Aalto's Landscape Ontology: Conceptualising landscape in Alvar Aalto's architecture using phenomenological concepts of Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment

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Statement of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

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Thesis Abstract

This thesis investigates the work of the twentieth-century Finnish modernist architect Alvar Aalto (1898-1976), as involved and intertwined with ideas and experiences of landscape. Late in his life, Aalto said that from his earliest years the Finnish landscape ‘was there all around me, all the time.’

Aalto has been regarded historically as the modernist misfit, a Northern humanist outlier working at the margins of rational modern architecture. Aalto’s architecture arguably extends, expands and evolves modernism to embrace a body-based humanism, informed by a socio-ethical agenda supporting the everyday ‘little man’, confronted by twentieth-century modernity. Aalto’s alternative or heterodox architecture is argued in this study as based in the historically acknowledged, yet largely unexplored, involvement of his work with landscape, evident in the conceptualisation, siting, design, details, and the experience of his work.

This thesis investigates the significance of landscape in Aalto’s work by conceptualising his architecture in terms of its relationship to landscape, addressing the lack of a sustained study of the significance of landscape in Aalto’s work. This historical-theoretical study investigates Aalto’s architecture, in buildings, details and elements, drawings, unbuilt projects, and architectural images, from the 1920s to the 1970s. Through these selected historical examples, the involvement of landscape in Aalto’s work emerges as an essential difference, distinguishing his heterodox practice from the orthodoxy of twentieth-century modern architecture.

The study innovatively organises Aalto’s work into three landscape-related historical themes, of White, Waves and Ruins. While landscape offered a topic for investigating landscape in Aalto’s work in this author’s MPhil(Arch) research into prospect-refuge symbolism (2010), these three themes emerged as relevant to investigating landscape through research articles published or presented by this author between 2010-2018. This study makes its particular contribution to architectural scholarship through a series of close readings of Aalto’s work, interpreting landscape in his architecture with reference to key phenomenological concepts of Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment. The study investigates renowned Aalto works such as Villa Mairea, Muuratsalo House and Aalto Atelier, along with lesser-known works such as Summa House, Alajärvi Town Hall and Seinäjoki Theatre, as well as sketches, images and details of Aalto works.

The thesis describes, analyses and interprets the significance of both Aalto’s architecture in the landscape, and landscape elements in his architecture, with reference to Aalto’s ‘own words’, to the wider Aalto literature, and to interdisciplinary literature on the phenomenology of Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment. Aalto’s lifelong familiarity with the Finnish landscape and his experience of its topography, geology, vegetation, water, weather and

mythology gave him a unique capacity to involve his work with landscape. Aalto's familiarity with landscape was further informed by his interests in biology, art, history and literature, and was driven in part by his empathy for the 'little man', the everyday person struggling with the conflicts and changes of the twentieth century.

The analysis of the study refers to the thinking of Norberg-Schulz and Pallasmaa on architectural phenomenology. It builds also on Wylie's geographical theorisation of the phenomenology of landscape, and is based indirectly on the phenomenological philosophies of Merleau-Ponty and of Heidegger, through architectural readings of their work. The study uses recent theoretical and historical work – including Malpas on place, Böhme on atmosphere, and Goldhagen on embodiment – to locate Aalto's work within recent and contemporary thinking on phenomenology in landscape and architecture.

Landscape is argued through the thesis as giving an ontological basis to Aalto's method. Landscape emerges as forming a fundamental, originary architectural beginning, without which Aalto could not have imagined and created his architecture, without which experience of his work could not be fully described or investigated, and without which contemporary understanding of his work would remain less comprehensive. As such, landscape, categorised into historical themes of White, Waves and Ruins and read through phenomenological concepts of Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment, offers a unique resource for investigating the meaning and significance of Aalto's architecture. As an investigation of landscape through its close reading of Aalto's work, the present study aims to expand understanding of Aalto's complex and enduring modern architecture, and of the broader significances of landscape for contemporary architectural thinking and practice.

INTRODUCTION

This Introduction outlines the thesis in terms of its background, aims, objectives, and expected outcomes, as a response to the research question. It explains the observations and questions that prompted this study in the field of architecture, distilled in the research question, *What is the significance of landscape in Aalto's architecture?* It sets out the aims of the study, and how they are to be achieved through its objectives. It outlines the outcomes of the study, as expected in responding to the research question. Finally, it outlines the chapters of the study to preview its contents and direction.

