

A phenomenological framework for describing architectural experience¹

Christopher Tweed
School of Architecture
The Queen's University of Belfast
2 Lennoxvale
Belfast BT9 5BY

Tel. +44 28 9027 4522
Fax. +44 28 9068 2475
Email c.tweed@qub.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

Rasmussen's *Experiencing Architecture*, first published in 1962, remains the essential introduction for students of architecture. It launches the trajectory along which the interested novice acquires the specifically architectural patterns of thought and language that enable him or her to analyse extant and formulate new designs. Such accounts of architectural experience direct our attention to those properties of the built environment that are deemed to be important to the continuation of the architectural tradition. Architectural discourse, therefore, revolves around a set of pre-given topics that privileges some properties of the built environment over others. At this rarefied level of debate, theoreticians and practitioners seldom consider general concerns about the contribution architecture, as a cultural practice, makes to society and the experiences it offers the lay public. To address these issues requires that we discard preconceived ideas about architectural value and examine our everyday interactions with buildings and account for the differing perceptions of architecture that coexist within our broader culture. The phenomenological tradition suggests ways in which we might pursue this goal.

Steinbock's reworking of three overlapping themes or dimensions in Husserlian phenomenology—static, genetic and generative—provides a useful framework within which to explore the constitution of architectural sense and meaning. Static analyses allow us to address ontological issues about the built environment and our interactions with it. In this endeavour, our understanding is considerably enriched by those who have developed central ideas in Husserl's thought: Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the lived-body as the locus of intentionality; and phenomenologists with a particular interest in architecture, such as Bachelard, Bollnow and Casey. The genetic dimension allows us to examine individuals' development of an architectural perspective, mainly through experience and education. Finally, generative phenomenology broadens the inquiry by directing our focus to processes of critique and renewal which are central to an evolving architectural tradition.

Introduction

A recurrent criticism of contemporary architecture is that it ignores the needs of its users, whether they are clients, occupants or (in the broadest sense) casual passers-by. Since 1984, when the Prince of Wales' delivered his now infamous speech, in which he described one of the proposals for extending the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square as a 'monstrous carbuncle on the face of an old friend,'² the standing of the architectural profession has spiralled to new lows, at least in the way it is represented in the media and, quite possibly, in the eyes of the general public. The most recent public broadside was delivered earlier this year by Ron German, the president of Stanhope plc, one of Britain's leading property development companies, who

¹ Paper presented at the "Phenomenology and Culture" conference, University College Cork, Ireland, July 2000.

² Speech delivered on the 150th anniversary of the Royal Institute of British Architects, Royal Gala Evening at Hampton Court Palace, May 30, 1984. Transcript available from <http://www.princeofwales.gov.uk>

predicted the demise of the profession within the next 15 years. He is quoted as saying: “Making things special may be important to architects, but it does not make much difference to occupiers.”³ German’s motivation, along with many others, is to reduce the costs of design and construction, which he believes can be achieved through advances in standardisation and system-building techniques. His vision is of a built environment consisting of standard ‘sheds’ in which architects have little or no involvement. It seems pertinent to ask what architecture does for us, what is its value, what are its contributions to our culture, and to ask if “making things special” matters to anyone other than architects. To answer these questions we need to know how different people experience the built environment. In this paper, therefore, I summarise previous attempts to describe architectural experience and their shortcomings, before setting out a framework for a more comprehensive enquiry. The framework is based on Anthony Steinbock’s elaboration of the Husserlian dimensions of static, genetic and generative investigations, which can help us to develop accounts of architectural experience that are more comprehensive than previous efforts. Most importantly, such a framework promises to establish connections between the relatively narrow studies of architectural perception and broader cultural issues. However, before we examine the contribution that phenomenology can make to describing architectural experience, the paper begins by summarising some general directions in architectural theory.

