

Toward a Phenomenological Ethics for Urban Design

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Submission for the University of Oregon Philosophy Matters Prize
May 2014

In an interview with Wired magazine in 1996, celebrated modern architect Rem Koolhaas stated that, “People can inhabit anything. And they can be miserable in anything and ecstatic in anything. More and more I think architecture has nothing to do with it.” His statement reflects a long history of modernist thinking in architecture and urban design which dismisses the role of lived human experience in the design of built space. In infamous modernist cities like Brasilia, with its orderly grid of “super blocks” and series of gigantic space-age monuments connected by long strands of asphalt highway, the lived experience of city dwellers was overlooked in favor of a grand master-plan intended to be viewed from above. Modernist urban design, not just in Brasilia but in cities around the world, engendered huge swaths of paved roads and highways, overpasses, and vast urban sprawl. It also unraveled elements that have shaped healthy, social urban life for millennia: density, walkability, smaller-scale buildings, and in general, spaces that support immersive, multi-sensory human experience and allow for easy social interaction. Such spaces invite us, through dynamic sensory engagement, to understand ourselves as inextricably connected to place. They help us discover how our own identities emerge from the physical, social, and biological systems we inhabit. In seeking to control and separate the aspects of city life like the discreet parts of a machine, modernist designers ignored the interconnected and nuanced requirements of the human habitat, and obfuscated our deeper connection to lived space.

In recent decades, as the challenges of global climate change and increasing urban populations have emerged, there has been significant backlash against the modernist approach to design. Spread-out cities with restrictive zoning lead to vastly increased carbon emissions in transportation, low-density development accommodates fewer residents per square mile, and sprawling cities threaten wildlife habitat and natural resources. And so the aim of “sustainable

development” has been to increase the efficiency of our cities through denser development, alternative transportation networks, and new building codes. But advocates for sustainable development, though they lament the physical results of modernist urban planning, still typically leave out the role of our *lived experience in space* in their understanding of what makes an area sustainable or resilient.

In this essay, I will claim that perceptually enriching experiences in urban space, which can be facilitated and encouraged by design, are essential to the ideal of urban sustainability. I will show how the way a space is designed communicates something to us about our identity as embodied beings within a broader perceptual field, and can therefore bring us into a more thoughtful and responsive relationship with our immediate environment. When we feel deeply connected to a place we are much more likely to care for it, revere it, and protect it. Urban design, as the scaffolding for the formation of these perceptual connections, can be a didactic force that supports an ecologically responsible relationship between people and place.

Viewed in this light, the design of sustainable spaces must be philosophically informed in order to bring users of the space into an *ecologically responsible* relationship with it. If we want to shape cities and neighborhoods that are thriving, that support vibrant human and ecological life, then we must shift our philosophical approach to urban design and better understand its experiential foundations, with their ethical, social, and ecological implications. In this essay, I will investigate the interaction of people and place to identify an ethical foundation for engaging, resilient urban form that responds in a deeper way to the shortcomings of the mechanistic modernist approach. By exploring the ways in which we engage with and find meaning in space, I will seek new ways to address questions of sustainability through design that speak to human experience, rather than efficiency metrics alone. Drawing on contemporary thinkers who respond to and augment the work of

famous french phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, I will construct what I will call a *phenomenological ethics for design* that seeks to re-orient our approach to design toward a rootedness in social, cultural, and ecological contexts. I will argue that such an ethics can serve as an important tool as we seek to build urban spaces that enrich, enhance, and energize human life across its' spectrum, and bring us into a closer and more accountable relationship with the natural world.

The Ethics of Perception

In his book, *Sense of Space*, David Morris takes up the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to show how our spatial experience is pre-determined by an openness to a world which exceeds us, and thus is defined by a kind of ethics. He begins by discussing a theme in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy: the concept of the body as the point from which all other spatial patterns and entities emerge and radiate out. The body, put differently, serves as the locus of our spatial perception and so it occupies a unique position in our understanding of depth. As Morris writes, "My body is the original 'here,' the origin from which here and there, near and far, exfoliate; my body appears to escape the depth orderings that apply to things around me, to belong to a different order" (Morris, 3).