Background to the study

The modernist work of the Finnish twentieth-century architect Alvar Aalto (1898-1976) is acknowledged as conceptually and expressively connected to the idea of landscape. Frampton recognises Aalto's 'capacity as a designer of landscapes';[1] while Treib reflects that 'Aalto's architecture, the creation of humane settings, urban or rural, was rooted in the Finnish landscape and experience, and in modern times.'[2] Late in life, Aalto himself reflected that from his earliest years, the Finnish landscape 'was there all around me, all the time.'[3]

This study emerges from this author's curiosity about the experience of Aalto's architecture, in the wake of his MPhil(Arch) dissertation (2010) examining prospect-refuge symbolism in Aalto's architecture.[4] The author visited Aalto buildings in Finland in 2008, 2011 and 2017, encountering in Aalto's work white walls, curved forms, historical echoes, overgrowing plants, decaying surfaces and time-friendly material finishes, and observing Aalto's sustained sensitivity to site, topography, orientation, and the natural world – that is, to landscape. Landscape appeared to offer Aalto's work a mood of calm, and a sense of rhyme and rhythm, at building scales from city to site, through to form, silhouette, elements, details and finishes. Aalto's work deferred to, resembled, or contrasted with the form of the land, according to circumstance: the presence of woods or lake, a flat urban site, a busy road, or a suburban street. These resonances in Aalto's work between architectural phenomena and landscape contexts warranted further explanation, and at conceptual levels beyond the 'landscape aesthetics' of Appleton's prospect-refuge theory.[5]

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[1] Kenneth Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto' (1998), in *Labour, Work and Architecture: Collected Essays on Architecture and Design* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 121.

[2] Marc Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', in Peter Reed, ed., *Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 47.

[3] Alvar Aalto, Interview for Finnish television (1972), in *Alvar Aalto in His Own Words*, ed. Göran Schildt, trans. Timothy Binham (Helsinki: Otava, 1997), 274.

[4] John Roberts, *Alvar Aalto's Muuratsalo house, understood through Jay Appleton's prospect-refuge theory*, MPhil(Arch) dissertation (Newcastle, NSW: University of Newcastle, 2010).

[5] See Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, rev. ed. (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1996); also Grant Hildebrand, *The Wright Space: Pattern and Meaning in Frank Lloyd Wright's Houses* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991).

A cluster of notions including nature, biology, topography, the Finnish forest and lakes – in short, clustered around a notion of landscape – have informed historical views of Aalto since 1941, when Giedion stated that 'Finland is with Aalto wherever he goes.'[6] Particular landscape-related themes emerged through this author's research publications post 2010: a theme of *white* outcrops in the Aalto literature, associated with light, modernism, and a large white table remembered from Aalto's childhood; the dynamic presence of *waves*, curves, and sensuously moulded forms or surfaces has been noted in Aalto's plans, ceilings and other elements, often described as 'organic'; and whole Aalto buildings or parts of his work have been seen as weathered in advance, or described as *ruins*.[7] This author's research discerned and discussed key themes of White, Waves and Ruins (capitalised here and below) through which Aalto's work is involved with landscape.[8]

Aalto was interested in nature and the natural world from his early years, partly as a result of his childhood years spent playing, exploring, hunting and fishing in the forests around the rural towns of Kuortane and Alajärvi in Central Finland.[9] Aalto's early experience of the lakes, hills and forests of Central Finland, and the large white drawing table in his father's office, were part of his childhood, and appear to have been integral to his work and thought.[10] Nature in Finnish can be *luonto*, wildlife or scenery; for Aalto, nature could be manifested, seen and experienced in the forms of living things and in the animated space of the forest. Alternatively, nature in Finnish can be *olemus*, the essence, presence or spirit of that living, non-human world, evident in its forms and its invisible animating energies. Nature as a force and an ordering principle could be observed in living things, in the plant and animal world, in the seasons and cosmos, and in biological, cellular and microbiological structures.

From as early as 1925, Aalto differentiates the terms nature and landscape, observing that 'The landscapes we meet outside towns no longer consist of untouched nature anywhere'. Aalto concedes that the modern landscape should be seen not as pure or untouched but as a hybrid, 'a combination of human efforts and the original environment.'[11] Aalto became interested in landscape – in Finnish, *maisema*, forest, water, landform – learning how to capture its character through paintings, and how to quantify its dimensions through technical drawing on the white drafting table of his father's surveying practice. There he worked with young

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[6] Quoted in Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, 'Reading Aalto through the Baroque,' *AA Files* 65 (2012): 72.

[7] See, for example, Richard Weston, *Materials, Form and Architecture* (London: Laurence King, 2003). For discussion of white, see 24-25, 56, 180-181; for waves, see 51-52, 164-165; for ruins, see 118-121, 128-131.