Architectural theory

The starting point for architectural theory is found in Vitruvius’ three requirements for architecture—*utilitas*, *firmitas* and *venustas*—later translated by Sir Henry Wootton as, commodity, firmness and delight. Today, these same categories are used to identify the functional, technical and aesthetic aspects of building which, in turn, have become directions for carving up the responsibilities, not to mention the fees, in the modern construction project. With the increasing complexity of modern construction, and the proliferation of new building types, it is debatable whether architects can simultaneously address the range of problems which are buried under these innocuous headings. Although architecture only became professionalised around the time of the Great Exhibition in London, in the early 19th century, the profession’s undiluted control of building projects has been relatively short-lived. By the middle of the 20th century the design and construction team had been enlarged to include new specialists: building services engineers, quantity surveyors and, most recently, project managers, who have rather ingeniously manoeuvred themselves into the position of mediator between architects and their clients.

With diminishing responsibility for the final outcome of many construction projects, it is perhaps not surprising that much of the architectural theorising of the 20th century has been concerned to differentiate architecture from something else, especially mere building, and thereafter to show that architecture is a much superior product. This preoccupation with the differences between architecture and building is confronted in the opening paragraphs of Pevsner’s *An Outline of European Architecture*, in which he claims: “A bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture. Nearly everything that encloses space on a scale sufficient for a human being to move in is a building: the term architecture applies only to buildings designed with a view to aesthetic appeal.”⁴

Pevsner’s is only one of many, often conflicting, attempts to illuminate this demarcation. Among architects, the appellation ‘architecture’ is an honorific term which demands protection and is devalued when associated with buildings that do not satisfy a given set of criteria. A further

³ Reported in Jonathan Glancey’s article, “Do architects have a future?,” in the G2 section of *The Guardian* newspaper on 26 June, 2000, Guardian Newspapers, London, pp.10-11.

⁴ Pevsner, N., *An Outline of European Architecture*, Pelican Books, Middlesex, seventh edition, 1963, p.15.

value category, popular among architectural teachers, is whether a design is architecture with a capital 'A.' As Rowe notes, architectural theories are usually censorious and acerbic in their attacks on other extant theories (Rowe, 1987, 115).⁵ Very often they seek to redefine what "proper" architecture is, as opposed to what it was previously considered to be. In doing so, they seek to fix normative positions that will not only enable us to recognise true architecture, but will guide future design too. These design prescriptions vary in their specificity; from vague, cryptic aphorisms, such as "form follows function," through to Le Corbusier's five points towards a new architecture which identified supports, roof gardens, free design of the ground plane, horizontal windows, and free design of the façade as being the necessary ingredients of "proper" architecture.⁶ For Bruno Zevi, the Italian theorist, architecture is the art of space.⁷ And there are many more, ranging in their tenor from manifestos to attempts to define 'neutral' taxonomies of architectural concepts or building elements. For the most part these theories are abstractions, removed from the concerns of everyday life and from the architecturally naive. Few are interested in the direct experience of buildings. Their main concern has been to guide the future course of the tradition in ways that appeal to the architectural community, rather than to the general public. Thus we find, in spite of the Functionalists' declared aim of providing buildings that responded to people's true needs, the architecture that emerged from this theoretical stance often *looked* more functional than it ever was, which was usually enough to satisfy examination by the commentators of the time. It was only later that many came to recognise that the architectural understanding of function in relation to various human needs was narrow.⁸

Experiencing architecture

Steen Eiler Rasmussen's book, *Experiencing Architecture*, first published in 1962, remains the essential introduction for many fledgling students of architecture.⁹ It launches a trajectory along which the interested novice acquires the specifically architectural patterns of thought and language that enable her to analyse existing and generate new designs. During her education, a student architect can expect to encounter a range of normative positions which seek to define the essentials of architecture and architectural experience. Thus, in Rasmussen, we find detailed treatments of solids and cavities, scale and proportion, colour planes, textural effects, and rhythm singled out as primary elements. Rasmussen's concern, however, is to get beyond what is immediately apprehended in experience to enrich our experience through an understanding of the formal qualities of architecture. His focus, therefore, is directed as much towards intellectual pleasures, which are the reward of an informed attitude, as the immediate sensuous pleasures of experience. Hence, the text is replete with concepts and ideas which are intended to stock the intellectual armoury of the student, so that she is equipped with what is needed to fully appreciate architecture.

