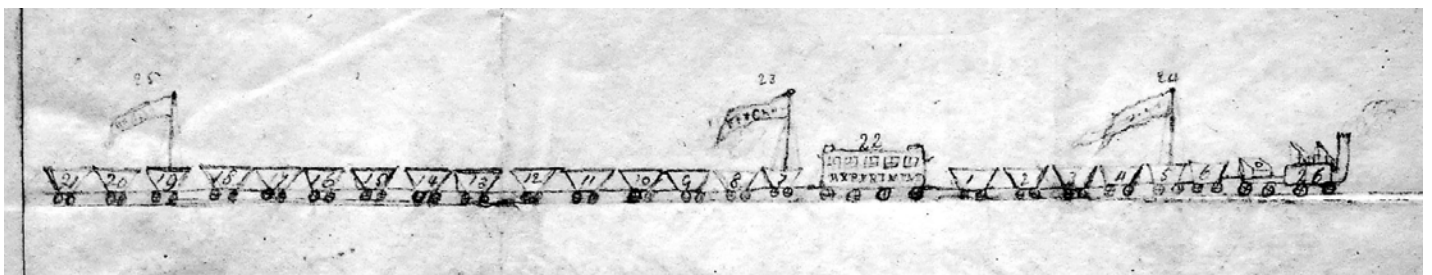
In the interpretation that follows, I explore John Backhouse's experience of the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway not simply as an individual's witnessing a single event—however momentous and significant historically—but as the revealing of a phenomenon, not exclusively to those who were present at the time but to a world that, in the beginning at least, had only an imperfect language to describe what was experienced.

I am fascinated with the ways in which we exist in and interact with the world in which we find ourselves. Through a phenomenological approach, we can better understand some of the complex relationships that exist in our lives and that constitute the lifeworld we experience. Is it possible, though, to research a phenomenon that did not reveal itself either to ourselves directly or to individuals, long since deceased, who can no longer recount their experiences to us? How might we understand lived experiences surrounding a phenomenon that unfolded almost two centuries ago?

This short paper is my first attempt to explore a phenomenon through an historic document, in this case, a letter that appealed to me because there were phrases that seemed to warrant a deeper reading. The document seemed an ideal subject for the application of a phenomenological approach. How successful my interpretation is depends on additional interpretations of other accounts and whether findings can be 'triangulated' in a way that identifies commonalities and significant underlying structures.

Written 10 October 1825, Backhouse's letter is remarkable because it is a firsthand account of the beginning of a technology that fundamentally changed our Western way of life. Written to Backhouse's sisters, the letter mostly discusses family affairs but includes, at its start, a young man's effort to describe, in both words and drawing [reproduction, below], an event and experience that he obviously found significant and exciting.

What I want to address here is how this letter might tell us of a situation that was radically dis-



tinct and different from the everyday lifeworld and natural attitude of the time. There are two passages in particular that describe a lived experience penetrating far beyond a factual situation and pointing toward the phenomenon of “seeing something entirely new.”

The letter begins:

*My Dear Sisters, Perhaps you may not understand what that drawing at the top means,/ it is meant to represent the opening of/ the Stockton & Darlington railway/ which took place on the 27 of September/ 1825.*

This opening may not seem revelatory, but Backhouse’s assumption that his description requires explanation is telling. The drawing is well executed and, to our modern eyes, is a clear representation of a train. Admittedly, its form today may seem outmoded and there are elements that seem odd. But the rendering of a train is recognizable and belongs in that category of things that we today automatically take as “railway.”

My point is that our taken-for-granted understanding of “railway” was not available for Backhouse at that moment. Since 1825 we have had some 175 years to facilitate a visual and verbal vocabulary to categorize and to define the world of railways and trains. This vocabulary has, of itself, developed a precise syntax whereby one set of known things has come to be associated with considerably different things. For instance, a connected set of wagons and coaches headed by a locomotive eventually became known as a “train.”

Notice, however, that no such taken-for-granted vocabulary and syntax are present in Backhouse’s letter, thus he immediately assumes that the drawing is not self-evident and requires some form of explanation and explication. The fact that he offers not only a full description but a preface describing, at the most basic level, what

the drawing is suggests that railways were not only new objects but, more importantly, new concepts for which an accurate language and syntax had not yet appeared.

The letter continues:

*It was a very grand sight/ to see such a mass of people moving; on the/ road from D [Darlington] to S [Stockton] 600 were said to be in/ on & about the wagons & coaches! & the engine/ drew not less than 90 tons!!!!*

The key word in this passage is “mass.” “Mob” as a term for an unruly crowd had already been used for several centuries before 1825, but “mass”—while used from 1563 in the sense of “gathering in mass”—can be interpreted as an indication of the time’s expanding industrialization. Earlier railways existed before 1825 but transported physical stuff—for example, raw materials like coal. Backhouse did not have a word to depict a large number of people moved by machine. As a result, he draws on an ‘old’ word typically applied to inert things. He reinforces his meaning by emphasizing that “the engine drew not less than 90 tons!!!!” In other words, he further commodifies the passengers by depicting them as “dead weight” rather than human beings.