But, Morris writes, the fact that the body serves as the origin of perceptual ordering means that it must actually be *part* of that same order. Here, our engagements with the things in world are made possible by the shared perceptual medium that we inhabit. Depth, as it resonates inside and outside of the body, spreads into both; the fluctuating of internal and external depth reflects our exchange within the world of experience. To illustrate this concept, Morris writes,

When I am just going about doing things, my watch, shoes, coat and so on, are neither here nor there in ordinary depth, they are incorporated into the extra-ordinary depth of my body. But I can doff my coat, slough the outer coating of my body's extra-ordinary depth into ordinary depth. Things are

incorporated into the extra-ordinary depth of the body, or the extra-ordinary depth of the body seeps outward into things...(4).

This concept brings us to an understanding of the body as a porous and flexible thing, rather than a sealed unit. The distinction between the body (or the self) and the outside world becomes expanded and malleable. And, importantly, space serves as the primary vehicle for our inherent intertwining with the world; if we are *always already* in space, then we are also always already part of the spatial universe and related to its many other inhabitants.

Following from this notion of the spatial body-world overlap, Morris outlines Merleau-Ponty's understanding of a pre-reflective meaning in movement. Movement, as the primary and primitive physical act of the body intertwining with the world, carries in it a meaning without concept, an original *sens* that then becomes translated into thought, speech, etc., through the process of expression. This *sens*, then, is the initial internal manifestation of our interweaving with the world. It is the first taste of the reversibility of experience. Morris writes that the *sens* of space is, "an 'I think' tacitly exists before it comes to explicitly reflect upon itself, and thus root[s] thought in corporeal soil" (82). Imagine, for example, that you are walking through an open field: the sun warms your shoulders, the grass swishes against your shins as as you part it with your stride, and the soft hum of insects hangs in the air. Before you can dwell on the species of the insects, on the distance to other side of the meadow, or on how pleasant the sun feels on your shoulders, you are engaged with this spatial sphere on a more fundamental level--you are infused with a *sens* of that space. From this initial sensuous intertwining you can begin to parse the many elements of the space--to form patterns, to ask questions, and to express. So, *Sens* is a spatial manifestation; it is formed as our body crosses with the world through movement. We are always already in space, always already crossing with the world, and always already forming a pre-reflective *sens* of that world. So, we see that meaning, in its

freshest form, emerges from our immanence in and movement through the physical world--space, here, is a realm always already infused with relational meaning.

Morris brings this understanding of Merleau-Ponty's thought to bear on an ethical construction of space. He writes that the ethical dimension emerges in our interactions with others and with the world beyond ourselves, *through* our movement in space. As we move through the physical world, we come in contact with things outside ourselves and through these encounters we begin to make the simplest of ethical choices (ie. do we face others, or turn away?). These choices are made possible because of the space, both physical and perceptual, that we share with the other. And, as we have discussed, we find ourselves *always already* engaged in relation to the other in space. Our *sens* of space is infused with meaning before we think, act, or make choices. If the ethical dimension encompasses the ways in which we overlap with the other and the world beyond ourselves, then space is not only a host for the ethical but is itself a necessarily and inherently ethical sphere.

In Morris' view, our sense of space is a sense of lived motion wherein we find ourselves overlapping with our material environment and with each-other. As the pre-reflective meaning in movement colors our interactions with the entities and spaces around us, we discover that we are already engaged in an ethical orientation to the other. Our ethical relation, then, is characterized by openness to the other *through* an openness to our material environment. As Morris puts it, "The ethical relation is textured as a double openness: it is an openness to the other through an openness to movement, place, the social, nature" (176). Put differently, we encounter the ethical entities in our life *through* a space that is already infused with meaning. So, we see that spaces shape our relation to the other, and shape our lived experience. It follows, then, that how a space is constructed and designed conditions the relationship we have with it, and the other within it. This places a new ethical

responsibility in the hands the designer, who can no longer imagine that she is free from social, cultural, or environmental context, and must instead recognize that the choices she makes will impact the people and place she designs for. Specifically, an understanding of our inherent spatio-ethical intertwining with the world presents designers with a new challenge: to create spaces that foster and support positive and productive perceptual relationships between people and place.