Rasmussen's premise is that to recognise and enjoy good architecture it is necessary to have specialised knowledge. As is often assumed with art, it seems we need to learn how to appreciate a good building. This view is shared by others. Norberg-Schulz, for example, advocates the teaching of architectural appreciation in primary schools, insisting that if architects want to gain greater recognition for their achievements, it is essential that the general public be made more

⁵ Rowe, P.G., *Design Thinking*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1987, p.115.

⁶ Le Corbusier and Jeanneret, P., "Five Points Towards a New Architecture," *Almanach de l'Architecture Moderne*, Paris, 1926.

⁷ Zevi, B. and Barry, J.A. (eds.), *Architecture as Space: How to Look at Architecture*, trans. from the Italian by Milton Gendel, Da Capo Press, 1993.

⁸ One of the severest critics of functionalism, Victor Papanek, could not see how anyone could enjoy eating a meal served on a table which looked as though it had come straight out of the operating theatre. See Papanek, V., *Design for the Real World*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2nd edition, 1985.

⁹ Rasmussen, S.E., *Experiencing Architecture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., Second US edition, 1962.

aware of the issues which architecture addresses. Norberg-Schulz, however, is critical of Rasmussen's confounding of a theory of architecture with a theory of architectural experience. Instead, he argues that the two should remain separate, partly because theories about how to experience buildings invariably prescribe directions about how to approach, where to stand and which path to take through a building. But perhaps more importantly, he argues that theories about how to experience architecture, Rasmussen's in particular, fail to take account of the symbolic content of architecture, the meanings which architecture conveys to different people.¹⁰

Many architectural theories, therefore, direct our attention to those properties of the built environment that are deemed to be important to the appreciation of architecture. In this way, architectural theory privileges the objects which thereafter define the scope of future discourse. At one level, debate will focus on space, form or mass and at others, on elements such as windows, doors, floors and roofs. Behind all of these accounts is an implied, Cartesian subject actively seeking to extract meaning from his experiences—paying attention—and in doing so experiencing architecture in much the same way as those belonging to the architectural community. So, there is a tendency among many, but not all, architects to disregard the impact which architecture has on the uninitiated, which is an arrogance that is often attributed to the profession. The flip side of the coin is that there are architects who diligently solicit and design for the needs of their clients, but often produce bland, uninspired architecture.¹¹ Is there a way we can have both: an architecture that is responsive to human needs, including the needs for aesthetic and intellectual stimulation? Papanek suggests there is by including aesthetic pleasure within the definition of function. Not only should a designed artefact satisfy the practical needs of its intended users but it should also convey the appropriate symbolic and aesthetic meanings. This is much easier to imagine than to practice. For example, whilst we may agree that (to use Papanek's example) a dining table should not normally look like a hospital operating table or a workbench, we may find it harder to agree on what properties of a table invite its users to dine off it. And are these meanings not likely to differ across individuals and cultures and, even for the same person or group, evolving? To address these issues requires that we discard preconceived ideas about architectural value and examine our everyday interactions with buildings and account for the differing perceptions of architecture that coexist within our broader culture. The phenomenological tradition suggests ways in which we might pursue this goal.

Phenomenology and architecture

Some of the most detailed descriptions of our experiences in and around buildings are found in the writings of 20th century phenomenologists. The most celebrated of these are Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* and Heidegger's essays "Building Dwelling Thinking," "...Poetically Man Dwells..." and "The Origin of the Work of Art." Otto Friedrich Bollnow has also addressed experience of the built environment, but his appropriation by the architectural community in English-speaking countries has been hampered by the fact that there is no English translation of his major work, *Mensch und Raum*. Architectural theorists have drawn heavily on these—and to a lesser extent on Husserl and Merleau-Ponty—to develop theories with closer links between buildings and their experiencing subjects. Elaboration of these themes continues in the work of living phenomenologists such as Edward Casey, David Seamon and Robert Mugerauer.