[8] John Roberts, 'Whiteout: Aalto's white table, and materialities of white', *Interstices* Under Construction Symposium 2012: *Immaterial Materialities – Materiality and Interactivity in Art and Architecture*, Tusculum, Sydney, 28-30 Nov 2012; John Roberts, 'Varying winds, varying waves: Nature and landscape in Utzon and Aalto', Fourth International Utzon Symposium, *What Would Utzon Do Now?* Sydney Opera House, Sydney, 7-9 Mar 2014; John Roberts, 'Aalto Landscape Ruins *Chora*', 3rd Alvar Aalto Researchers Network Seminar: *Why Aalto?* 9-10 Jun 2017, Jyväskylä, Finland (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Museo, 2017).

[9] Sarah Menin and Flora Samuel, *Nature and Space: Aalto and Le Corbusier* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 13, 21.

[10] Alvar Aalto, 'The White Table' (1970s), in *Own Words*, 11-12.

[11] Alvar Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland' (1925), in *Own Words,* 21-22.

engineers and surveyors amongst large contour maps and drawing materials,[12] and with his father as an assistant surveyor and cartographer staking out railway routes in the forests of Central Finland.[13] For the young Aalto the Finnish landscape became part of working life, a qualitative and quantitative entity of space and animation that could be measured and drawn, and elided into his architectural methods using his skills of seeing, drawing and analysis.

The literature, as discussed in detail in the Literature Review, identifies the presence of whiteness, waves and ruins in Aalto's modernism, with his abiding interest in nature, biology, living things, natural forces and landscape phenomena. The theme of White has been seen as a logical extension of a known modernist stylistic trope. The theme of Waves presents a critically accepted counter-proposition to the orthogonality of early modernism. And while ruins appear antithetical to modernism's hygienic, timeless universality, the theme of Ruins metaphorically and literally allows nature to overrun both white walls and strong forms, poetically and existentially suggesting un-modern elements of material mortality, and creating feelings of temporality, nostalgia, even melancholy and death.

Research Gap

However, a research gap exists amongst the many studies of Aalto's work, in terms of a sustained study of aspects of landscape in his architecture. Experience by the author of Aalto's work, confirmed and expanded by the critical Aalto literature, strongly suggests that research concentrated around themes of White, Waves and Ruins can frame an analysis and interpretation of Aalto's architecture. This research process, consisting of selecting buildings and other works, identifying facts and opinions about the work, evaluating the work through a theoretical framework, and assembling a critical narrative around Aalto's work, provides an interpretation of landscape in his work, and to support an argument for the ontological importance of landscape in Aalto's heterodox modern architecture.

Research Question

The research question focuses on the significance of landscape as decisive in distinguishing Aalto's work from that of his modernist peers, including Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Walter Gropius, as well as broader contemporaneous European architectural thought and practice. The historical-theoretical interpretive research process noted above becomes an operative framework within which to investigate the extent and significance of landscape as a liberating, ever-present reality in Aalto's singular, heterodox modern architecture. The research question posed is: ***What is the significance of landscape in Aalto's architecture?***

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[12] Aalto, 'The White Table', 11-12.
[13] Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Early Years* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984).

Aims of the Research

Responding to the research question, which concerns the significance or meaning of landscape in the work of Aalto, the present study has two aims:
1. To expand historical-theoretical knowledge of Aalto's work in further detail by investigating themes of landscape in his work
2. To expand understanding of Aalto's landscape-related architecture by using architectural phenomenology to investigate the significance of landscape in his work.

This approach creates a historical-theoretical framework through which to select and organise Aalto's work, and to provide a valid theoretically-based system of enquiry for investigating his work.

Objectives of the Research

This study of landscape in Aalto's architecture has five essential objectives through which to achieve the aims of the research:

1. *To identify landscape-related themes in Aalto's work from a review of the historical Aalto literature and the author's experiences of Aalto's buildings*. Three themes emerge, identified as White, Waves and Ruins, suitable for organising Aalto's work within the study.