In short, a new invention invokes a new sort of lived experience that, in turn, invokes a new language to depict that experience. This progression is borne out in Backhouse’s effort to describe people-as-passengers, of whom he speaks as a mass or weight that the train is able to haul. In fact, Backhouse does not refer to the passengers again as individuals until they have disembarked at their destination in Stockton to enjoy “an excellent dinner.” Arguably, Backhouse’s description might be interpreted as an early depiction of “mass transit,” where people rather than goods are the transported commodity.

# Luminous Encounters on the Island of Tinos

Ron Walkey

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*Walkey is an architect and Professor Emeritus of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. He lives on the Greek island of Tinos and in Vancouver. The following extracts are reprinted, with permission, from his Luminous Encounters (Athens: Optima '92, 2006; ISBN 960-8198-10-0). See his earlier EAP essay, "Again Alexandria," in the winter 1996 issue. [walkey@arch.ubc.ca](mailto:walkey@arch.ubc.ca). Text and drawings © 2006, 2008 Ron Walkey.*

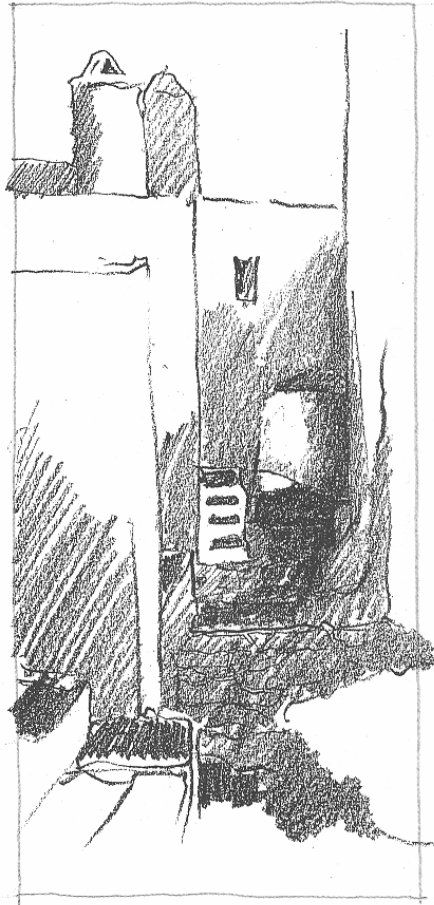
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The path to Tinos and to the village of Amadhos began nearly 30 years ago.

In March, 1976, I set out from Athens to separate from the kind assistance of my wife Evi. She had been helping me with the problems of language since our arrival months before. It was too easy to remain passive and dependent. I figured that, walking along pathways into and through distant villages, I'd be left to rely on my own shaky ability to make verbal sense in conversing with whom I met. So I headed north and then east from the city of Volos into Pelion, a long, mountainous peninsula curving out into the Aegean Sea.

One morning I was heading out from the tiny coastal village of Lefokastro, up toward the larger village of Arghalasti. The early spring day was warm and calm, bees buzzed, but the little village I left behind was still shuttered and empty during these off-season months. No one to talk with there.

It was only a few kilometers to Arghalasti—up through the dense groves of olive trees that lined the mounting terraces until I reached the straggled edge of chicken coops, some low stables, and then the stone houses that led me into the village toward the main square. A few steps more and I entered into the public heart space of that small community.



Laying my pack on a wire-backed chair, I moved another to sit at the outside corner of one of the three coffee shops that faced the generous open space. When the owner came out and threw me a glance, meaning "And what can I bring you?" I asked for a semi-sweet coffee and a 'spoon sweet'.

The villages of Pelion are rightly famous for their slate paved central squares. A church and the clustered stone buildings elegantly shape these spaces to open toward a spectacular view. Within the square, the trunks of ancient plane trees, some more than six meters in girth, stand like giants to anchor the square deep into the mountain slope. Above, a vast crown of wide flat leaves spreads out to shelter all life below from the summer sun.

I sat in this square, under its plane trees, and watched as the butcher unloaded two wrapped animals from a battered red Datsun, then shouldered them into his shop. A cluster of housewives in aprons talked together outside a small grocery store that I could see was stuffed with everything. Two minutes later, the mud-coffee arrived in a small white cup and beside it the owner set down a tiny glass plate. On it two sour cherries glistened, long drowned in sugar syrup. There was a wee spoon to the side.