Of all the phenomenologists, Heidegger has exerted the greatest influence on architects because of his explicit writings on building and dwelling. So, Norberg-Schulz in his later work abandons his 'scientific' approach in favour of a more poetic stance, emphasising the importance of

¹⁰ See Norberg-Schulz, C., *Intentions in Architecture*, Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1963, pp.195-196.

¹¹ Sadly, it is entirely possible to create architecture which is bland and uninspiring as well as being oblivious to the needs of its users.

place—as opposed to homogeneous, Euclidean space—through the concept of *genius loci*. But perhaps Heidegger's main role has been to elevate the role of dwelling, as a mode of being. Although Heidegger did not limit his discussion of dwelling to its common-sense connection with housing, much of the resulting architectural theory based on his thinking addresses architectural experience of houses and home. In phenomenologically influenced writing about architecture there has been a preoccupation with the meanings and experiences of the home.

Because philosophers are outside the immediate community of architectural practitioners and educators, we should expect phenomenological descriptions of human encounters with the built environment to be architecturally indifferent, to favour no one style of architecture over another. Descriptions of experience in and around buildings, from philosophers, should be neutral. This is not true for the later Heidegger, who clearly leans towards, what is called in architectural debate, the vernacular approach. As Christopher Macann suggests, Heidegger, rather ironically, and particularly in his writings about art and architecture, expounds what he most despised, a *Weltanschauung*.¹² This is also obvious in his discussions about technology. Don Ihde suggests that Heidegger's inequitable accounts of an old stone bridge, which is considered good, and a modern steel bridge (bad) show a clear leaning towards romantic idealism (at least as far as technology is concerned) that is difficult to justify consistently.¹³ It is not surprising, therefore, that Heidegger is often enlisted to further the cause of architects, and others, who seek a greater harmony between man and nature through the adoption of, or adherence to, vernacular architectural forms. This is often manifested as a nostalgia for past forms and simpler methods of construction, with the implication that a return to the past will alleviate many of the problems we suffer from now. But perhaps what alienates architects most is that Heidegger's settings for sensitive architecture are invariably rural, which makes discussions about isolated houses in the Black Forest seem irrelevant to problems of designing for contemporary cities. And much of what is recognised as good, or at least interesting, would seem to be excluded from Heidegger's description of architecture. One wonders what Heidegger would make of, for example, Frank Gehry's Guggenheim in Bilbao. Whether one likes or dislikes a particular building is in some sense irrelevant when we are primarily interested in the experiences it makes possible for different people. Much of the architectural theory derived from Heidegger's thought sounds too much like a set of prescriptions rather than descriptions of experience. Somewhere along the way, judgement about good and bad experiences have crept into the exposition, with the result that Heidegger's romanticism condemns buildings many in the architectural community would consider exemplary. So, whilst it may be impossible to construct neutral accounts of architectural experience, we should be able to stop well short of advocacy.

Merleau-Ponty's influence has been to emphasise the role of the body and kinaesthetics in our experiences of space, including architectural space. He reminds us that our everyday interaction with buildings is not as cerebral as many theorists would have us believe, and that there exists a level of bodily experience that is prior to our analysis of architecture. But even Merleau-Ponty's architecturally indifferent description of the perception of space implies a lived-body which is assumed to be healthy if not positively athletic. Though he chooses extreme cases of disability to advance his argument, these are always contrasted with an implied healthy exemplar. Once again possible experience is narrowed, in this case by assumptions about the type of bodies we might have.

¹² See Macann, C., *Four Phenomenological Philosophers: Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty*, Routledge, London, 1993, p.208.