Spaces, as we have seen, are always infused with meaning, meaning we engage with and participate in when we enter that space. Buildings and outdoor spaces, in this view, should not only be functional in the sense of serving a specific social or economic purpose, but they should also host positive perceptual meaning-making. To create such spaces, designers must approach projects with a mindfulness of the reversibility of experience and the deep spatial *sens* through which our meanings in the world are made.

Implications for Nature

Contemporary philosopher and travel writer David Abram has also interpreted Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, this time as the foundation for an ethical relationship between humanity and our environment. What distinguishes Merleau-Ponty from other philosophers, and even other phenomenologists, he writes, is the identification of, "the body, itself, as the conscious subject of experience" (Abram, 3). Put differently, Merleau-Ponty describes consciousness as something inherently physiological, a process made manifest through our physical embedded-ness in the world. Releasing the notion of a transcendent immaterial soul, Abram claims, is the quality of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy that leads to a deep valuation of the lived, physical world--the environment that surrounds us. In his view, the placement of the thinking and feeling soul *within* the physical realm

must require careful attention to the whole of the living Earth, and even reverence for it. With the release of the transcendent soul, we are not left with only the biological stuff of firing neurons and connective tissue, we are able, instead, to discover a new kind of spiritual self--a soul rooted in our immersion in the sensuous, embodied universe. Whether or not Merleau-Ponty himself intended to support an environmentalist agenda, we can examine the ways in which his phenomenology resonates with and supports our need to be close to and care for the natural world. As Abram writes in his article, "Merleau Ponty and the Voice of the Earth:"

Our civilized distrust of the senses and of the body engenders a metaphysical detachment from the sensible world--it fosters the illusion that we ourselves are not part of the world that we study, that we can objectively stand apart from that world, as spectators, and can thus determine its workings from outside. A renewed attentiveness to bodily experience, however, enables us to recognize and affirm our inevitable involvement in that which we observe, our corporeal immersion in the depths of a breathing Body much larger than our own (4).

Here, Abram makes the case for a shift in perspective in human investigations, one that always begins from *within* the material world, and therefore requires a more subtle and thoughtful understanding of the connections we have with the things we study or attempt to change. In other words, as we plan and shape our communities, we must consider the impacts our choices have on the rest of the biosphere, and in turn, consider how this environment impacts *us*. In this view, we can no longer assume that human development, be it intellectual, social, or cultural, stands outside of the rest of the biological world and its forces. Indeed, if we are one part of a deeply interwoven physical world, the very world from which meaning emerges through the reversibility of experience and our *sens* of space, then we are faced with much more nuanced ethical dilemmas as we engage in the fields of science, art, and community development.

In "Merleau-Ponty and the Voice of the Earth" David Abram claims that phenomenology, as it appears in Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*, can inform modern practices of ecology and

management, orienting them toward engagement with and protection of the environment. Like Morris, David Abram explores depth as an essential element of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, and uses it to address the ethical nature of our spatial intertwining with the world. But Abram approaches this ethical relation through an environmental lens, considering the implications of the *flesh* (Merleau-Ponty's term for the sinuous and interactive medium of experience) for our connection to, and responsibility toward, the natural world. He writes, "Depth, which we cannot consider to be merely one perceptual phenomenon among others, since it is that which *engenders* perception, is the announcement of our immersion in a world that not only preexists our vision but prolongs itself beyond our vision, behind that curved horizon" (4). Abram dwells on Merleau-Ponty's ideas of depth and horizon, claiming that both concepts lead to an understanding of the Earth as a complete, enclosed organism, with the atmosphere as the "fluid membrane within which all of our perceiving takes place." The body, here, is understood as a perceiving agent in a world of agents, through which we can experience ourselves as enveloped in an interactive, animate universe. And, as we have discussed, the placement of perception *in-between* ourselves and the world--a phenomena of spatial entanglement--leads to a new valuation of lived space and its innumerable inhabitants.