A man sat at the next table, having taken up his station against the wall so that nothing in the square might pass unobserved, a farmer, old enough to be too sore and stiff to continue with his animals. His wife or daughter had probably parked him here for the day. I thought, “Aha, a good time to practice my rudimentary Greek!” so I started with a hello, then answered to where I had come from, did I have a family—all the usual social touching of a foreigner by a local. Then I told him I had just come up from Lefokastro, the small sea-edge village a few kilometers away.

“Oh, good” and then after a pause, “I’ve never been there.”

Thinking I had not heard him right, I repeated and pointed off to the left to the way I’d come, “Lefokastro, the village just down the hill by the stone path that starts over there.”

Pulling himself a bit more upright for clarity, then placing two hands on his cane, this time he said more slowly so I’d definitely understand, “No, I’ve never been there. Why would I go there?”

Somewhere in my mind a door opened.

What did it mean for him, his life so involved with the necessities of family, land, and animals that he had not gone beyond what he could almost see from the main square of his village? Seemed like he’d never wanted to, never thought of it.

My life up to that moment had been decidedly different. For decades I’d been on the run, a place junky drawn by curiosity into many corners of this world to dwell in the unfamiliar in the hope of clarifying the familiar. I had filled my mind’s eye from many sources but with that built-in detachment of the traveler. Where I found myself was not my world or of my world. Then this question: “Why would I go



there?” The radius of this man’s world was fixed from day one.

I wondered how it would be to spend a lifetime looking deep into the same situations rather than feasting on diversity from a distance? To live in a place, to be ‘placed’ in a culture from where there was no escape from the familiar or from the responsibility to others that would be expected—how would those places feel? Palpable and alive, not picturesque, for every single stone would tell its story, tell his story, tell my story.

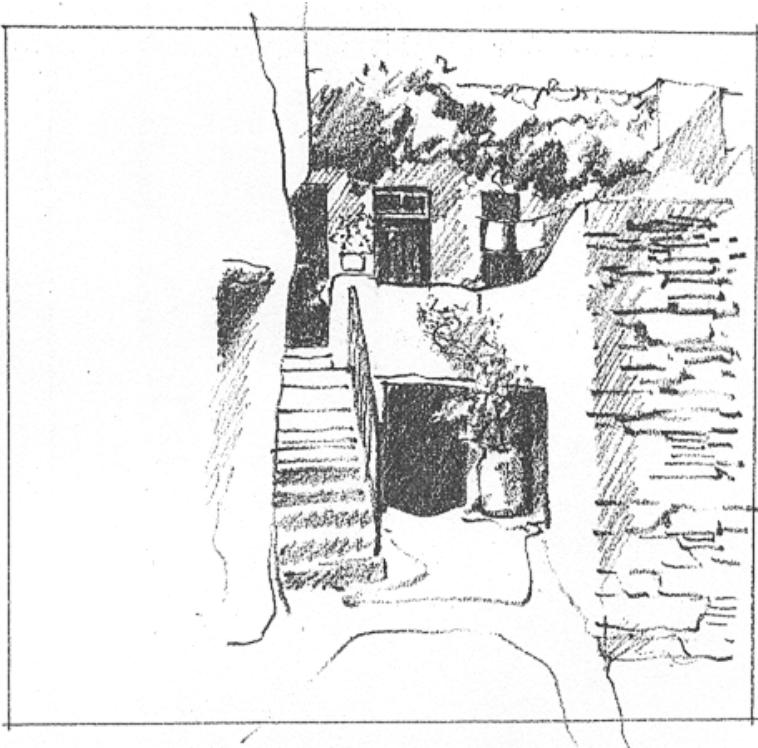
For many years after that encounter, when time opened its arms to us, Evi and I continued to travel to many parts of the country, seeing, tasting and asking. Usually it was the villages that drew us as well as the local land transformations wrought by the necessity of sustaining those small agricultural communities.

What was still visible everywhere was the residue of the desperate Greek engagement with nature to survive in a sparse, tough land. And I was drawn to the ever-present overlay of history, known but not seen. Nature unmediated with human history has for me always seemed distant and apart. I have never found any personal

revelations there.

I’d arrive in a village and be off into every lane, making a drawing of a house subsiding into ruin or photographing an old half-submerged wall made of stones noticeably larger than the local ones. “Now how did they get here, and when, and why?” Each presentation of place offered questions. There came a point where I wondered whether in one of these villages I might find the place ‘of me’, remembering that a psychic once ‘revealed’ that I’d led a previous life somewhere here in the Balkans.

All of these assembled places called villages were prey to time. Most had seen their prosperous era in the 100 years leading up to World War II, and since then neglect was demanding its due. Yet in other villages, new energy for building holiday homes was evident as it blasted through the fabric of tight, cob-



### Souvlaki Theatre

Every interaction between people is a small piece of theatre, sometimes subtle and fleeting, sometimes dramatic and magnetic. In part this is because the built world here, the white village, the tumbled abstraction of buildings, the fluid forms of steps and doorways rounded by an ever-thickening crust of whitewash just seem to be waiting for any Godot who happens to pass by. This is not just an accident of form. The form was created to be a stage.