¹³ See Ihde, D., *Postphenomenology: Essays in the Postmodern Context*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1993.

In summary, phenomenological treatments of architecture emphasise the house over other building types; they frequently propound particular architectural values rather than describing the phenomena associated with architecture and its practice; and they fail to account for the social realities of architectural practice. Recent developments in Husserlian phenomenology suggest ways in which these shortcomings might be addressed. But before discussing these, it will be useful to examine some other ways of describing human-environment relations, and how they might be applied to architectural experience.

Affordances and architecture

Any account of architectural experience must include a discussion on human perception. Gibson's ecological theory of visual perception introduces the notion of affordance which seems to offer a promising direction for investigating the functional aspects of buildings. Indeed, Gibson is critical of the fact that a theory of affordance is lacking from architecture: "...a glass wall affords seeing through but not walking through, whereas a cloth curtain affords going through but not seeing through. Architects and designers know such facts, but they lack a theory of affordances to encompass them in a system"¹⁴ In general terms, an affordance is what an environment offers an organism, for good or for ill. Thus, we can say that trees afford climbing for squirrels, but not for dogs. Architecturally, buildings can afford or furnish different experience for different people, depending on a range of factors which include their cultural background, their skills, their present purpose, and so forth. Affordances capture the interaction between people and their environments rather than presupposing objective functions for an environment.

Gibson provides little more than a sketch of what a theory of affordances might look like. More recently, Ingold has begun to flesh out Gibson's ideas in greater detail.¹⁵ The link between affordances and phenomenology can be found in a paper by Dreyfus which discusses the current relevance of Merleau-Ponty's thought to theories of embodiment.¹⁶ An affordance is seen as a culturally conditioned response to an artefact, such as a chair. Dreyfus argues that a chair affords sitting on because we have the kind of bodies that bend at the back of the knee and because sitting is a culturally defined norm in many, but not all, situations. The relations between anatomical possibilities of the human body and culturally sanctioned behaviour is complex. There are, for example, situations where it is not acceptable for individuals to sit. Furthermore, there are situations in which a person refuses an invitation to sit down because of the expected behaviour and power relations that follow. Nonetheless, the notion of affordance would seem to offer a useful starting point from which to consider what buildings can offer different users.¹⁷ In the context of this paper, an important question is: can we extend Gibson's notion of affordance to embrace all kinds of human experience and activities in buildings? Could we say that a building affords aesthetic pleasure? Could we, within the same breath, say a building affords energy conservation? How do we perceive affordance? What is that prioritises the recognition of some affordances over others? These are questions which we might expect phenomenology to provide answers to and, as argued here, suggest a return to Husserlian ideas about perception, normativity and intersubjectivity.

¹⁴ Gibson, J.J., *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1979, p.137.

¹⁵ Ingold, T., "Culture and the perception of the environment" in E. Croll and D. Parkin (eds.), *Bush Base: Forest Farm – Culture, Environment and Development*, Routledge, London, 1992, pp.39-56.

¹⁶ Dreyfus, H.L., "The Current Relevance of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Embodiment," *Electronic Journal of Analytic Philosophy*, University of Indiana, <http://www.phil.indiana.edu/ejap/1996.spring>, 1996, pp.8.

¹⁷ It is not possible to develop such a theory further in this paper as this is a major undertaking.

Home and beyond: a critique and renewal of Husserlian phenomenology

Husserl has been neglected by architects, possibly because of the perceived unsuitability of his work to the social world, which is clearly implicated in architectural practice. However, a central argument in this paper is that Husserlian phenomenology, particularly as developed by Anthony Steinbock, can provide a suitable framework with which to explore architectural phenomena in a much more complete sense than was previously recognised. The remainder of this paper, therefore, is concerned with showing how Steinbock's reworking of Husserlian themes can illuminate our understanding of architecture as a set of practices, as a community of heterogeneous individuals and as a culture.