Recent investigations into the development of human hearing have shown that our ability to hear may have developed in direct response to bird song; the presence of singing birds often signals the presence of water, and a suitable human habitat, so those who could hear and follow the cry of birds could find a good place to live. We heard the song of birds before we spoke with human voices; we listened to the music of the more-than-human world before we made any of our own. This is perhaps one of the countless ways that our interactions with and dependence upon the other beings and bodies of the spatial world help us form meanings, find patterns, and begin to express these in

various ways. David Abram uses a study of language to illustrate how human expression emerges from engagement with a rhythmic, living universe. Abram writes, "...language has its real genesis not inside the human physiology but, with perception, in the depth--the play between the expressive, sensing body and the expressive physiognomies and geographies of a living world" (15). In this light, expression can be seen as the process of making the world into ourselves, and ourselves into the world. Expression, then, is a node formed at the confluence of the individual and the greater living world. Human expression, including language, art, and design, is indebted to the contributions of other expressive beings in the flesh--it is shaped by the voices, rhythms, and textures of the biological universe. Abram argues that because expression emerges from this oscillation between the self and the world, to assume that it serves only human needs, and to use it as such, is ignorant and even dangerous. He writes:

As long as humankind continues to use language strictly for our own ends, as if it belongs to our species alone, we will continue to find ourselves estranged from our actions. If as Merleau-Ponty's work indicates it is not merely this body but the whole visible, sensual world that is the deep flesh of language, then surely our very words will continue to tie our selves, our families, and our nations into knots until we free our voice to return to the real world that supports it (17).

So, what would it mean to shape expressive forms that respond to and recognize the natural world as a contributor and supporter? Abram gives us some clues in his book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*. In this book, Abram writes about the difference between technological forms and natural forms in their ability to stimulate and respond to our senses. The natural world is ever-shifting; in cycles of life, death, and re-birth it re-creates itself in millions of nuanced manifestations that hold common threads but always contain bits of random variation, mutation, and subtlety. It is a world perpetually recalling and echoing itself, turning itself over anew, its bits and pieces shifting in response to each other. Natural forms, then, are inherently responsive and stimulating--they have

evolved, ourselves among them, in a kindred nexus of vibrating calls, the ever-shifting volume of the flesh.

By contrast, Abram writes, human-developed technologies are typically designed to serve a specific function and to do so effectively and predictably. Especially with the advent of mass production, our technologies and artifacts do not have the same kind of variable stimulating power past the limits of their designed function. Though these objects, like any in the material world, actively shape our lived experience, they do not open us as readily to the give-and-take of sensory development. We are left, then, always seeking *more* stuff to fill the gap--always craving the immersive and imaginative satiation that comes naturally in the nuanced forms of the living landscape. Abram writes,

The superstraight lines and right angles of our office architecture, for instance, make our animal senses wither even as they support the abstract intellect; the wild, earth-born nature of the materials--the woods, clays, metals, and stones that went into the building--are readily forgotten behind the abstract and calculable form (64).

Abram laments the form that modern human artifacts commonly take--that of straight lines and predictable patterns. His contrast lies between technological entities, which are mass produced, made in regular and predictable patterns, and do not excite the senses, and organic entities--natural forms that are unique, subtly varied, curvilinear, and *do* engage the senses. I would argue, however, that this distinction is not the most useful one we could make to address the problem of an uninspiring and sensorially distancing modern design aesthetic. Mass production and simplicity are necessary and inescapable elements of a world with more than seven billion people, many of whom will not be fashioning their own household items and domiciles out of found natural materials. However, if the objects and structures in our lives are designed from a perspective of perceptual mindfulness, designed to make clear our connection to and dependence upon our living environment,

they could come closer to serving the stimulating and connecting function of Abram's "organic entities."

What I see to be at the root of Abram's contrast between technological and organic entities is really a difference between design from *without* and design from *within*. Design from without is rooted in the notion that people are separate from place, and that intelligence is separate from corporeal sensation. Design from without disregards its source and context, and in doing so, fails on an important level. It lacks the vital nuances of the human habitat--details that *invite* us into a space, that echo the subtle and stimulating imperfections of the more-than-human world--leaving us unfulfilled. Design from within can be seen as mindful, imaginative, sense-inspiring, and created in context. Design from within draws out and intensifies our connection to the spatial world, concentrating an element of sensory experience and inviting curiosity. It aims to *show* us our connection to the more-than-human world and bring us into more explicit conversation with it. Most importantly, design from within is exactly that--it emerges lucidly from our unique perspective *within* a larger perceptual field, one that is vaster and more intricate than we could ever understand.