The public spaces of these villages were shaped as a collective living room for the community. Sometimes as many as 15 children and maybe the four grandparents all lived in little more than a one-room house with a few attached niches. Where else but in the street could life unfold? They lived close, without the luxury of tasting anonymity, and this meant having to get on with each other, coaxing an eye, temporarily resheathing a metaphorical knife in an argument, and working through all the daily situations and crises that come from fierce pride in the individual family.

It's easy to see the entire length of the central street of Arnadhos as being one elongated stage with many stage-right, stage-left entrances. And in this theatre there is neither physical nor psychological room for a separate audience. Though you might like to be a white wallflower, saying, "I'm only here to watch," you'd be part of a scene—often its focus.

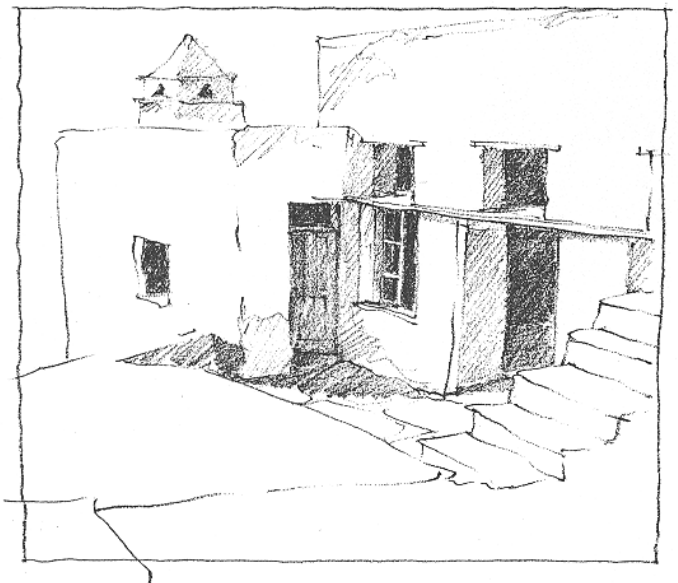
The permanent street 'set' includes stairs, door-

bled streets, slicing off the face of an old shop, and parking on what once was a walled garden. And of course concrete had arrived with its ubiquitous gift of grey monotony.

Some years ago the fates conspired to lead us into an opportunity of being 'placed'. We were able to buy and over the years spend considerable time in and around a very small house embedded in the highest village on the island of Tinos, one of the Cycladic islands anchored in the middle of the Aegean Sea. The village of Arnadhos is a white conglomerate of simple rectangular houses, penetrated by narrow, arched-over streets that are only donkey-wide. The car, the truck, and the machines for building are unable to penetrate with their devastations. Our house is up high in the village. To reach it from the small parking area, we must pass the muster of Frosso, Andreas, Manos, Theano, Stathis, Anesa, Anthi, Panayotis, and Takis as they come to the doors of their houses to welcome us. Comings and goings are always common knowledge.

We were warmly welcomed by the locals, given advice on whom to hire to make and replace the rotten windows, whom to call to stucco the cave-like bathroom, what paint shop to support, what to do on the feast days and, most importantly Who was Who.

This was the place, to stay placed.





ways, steps down to cellars, stairs up to storerooms, sections of road vaulted over, enclosed from sun and wind that serve to make every entrance and exit dramatic. And along both sides of the street are white-washed stone, shelf-like structures elevated to form small platforms, each one a mini-stage.

All these street accoutrements are also necessary in practical ways. They offer a dry perch when the winter rains deluge the streets to create knee-deep torrents. The shelf-like benches are essential for loading and unloading donkeys and mules and shape a place from where it's safe and easy to dismount and remount those patiently standing beasts.

And of course no place along the street obeys any straight-line geometry. Instead, the streets lie softly on the gentle rise of the land—a few stairs here, a slightly ramped section there. And they bend in a relaxed way to receive a cross path or to shift into an arched section. One day someone should transcribe these elements into some form of musical notation, for I'm sure this street could make a beautiful song.

Yesterday I led a group, several friends of friends, just arrived from India, through the village streets. It seemed not unfamiliar to them, but they were puzzled.

"But where are all the people?"

My answer, "It's just siesta time," concealed the deeper truth. The stage of this village is almost vacated, perhaps permanently vacant as the population dwindles away. I am left to ponder on past performances, ask around for the old scenes, wonder whether it was here that the body of Vangelis' father was laid out after his house collapsed upon him, whether it was out of this doorway that cuckold Zacharias emerged to confront his wife? Maybe. Only on summer days when the village celebrates its own saints days, do I get a bit of a sense of what it must have been like when the stage was nearly always occupied.