In his recent book *Home and Beyond: generative phenomenology after Husserl*,¹⁸ Anthony Steinbock's principal aim is to challenge a criticism often directed at Husserl, which is that he, following Descartes, remained committed to a philosophical perspective that reduces structures of meaning and sense to a purely subjective foundation, to the so-called "transcendental ego." This is seen as the main reason why many, who have otherwise been heavily influenced by Husserl, have been reluctant to treat Husserl on his own in the context of social theory, because of the assumption that the foundational nature of Husserl's thought is ill disposed to deal with problems of socio-historical aspects of our lives. In particular, the problem of intersubjectivity, in Husserl, is considered as unresolved. Drawing on writings which span the entirety of Husserl's working life, Steinbock argues to the contrary that there is sufficient evidence, albeit distributed across many different sources, including substantial parts of *The Crisis*¹⁹ which have never been published, to show that Husserl had arrived at a position which is more than adequate to address problems of intersubjectivity and socio-historical becoming.

Steinbock focuses on three overlapping themes in Husserlian phenomenology: static, genetic and generative analyses. Although his ultimate goal is to treat generative problems he begins by showing first how static, and subsequently genetic, analyses exhaust their methods and thereby provide leading clues (or *Leitfaden*) to the development of new methods of investigation. Steinbock is keen to emphasise that although his exposition unfolds starting with static, followed by genetic and concludes with generative analyses, this should not be taken as the natural direction for phenomenological inquiry, and that the more likely direction will be the reverse, beginning with generative matters. In this way, the leap to a transcendental ego is, at the very least, postponed.

Static analyses take two forms: first, constitutional analyses that abstract from the dimension of temporality altogether, inquiring into modes of sense-formation and layers of validity; and second, structural analyses that investigate invariant types, or material and formal essences, through eidetic method. In this case the investigations are mundane because they are carried out in the natural attitude.

Taking architecture as our subject matter, a static analysis could begin with fundamental types of, for example, enclosure, boundary, form, doors, paths or even 'gathering' and then proceed to an abstract constitutional analysis which brackets temporality to investigate how these types are given to us in different perceptual variants. The meanings of 'objects', such as walls, roofs, etc., are not problematic at this stage; they are taken for granted as part of the natural attitude. Static

¹⁸ Steinbock, A.J., *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology after Husserl*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1995.

¹⁹ Husserl, E., *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. from the German by David Carr, Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1970.

analyses 'bracket' the subject's own history and development as an individual subjectivity. However, we soon realise that the constitution of these types is not exhausted by such an analysis, which points towards genetic matters, of the kind alluded to above, that lead to the development of an architectural attitude. The perception of space, as an example, implies a particular subjectivity which has a history, a genesis. Space perception of a child is remarkably different to that of a young adult, and different again for an elderly person. So, a "static" grasping of things misses the temporal dimensions of the thing given in experience, dimensions that are also relevant to this thing's sense and to its description.

By admitting temporality, the genetic dimension allows us to examine the constitution of sense and meaning through the development or genesis of individuals. Genetic analyses focus their attention on the passive synthesis of sense and meaning, through sedimentation, association, memory, etc. So, the meaning of my present experiences is to a large extent dependent on what I have previously experienced and my general disposition towards the world. As a result of past experiences things take on greater or lesser importance; they develop meanings; they appear in "affective relief" and thereby have more or less significance for individuals. It is only through our genesis that we learn to 'see' the objects around as objects, rather than as patches of colour.

Development of architectural ways of 'seeing' are described in another paper and will not be discussed in detail here.²⁰ The formation of a specifically architectural attitude draws on Hugh Silverman's synthesis of the structuralist account expounded by Piaget and the Sartrean life-project.²¹ The result is akin to the effect in painting called *pentimento* which describes how previous layers of paint 'print through' on to the surface of the most recent layers. This description of individual genesis offers a conceptual device with which, potentially, we can explain how architects develop from the earliest stages of childhood through architectural education to practice, and account for the choices they make along the way.