Both Morris and Abram give us readings of Merleau-Ponty that take the notion of the flesh and our reciprocal intertwining with the world and translate it into an ethics that calls us to consider our inherent spatial and imaginative influence on and from this world. Design should be approached from *within* the context of the sensuous world, it should seek to utilize the reversibility of experience to help us connect with and feel at home in built space. In this view, the artificiality of the human/non-human divide becomes clear, and *good* design is that which recognizes its expressive source in the many folds and sinews of the living flesh--serves the needs of people *and* their habitat.

Immersive Experiences in Architecture and Urban Space

Both of the above authors offer an ethical perspective on Merleau-Ponty. David Morris helped us understand how space is an ethical dimension, and David Abram explored our sensual immersion in a perceptual field. From these perspectives we can see how our pre-reflective embeddedness in space and in our natural environment leads to a kind of ethics, but still we need to understand how such an ethics could work for community design and architecture in particular. In the last section of this essay I will discuss the work of Arnold Berleant and architect Steven Holl along side concepts from Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible* to explore a phenomenological ethics for built space.

In his essay, "Aesthetic Perception in Environmental Design" Arnold Berleant writes about the difference between monumental and participatory spaces, the former adhering to classical notions of aesthetics, the latter centered around a phenomenological approach that seeks to put the subject in a dialectic relationship with the space. Berleant speaks of these two kinds of spaces in terms of the vast and the intimate--monumental spaces holding us a distance while participatory spaces fold us in. Monumental spaces are those that are designed to be *seen*, to be experienced from without and admired from afar. Such spaces are grand, symmetrical, geometrically balanced, and do not typically incorporate reference to the landscape around them. Participatory spaces, on the other hand, *invite* people to explore and experience the space--to become part of it. These spaces are not designed solely based on visual experience, as monumental or panoramic spaces typically are, but consider many elements of sensory experience. Berleant writes,

The participatory landscape does not exert an appeal that is exclusively visual; it draws on kinesthetic responses, the apprehension of the body of mass, of texture, and of the various sense qualities that constitute the perceptual experience of the spatial environment. Movement in time are essential components of such experience (89).

So we can see how participatory spaces are designed to resonate in multiple dimensions of the physical world, enriching and acknowledging the nodes of meaning made as we move through the world of the flesh. Such spaces bring us closer to our habitat--help us know it and appreciate it in a deeper way.

Berleant and others also discuss the *process* of design as phenomenological: mirroring the perpetual process of overlapping experience, the architectural process can be seen as a participatory, responsive movement that incorporates community input and takes shape in response to the landscape. In this view, a project is never quite finished--it is always *taking shape* as the people (human and non-human) that inhabit it use and influence the space. This idea posits design as a participatory process-- not the formulation of a commodity to be planned, built, and walked away from. We can understand this conception as an extrapolation of the reversibility of experience--with the participants in a project (say, the designer and the community she designs for, or the humans and animals that use and inhabit a park) interweave and overlap to create something that belongs fully to neither, that occurs *in-between*.

In the book *Questions of Perception*, Steven Holl and his co-authors explore the ways in which built space is experienced through the senses. In a highly abstract and imagery-laden text, they illustrate a kind of synesthesia that occurs as we experience built spaces--sight overlapping with sound, taste, touch, smell to produce a whole experience that is richer and deeper than the sum of its parts. Each of our senses marks and informs the others, creating a multi-faceted experience of the flesh of a place. Holl writes, "Anyone who has become entranced by the sound of water drops in the darkness of a ruin can attest to the extraordinary capacity of the ear to carve a volume into the void of darkness. The space traced by the ear becomes a cavity sculpted in the interior of the mind" (Holl,

30). Here, we can see how the overlapping of sound, visual imagination, and volume create a synesthetic experience of space that draws perception beyond a single sense, or even a single perceiver. In this context, Merleau-Ponty's concept of the flesh is perforated in many layers, the visible and the tangible coiling upon each-other as they coil in on themselves.