Some weeks ago, in the village just below us, it was the day to celebrate the saints Peter and Paul. This used to mean opening many of the houses for feasts, but as there are fewer and fewer resident families, the feasts are replaced by a collective activity that resurrects the public theatre of the street. Villagers, with their sons and daughters up from the main town or here from Athens plan a souvlaki barbecue, some buffet food, and a disc jockey. And the street is counted on to work its dramaturgical magic.

Let me describe the scene around the barbecue. It is to be set up just a bit off center of one of the upper streets in the village, one not more than about four meters wide.

### **Actors**

Four men: two with bellies ample enough to lift their T-shirts; the third, tall and weather-beaten; the fourth short, quick, and loquacious. Three boys: 8-11 years old, all with close-cropped heads.

### **Props**

- One 45-gallon drum hacked open vertically down the middle, halves mounted horizontally end to end at belly height onto just-barely-stable-but-still-wiggly welded steel legs.
- Unlimited bags of charcoal set to one side.
- One 1.5 liter plastic water bottle filled with clear white gasoline.
- One metal handheld butane gas welding torch, of the kind used by plumbers.

- One household hairdryer with an attached extension cord that snakes over a windowsill and into the living room of an adjacent house.
- One plastic dustpan.
- One 1.5 liter plastic water bottle filled with water.
- Two large boxes of refrigerated souvlaki, all pre-threaded onto small sticks.

### Script

Players take their positions: One Belly-man to each side to act as the arms, Tall-man at the head to act as critic, Quick-man to act as rover and fetcher. Boys to stand by, flit around, peak over, come close to getting burned, to accept continual verbal abuse from the men, and finally to get yelled at by the ‘chorus’ of mothers and grandmothers who sit not ten meters away. The boys must close their ears to the continual evocation of “Be careful!” assaulting them from the all-attentive chorus. Ideally, they should get in the way whenever possible but in the end will receive the honored status of serving the finished product.

### Action

The Belly-ones pour a mound of charcoal into the bottom of the barbecue. Quick-one douses the coals with white gas, Tall-one flicks his Bic, and all leap back as the flames shoot up nearly reaching the branches above.

“Be careful!” hisses the chorus.

Quick-one lights the welding torch and holds it whooshing close to the coals, as if to send them straight to hell. Belly-man-one holds the hairdryer as close as he can, trying to keep the cord from being melted by the blue tip of the torch held by Quick-one. Belly-man-two uses the plastic dustpan to turn over the tortured black lumps. Tall-man says they are doing this all wrong. Quick-man disagrees. Boys flit about and under the men’s arms peeking over the jagged lip of the cut barrels.

“Be careful!” intones the chorus.

Torch, hair dryer, dustpan, then Quick-one uncorks the gas bottle, pours a thin stream from on high, and the flames leap to the trees.

“Be careful!!” from the chorus. The boys do leap back to protect their eyebrows from singeing. The men love being close to the heat, evidence of real machismo in the blots of heavy sweat stains darkening along the back of their T-shirts.

In 15 minutes the charcoal is glowing red, and the square souvlaki are laid out side by side on the grill, turned continually by the Belly-men. Quick-man says they are doing this all wrong, Tall-man disagrees. Judging the coals to be too hot yet not seeking any consensus in the matter, Quick-man raises the bottle of water and splashes down half its contents. Steam engulfs everyone within two meters—real Wizard of Oz stuff, rising into the trees.

“Be careful!” from the chorus.

All the while the villagers and family members who have ascended from the town below and those who have come down from other villages above, pass within one meter of this performance, back and forth to greet old friends and to make their way to the small square at the end of the street where music from speakers blares from a raised terrace. The disc jockey there has been hijacked by a group of pubescent teenage girls. Instead of the traditional ‘nis-siotika’ songs that draw everyone out into the middle to join in a swirling line dance, the girls have bewitched him, and he plays teeny-bop music from their own world.

And so, with a too loud, love-lost song that keeps repeating “Sorry, Sorry” in English, they jump onto the stone shelves and practice their newly found hip wiggle. A few have already clicked into their femininity, but most jump around somewhere on either side of the beat. They manage to excommunicate the older crowd, so, for this night that is dedicated to the saints, the center stage will remain nearly empty, unable to work the magic catharsis of sustaining a traditional night of dancing long, long into the night.

Just out of flame distance from the fire makers and to one side, a stone bench and table are backed by one of the most magnificent bougainvilleas in the world. This is ringside center and beautiful. Here the old ones sit at various tilts, perhaps seven raisin-brown females and two pole-thin drifty-eyed males. They watch and nod, as they are related to most, honored by all. The tower of flowers above them is somehow fitting. I stop to wish all of them well, coax one then another to come to dance, but they do have a good excuse this time.