The final, least developed, dimension is the generative one, which brings into play not only the personal histories of individuals but the generation of the lifeworld across generations and within communities. Generative methods work across communities of individuals and include not only the development of individual psychologies but the historical development of traditions and cultures. Generative methods, as you might expect, have a close affinity with anthropology.

Generative, in this context, has two related meanings. First, it refers to the generation of norms, values, systems of belief; and second, it refers to generations of individuals and the enduring sense of tradition and community that crosses the boundaries of individual lives and biographies. Generativity is, at the same time, the handing down of traditions *and* the generation of new traditions for future generations. Steinbock underlines the role of the cultural context in the constitution of meanings: "[g]enerative phenomenology treats phenomena that are *historical, geological, cultural, intersubjective, and normative* from the very start." Generative matters and methods are intersubjective rather than subjective. They are concerned with how normative behaviour is shaped and modified by successive generations through a process of critique and renewal. A key concern of generative phenomenology is how the norms, values and belief systems of one particular tradition are defined in relation to another. To investigate this, Steinbock makes use of Husserl's homeworld/alienworld structure.

²⁰ See Tweed, C. (1999). "Learning to see architecturally" in R. Paton and I. Neilson (eds.) *Visual Representations and Interpretation*, Springer-Verlag, London, pp.232-243.

²¹ Silverman, H.J. (1987). *Inscriptions: After Phenomenology and Structuralism*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Ill., retitled 1997 edition.

The homeworld is that which we feel typically familiar, ‘at home,’ with and can only be defined in relation to that which is unfamiliar or alien. In other words, it is impossible to have a homeworld without an alienworld, and the alienworld is defined in contrast to the homeworld. The alienworld is what we are not. The homeworld, crucially, defines the practices and behaviour which we find acceptable or normal. Furthermore, the norms of a given homeworld are derived from what is optimal for a given purpose at a given time and are therefore subject to continuous criticism and revision. In Steinbock’s terms, normative practices are always available for critique and renewal. In an architectural homeworld, for example, every time we start a new project we critique and renew (or reject) our commitment to familiar, but selective, ideals of design. Persistent failure to do so, is likely to result in stagnation of the tradition through mere repetition of past architectural moves and motifs.

Steinbock goes to some length to dispel the notion that ‘our’ homeworld is in any sense superior to others. It is, for us—but only for us. The homeworld/alienworld structure is co-generative in the sense that our typically familiar beliefs, norms etc. are ours only because there is a realm of beliefs that is not ours. It is this liminal relation between home and alien that defines each: “home and alien are [not merely] formed by positing limits, but ... are *mutually delimited* as home and alien, normal and abnormal. ... they are *co-relative* and *co-constitutive*”. It is impossible to define the limits of either homeworld or alienworld in any final or stable sense because they are constantly undergoing redefinition through encounter. Nor are homeworlds homogeneous collections of individuals who think the same thoughts and agree on everything. The limits of the homeworld are changing continually not just through encounters with the alien but also through critical renewal and appropriation by ‘homecomrades’. Without a critical appropriation the tradition will descend into mere repetition and ultimately will disappear.

The identification of a generative dimension to architectural experience prompts us to ask several questions. Who belongs to the “architectural community”? Practitioners, academics, critics, historians, the professional bodies, in one country? in all countries? Where do we draw the boundaries around architecture? What constitutes architecture as opposed to non-architecture? Answers to these will require considerable research but should help us to better understand the relationship of architecture to our culture.

Concluding remarks

The main argument of this paper has been that to understand the phenomena of architectural experience we need a broader approach to treating architectural experience, which is not limited to dealing with individuals’ static response to a piece of architecture, nor to a particular type of subject, nor to a specific style of architecture. In conclusion it is suggested that an expanded notion of affordance, enriched by a phenomenological understanding of human-environment interactions, offers a promising direction for us to explore. A theory of architectural experience needs to embrace all aspects of building—commodity, firmness, delight, symbol and practice.