Holl writes that buildings, when they are designed for visual experience alone, lose the element of tactile plasticity that ushers us into a deeper and more nuanced relationship with the space and helps us intuit a palpable connection with it. When designers create spaces that leave out "details crafted for the human body and hand" they fail to employ the sensuous and synesthetic logic that makes explicit our experience in the flesh. We could say that such spaces, designed from *without*, are thus rendered somehow flat and isolated. It is the kinesthetic empathy that thoughtful, responsive forms provoke that invites our physical curiosity and triggers our sensorial imagination. Holl's work complicates that of Berleant, suggesting that a distinction need not be made between *participatory* and *monumental*, necessarily, because the question is actually not one of scale but of sensory habitation. A space could be very large (monumentally large, even) but if it contains the details required for sensuous human habitat, then it could indeed be participatory as well. The subtle complexity of natural materials, the play of shadow that softens and deepens homogenous light--these details bring us into a space, help us find connective meanings within it.

Architecture plays a mediating role in our sensuous experience of the material world, and as such, the authors insinuate, should acknowledge and be informed by the realm of sensory perception:

In memorable experiences of architecture, space matter and time fuse into one single dimension, into the basic substance of being, that penetrates the consciousness. We identify ourselves with this space, this place, this moment and these dimensions as they become ingredients of our very existence. Architecture is the art of mediation and reconciliation (38).

Here, we see that buildings are never experienced merely in the visual plane, but are *inhabited* by our every breath, step, and brush of the hand such that they become incorporated into our spatial and temporal identities. Built space, in this way, helps us recognize who we are, and the kind of reality we inhabit. The spaces we dwell within carve the contours of our identities such that we become inseparable from place--from the shifting and intuitive flesh of our spatial experience.

Constructing a Phenomenological Ethics for Urban Design

The authors we have discussed all present us with something valuable for designing spaces that facilitate positive and enriching meaning-making. Berleant makes a useful distinction between spaces that hold us at a distance and space that invite us to engage with them through beckoning form and sensory engagement. He also gave us the notion that the *process* of design could be phenomenological; as people engage with the space it is ever-becoming. David Abram spoke to the subtlety and enticement of natural forms, showing how certain objects and spaces stimulate the senses and resonate with our breathing bodies, giving us something new each time we engage with them, bringing us into a more aware relationship with the sensed world we inhabit. And Steven Holl showed us how the senses overlap in our experience of space, deepening our sense of place and adding dimension to it. He also wrote of the need for “details of the human habitat,” and the kinesthetic empathy that beckoning forms and natural materials provoke. Holl’s ultimate claim was that the experience of space shapes our very identity. As we engage with space through the reversibility of experience *who we are* becomes a product of our meeting the space and it meeting us; our identities are always re-forming as loops of perception oscillate between our bodies and the world.

All of these concepts illustrate how our experience of space can be enriched and enhanced by a phenomenological approach. In this view, we want to design spaces that beckon us into them, that make us aware of our engagement with them, that frame our relationship to the sensed world in a new way, and that help us create positive identities within them. These elements of phenomenological design, because they make us more aware of our pre-reflective engagement with and dependence upon the material world, could help us care for it more, provoke curiosity and playfulness in space, and ultimately allow us to lead more enriching and meaningful lives.

But who will have the benefit of engaging with these mindfully-designed spaces? All of our authors essentially theorize for the affluent. It is the wealthiest people who typically get access to well-designed, engaging places that stimulate the senses, while large swaths of the population, in this country and around the world, are sitting in fluorescent-lit, homogenous office buildings and living between rows of indomitable flat-faced concrete walls. But, in the worldview we have constructed it is not only the affluent who engage with space, everyone does. We participate in meaning-making in all spaces, good and bad, shaping identities through the reversibility of experience. The identities we form are dependent on the spaces we interact with; if we encounter a monumental glass skyscraper, a park with winding paths, a clapboard shack, a University campus, or a grey-walled cubicle, all of these shape our identities differently, giving us back unique meanings through the reciprocal process of perception. The ethical dilemma, here, is to create spaces that are inspiring and enriching, that shape identities of belonging and sensory richness for all kinds of people, not just the wealthy. In fact, we can see phenomenological design as a tool for connective empowerment, to help people in the most disconnected and uninspiring circumstances engage with space in a deeply resonate way--to shape a sense of belonging in place, a sensorily embedded identity, a *perceptual efficacy*.