“What, to this music?”

Precisely at that moment, the Short-one chooses to empty the bottle of white gas and the scene is filled



with the flames reflecting on faces. The two Belly-men lean back symmetrically, the boys jump, the old ones tilt back.

“Be careful!”

Life’s theatre in the street.

### Different Dream, Different House

Yorgos wants to sell his village house, but nobody wants to buy it. I’ve taken a number of prospective owners up and through it, and the local real estate agent has brought up perhaps half a dozen more. Af-

ter five minutes in the place, they all turn and walk straight out.

We are talking about a fine old Tinos stone house not far from the entrance to the village with few stairs to navigate from the parking area. From the balcony, out over an exuberant bougainvillea, is an unobstructed view south over the whole of the southern Cycladic Islands. Everything in this house works: solid structure, good electrics, relatively new plumbing. There are no damp walls, you could move in tomorrow. The price is more than right at about one third the cost of the newly completed, concrete-box, ‘traditional-style’ villas lining the road up from the port. Ah, there’s the rub.

Fifteen years ago in a rare moment of affluence, Yorgos set about to transform the house with its stone vault, slightly meandering walls, small vertical windows, and stone-cut fan lights into a perfect replica of a two-bedroom Athenian apartment. He tore out the vault, the beams, the stone-slab ceiling, replaced the wood-paneled front door with ugly blue-and-white aluminum, enlarged the window openings to near square, fitted the bathroom with a large tub swimming in a surround of light blue tiles, installed new, flat plywood doors and—the *piece de resistance*—a pair of glass-paneled pocket doors to slide away as if to reveal a large ‘parlor’. He put in new kitchen and bedroom cabinets and replaced the old pine planks with machine-polished terrazzo floors. The facade was crowned with an eyebrow extension of the roof slab cantilever and the balcony was bejeweled with a rail of thinly wrought iron, limply rococo, painted blue, of course.

He made a bold statement for the times. His family would live in the village as they would have lived had fate allowed them to move to Athens. Certainly, many of his changes brought convenience—no doubt the old roof leaked and the doors were crumbling. But while the neighbors were satisfied with simple repair or replacement, Yorgos had a new vision—a new dream of how to live.

Now the house is his nightmare. Prospective buyers don’t share his dream. They are not villagers anxious to imitate urban taste. Instead, they’ve come looking for a second home on an island—a place emotionally distant from their 11-month-a-year apartment life in the city. They search for a house to

spend their summer month with friends enjoying the tavernas, the beach, and putting up with the wind.

Having an island home is a very popular cultural fantasy right now, and the economy seems strong enough to see the fantasy fulfilled. Magazines are stuffed with lush images of renovated island homes and all the furnishings, colors, and newly made ‘traditional’ details that are a necessary part of this dream. It can be an old house fully renovated and filled with Miele appliances, or a new concrete frame structure, just as long as it is encrusted with these ‘traditional features’. The vision, the dream, must precede any actual house.

Yorgos’ house presents all the wrong signals. Except for the view, it doesn’t have any parts of the genetic code that would make up the vision. It’s invalid and dismissed with a “Why should I come here to live in a place like I have in Athens?”

I wonder: Is this attitude any different from log-cabin mania in Canada or anywhere else where a vernacular necessity has been replaced with its image? All part of our modern burden of choice, I guess. When these village houses were first built, the social tradition, building techniques, and limited means all combined to limit options. Generically, the dwellings were similar in nearly every way. But a house on this island is now being bought to support an optional, part-time lifestyle, not for a dwelling essential for survival. The image is what is essential now.

Since none of these signals are immediately recognized in Yorgos’ house, newcomers turn away despite the perfectly functional spaces shaped by two-foot-thick stone walls, a labyrinthine stone vaulted basement, efficient, silently working services, and a captain’s bridge view.

Friends of friends were almost interested, but only if the house could be ‘re-transformed’ to fit their vision. So I spent a day with the old builder Vassilis, estimating the cost to make the house fit the dream. Out with the wrought iron and aluminum doors and in with uneven stucco, slate benches, and reshaped wooden windows. The cost of covering the terrazzo with local slates, lowering and rebuilding the doors, and inseting stone slate ‘eyebrows’ over openings for that village look was reasonable, since most of the changes are cosmetic. But no sale.

The locals don’t get it. This is still a house of pride, one of the best in the village because of ‘modernization’. From their point of view, the old stuff is mostly a headache, if not downright leaky. “And you can move in tomorrow!”

Andreas, Yorgos’ neighbor, decided not to sell his family house in the village but to transform it. He has recently retired from his work as a concierge in central Athens and wants to spend more than just summer months back in the village of his birth—in fact, in the actual house of his birth.

Just a few doors from us, this house has the advantage of a small, protected lane running along one side that lets light into the deeper rooms. Some years ago when Andreas was thinking of selling and, suspecting that I might know some interested foreigners, he invited me in to see the beamed ceiling in the main room, the tiny traditional cubicles that served as bedrooms, the nice time-worn floors, the great stove hood in the small light-filled kitchen where fire from dried thorn bushes would cook the meals. The deep window sills supported thin mullioned small-paned windows and the wood paneled doors were rounded at the edges from 15 coats of high gloss green paint—all had worn time well.

Andreas’ grandchildren, however, leaned on him, and so in the end he decided to keep the house, but its image he didn’t want. So over this past winter he has transformed the family house to resemble—yes, an Athenian apartment! Now it has high, concrete-slab ceilings with not a beam in sight, tall, painted single-panel doors, and brown-and-white aluminum double-paned exterior doors and windows, complete with their integral screens—so much aluminum that the glass area is restricted. Modern kitchen fixtures sit in a bare room, a hanging fluorescent fixture dangles in its center. The floor underfoot is now endless oatmeal-colored, 12 x 12 factory glazed tiles—sturdy, square, neat, and echo filled. He and his Maria are very proud of the new image, the new identity, and I’ve been invited to admire and nod approval.

Their dream is fulfilled, but it’s a good thing he’s not planning to sell.

### My Problem

All this moaning and groaning, all this bitching I do about what’s being lost. I should be tired of myself,

but I haven't been able to balance the changing reality of this place with the longing for it to remain as it is. When we came here we had eyes for the aeons of the place, the pace of a day with donkey, the stories of a village filled with life and its near self-sufficiency, for the residue is all around us.

In the midst of this beauty and this history, I have a hope for its continuity. But I keep forgetting that nothing is static no matter how much one might wish. It can't be nostalgia that I'm afflicted with, for that word, comprised of the Greek '*nostos*' return, and '*algos*' suffering, refers to an unappeased yearning to return. And this place is certainly not part of my Canadian past.

Nearly all the physical changes here are destructive: damaging, ugly, thoughtless, and selfish. The three-storied concrete frame boxes stuck on the terraces, the roads slashing across the hills, the giant mobile telephone relay aerials crowning the crest of the tallest hills, the villas for sale advertising swimming pools (when we are in the midst of a serious two-year—maybe permanent—water crisis), the private wells dug illegally at night, the raw sewage dumped in ravines, the high-tension transmission cables built across the island's front face to bring fresh disco energy to Mykonos, and more.

The locals have precious little nostalgia for their own land. That old life was dirty and backbreaking, and death was always a close companion in every family. Now life can be easy, and the new urban and tourist energy is pouring over the waves to fill their pockets.

"You know that old terraced piece of property handed down from aunt Toula—where Ismini had her goats 15 years ago? Why last weekend some lawyer from Athens came, stopped on the road with his family hanging out the windows of his big car, and made an offer of \$190,000 for those three terraces!"

For the locals, this landscape that I feel should be sacred is seen as a great lotto—an inherited resource with which to go fishing for foreigners. Can I blame them? Kostas wants to buy a house for his daughter and her family living on the island of Syros. Why not sell something he'll never use again?

"You should see what happens in Portugal and Spain," well-traveled friends of mine say. "What's happening here is so much better!"

Well maybe, but it's hard to live in this beauty with such a noble past and a possible fine future and see how much money is being thrown at building these vast soulless one-week-a-year 'houses'. How and where these structures are being built is banal. Size, superficial appearance, and speed of completion are the ruling canons in our time.

With the old buildings, every structure, every stone-paved pathway, every pigeon hut was built slowly, by hand, yes, but mostly with time as teacher. Takis once told me that it took 30 years to finish one of the highly decorated dovecotes, a thousand of which are scattered about the island. Placing these unique buildings on the site needed to be exact to shield the young birds learning to fly and to return safely in the island's severe winds.

"Well, first my grandfather thought about where to put the dovecote," Takis says, "and this took him about five years. See, he had to look and think about it every day. Then he laid the rectangular foundations of large squared stones onto the bedrock. Then, for the next four years, he thought about the basic shape of the building before making his mind up."

The actual building of each stage, finding and transporting the stones probably took less than a month, but the contemplation of the moves to be made and their likely consequence were what made these structures profound. It was the time put into the project, in contemplation, and in hand work with its loving imperfections that made all the difference.

And every act of building was like that. The walls of houses like ours, about 70 centimeters thick, were made with two wythes, an inner one and an outer one, each stone laid in earth with smaller stones carefully fitted for stability. The space left between the two was then filled with rubble and earth. But if you look more closely, you'll find that each stone on both faces of that wall is sloped just ever so slightly outward so that any moisture will migrate to the outside.