So, moving forward, I propose three major elements of phenomenologically ethical design:

1. Design that *invites*: This element of our design ethic encompasses the need for details of the human habitat, beckoning forms, and internally-nuanced natural materials. Design that invites brings us into a more explicit relationship with our senses, asks us to participate in space, provokes curiosity and playfulness. It takes an element of experience and concentrates or alters it such that we become newly aware of our pre-reflective engagement with the material world. Design that invites is design for spaces and living identities that are always-becoming-- each continually birthed anew by the perceptual interplay between the space itself and those who dwell within it.
2. Design from *within*: Design from within, as we have discussed, occurs consciously within ecological, social, and cultural contexts. Approaching design from our embedded position *within* a perceptual universe forces us to consider the horizons that are always concealed from us, the facets of the perceptual universe that are always beyond our grasp. Design from within recognizes the unknowable, and mindfully addresses our interweaving with the rest of the natural world. In many ways, design from within can be seen as a design of humility--a recognition of the placement of humanity within a larger and inter-dependent world of experience.
3. Design that *empowers*: The last element of our phenomenological design ethic emphasizes the role of design in shaping identities and encouraging (or inhibiting) perceptual efficacy. Design that empowers changes our relationship to space by making us newly aware of our role as participant in meaning-making. It empowers people to engage in rich, multi-sensory identity-creation in common and useful spaces. This aspect of our design ethic entices users of a practical space to consider anew their place within a wider socio-ecological webwork, forming a new and exciting strand of connection between themselves and the breathing world they inhabit. In this way, design that

empowers uses a platform of utility to open the door for a deeper sense of belonging, inspiration, and accountability in place.

These three aspects of our design ethic: design from *within*, design that *invites*, and design that *empowers*, can be understood as overlapping spheres--inseparable and inter-related dimensions engendered by a phenomenological approach to design. The oscillations between body and world, self and other, humility and empowerment, are reflected in all three dimensions, each bringing forth a unique manifestation of these perceptual interplays. Projects that embody our three principles tend to the practical needs of city-dwellers while opening new and immersive spheres in the urban fabric. They reveal to us, in fresh and explicit ways, our reciprocal relationship with the material world, and our deep embeddedness in the flesh of experience. They foster connections between people, place, and nature and provide the sensory impetus for rich imagination. From urban bicycle greenways in Copenhagen, to participatory solutions to slum housing in Chile, to ecologically re-imagined railways in New York, these projects are emerging in cities all over the world as designers and community members seek to re-define urban areas as human habitats rather than simple conduits for automobiles and abstract economic gains. By revealing our role as co-creators in the ever-becoming world of the flesh, phenomenologically ethical spaces facilitate the development of profound *perceptual efficacy* and allow for truly rich, engaging experiences in space.

This essay has aimed to illustrate the ways in which our lived experience of space shapes our understanding of ourselves and our relationship to the world around us. In this view, it is not enough for efforts in sustainability to seek efficiency, lower carbon emissions, or revolutionary energy technology. In order to re-orient the values that influence our treatment of the environment, we need a tacit and rooted understanding of our accountability to place, to the breathing life-world that supports

and defines us. This understanding springs from sensory immersion in place, and from the realization that we are always already in reciprocal exchange with the world we inhabit. If design, as the shaping of the human habitat, is the process of finding ourselves in the world and the world in ourselves, then it can inform us of our pre-reflective engagement with the world. Insofar as we are defined by our relations to the world we live in, design can bring us closer to ourselves by acquainting us with the diverse possibilities our habitat. In this way, the discovery of difference can become an engine of connection in phenomenologically ethical design. Like a single shade of cobalt speaks to a spectrum of blues through a relation of difference, we can turn to face the breathing biosphere in its manifold by discovering our distinctness from it. Design from *within*, design that *invites* and *empowers*, seeks to reveal and celebrate our role as a strand woven into the multi-faceted fabric of the living world.

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