In the new buildings on the island, the concrete gets filled out with clay tile overnight, then imitations of the old building techniques, like an arched marble fan light, are attached to the walls in decorative fashion. This sweet, insincere soup of 'traditional' details is seen all over the island. It seems like every day a

new villa pops up on an old terrace and looks like a fat piece of pastry.

The brute reality of the concrete is, as everywhere, destructive of life in any form. The bulldozer, concrete pump truck, rectangular formwork, tacked-on details—these and not the hand and eye play the new key roles. With the Athenian pockets full, money is used to “Finish it tomorrow and sell it.” There is no soul in the effort because there’s no time or thought beyond the immediate.

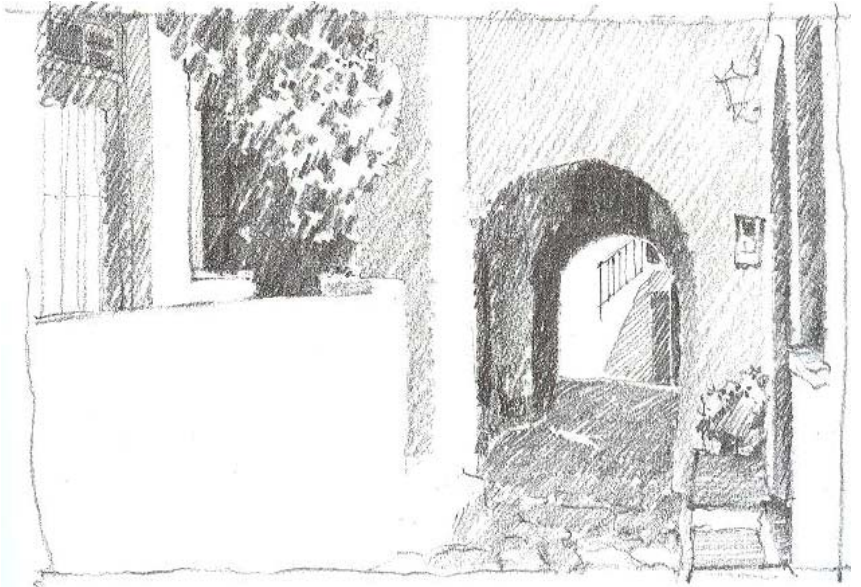
And where are these houses built? Until just a few years ago, dwellings were clustered in villages where access to the central church, to communal water, the need for mutual assistance as well as family ties, all played a decisive role. The new construction, usually a trio of identical three-story, side-by-side summer-time villas, is being built anywhere there is a view and irrespective of what damage the access roads will inflict. Another form of suburbia.

When we came here, the seeds of this monumental change were already well imbedded. One morning I walked with Stavros down the old road built for animals and people. As we headed for a morning liturgy at a small church, the one with ‘1669’ carved over the door, we passed across the terraces, most unused, where many of the stone retaining walls have crumbled with neglect. Stepping down over the worn pavers, he pointed out each property along the way and, as a clear singing voice from the church below drifted up to us in the windless air, he stopped and turned to me.

“This was Vangelis’, he’s sold it, and Yannis the developer has bought the land all the way down to the road below and over here.” My heart sank.

How can I complain? This place is like so many others at the edge of the centers of progress—just a little out of sync and now catching up. Did I really expect this place to stay unchanged, to remain useless in the face of opportunity? But what about the decrease in the sum total of beauty on this island? Does that matter any more?

It’s my problem, and I’ve got to somehow find a balance with the modern gorgon—to look for something positive emerging out of the new. The trick is



not to enter the grey grim Kingdom of Morose, for it is so easy to succumb to terminal grumps. What to do? I think it was the writer Leon Wieseltier who said, “The only revolutionary thing left to do is to make something go slower.”

Evi is in Athens this week and I am playing at being a bachelor, aided and abetted by the local women who slip me delicious plates of eggplant, stuffed tomatoes, cheeses, and eggs.

“For the orphan,” they say. This is my time to whack away at small projects. I try to work ‘for all time’ like the locals used to. The questions I ask as I make a humble storeroom door: How to seat it comfortably? How to build in a recognition that both jambs lean unequally to the east and yet not get funky about it? How to prolong its life by softening the banging when it closes?

And also every day there is sublime beauty. A butterfly comes for a brief visit. The white arches gleam. Manos waters the geraniums into a riot of color. Antonia calls out from below, “Hoy!” then she comes slowly up to our terrace holding a steaming plate of artichokes stewed with dill.

So maybe I should just look closer to home, water a plant, paint a crisp line of whitewash at the bottom corner of the terrace—a line that follows closely the curve of the wall and the heave of the floor, while being careful to keep the horizontal width constant. “Ah, what a fine line! Who could ask for anything more?”

But questions do arise.