2. *To create a theoretical perspective on Aalto's work, appropriate to an analysis of his architecture*. From an initial survey of architectural theory, theorist Kate Nesbitt in *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture* (1996) includes *phenomenology* as a theoretical paradigm,[14] suitable for articulating the relationship between humankind, nature and architecture, which remains as a 'longstanding philosophical problem', posing problems of meaning in architecture.[15] Theories of *place*, particularly Norberg-Schulz's idea of finding the *genius loci*, the 'spirit of the place', offer conceptual means 'to resist the relativism in modern theories of history through the engagement of the body and its verification of the particular qualities of a site.'[16]

3. *To select and organise Aalto's work in terms of buildings, images and texts to be used in the study*. The term 'Aalto's work' refers, here and in what follows, to Aalto's buildings, his words and writing, paintings and sketches, conceptual studies, the Aalto office's drawings and models, and the sites, elements, details and finishes of Aalto's buildings. The author's own images are included in this selection.

4. *To investigate each historical theme, White, Waves and Ruins, using concepts of architectural phenomenology*. The investigation is focused in subsections or 'episodes', each exploring the chapter theme through phenomenological concepts of Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment, through conceptual topics and degrees. In this way White is investigated in the episodes of Chapter 3 through topics of surface,

[14] Kate Nesbitt, Introduction, Kate Nesbitt, ed., *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 28-30.
[15] Nesbitt, Introduction, 48.
[16] Nesbitt, Introduction, 49.

form and immateriality; the theme of Waves is investigated in the episodes of Chapter 4 in degrees of scale, of large, medium and small waves; while the temporality and spatiality of Ruins is investigated in its episodes in Chapter 5 through three topics, of history, inside-outside relations, and time.

5. *To reflect on the analysis done through the study, addressing the research question of how and to what degree landscape is meaningful in Aalto's architecture*. The thesis concludes by considering possible implications of the study for future research and practice as it involves involvements of landscape in architecture.

Expected Outcomes of the Research

This study seeks to expand critical understanding of Aalto's modern architecture and to argue for the significance of landscape as a decisive aspect of his alternative rationalism, of Aalto's modernist heterodoxy. The selected Aalto works and phenomenological concepts are enjoined in a research narrative where landscape emerges as central in the significance of the work featured in the 'episodes' within the chapters of the study. This centrality of landscape, as it emerges from the study, suggests landscape as forming the ontological basis for Aalto's thinking and design, and for the visitor's experience of his work.

The study intends to refresh historical-theoretical interest in architectural phenomenology through its study of landscape and place, and to lead to further investigation of modern architecture through atmosphere and embodiment. It also articulates the value of landscape as a discourse for investigating architecture, more broadly and more recently, into twenty-first century work, and for contemporary education and practice, extending the conceptual scope of architectural discourse to embrace landscape and related issues of context and environment.

Through this research into Aalto's architecture and landscape, the study suggests the need for the field of architecture to learn from one of its 'modern master' practitioners, of how to connect with the living world in strategies of response and responsibility, so that architecture might assume a certain leadership in creating a socially, artistically, and environmentally transformative framework mediating between humankind and planet Earth.

This research intends to prompt a new view of Aalto, a renewed view of his work and its value for thinking and practice, suggesting significances that have been only barely acknowledged previously, by using a category – landscape – that can be difficult to grasp.

Chapter Outlines

The present study is organised into an introduction and six chapters. This Introduction introduces the work and frames its arguments and the methods used to respond to the research question. Chapter 1 introduces the methodology used in the study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature of Aalto's work including his 'own words' and

historical views relevant to thesis themes of White, Waves and Ruins, and of theoretical literature on phenomenology of Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment, in architecture and landscape.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 present a series of studies to make the argument of the research, where Aalto works are organised into the landscape-related thematic chapter areas of White, Waves and Ruins. Chapter 3 investigates the theme of White; Chapter 4 investigates Waves in Aalto's work; and Chapter 5 considers the theme of Ruins in Aalto's architecture.

Each of Chapters 3, 4 and 5 contains three sections where selected Aalto works are investigated through the phenomenological concepts of Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment. Each of these nine sections contains three short sub-sections or episodes. Through this episodic structure, selected examples of Aalto's work are investigated through close readings, using concepts of phenomenology to look into the role of landscape both in Aalto's design and in a visitor's experience of the work of architecture.

Chapter 6 completes the research, outlining its responses to the research question. It concludes overall that the significance of landscape for Aalto's architecture is fundamental, indeed ontological, and that it establishes an essential basis for the conception, design, details and experience of Aalto's architecture.

CHAPTER 1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

> And the more we occupy ourselves with these purely theoretical games in the wide blue yonder, the more we forget Mother Earth, where man, after all, has his habitat and where happiness – in any case the temporal – is to be created.[17]
>
> Aalto, 'The Architect's Conception for Paradise' (1957)

1.1 Aims of the study

This research aims to complement and expand existing historical and theoretical accounts of Aalto's architecture through phenomenological close readings of his work. The study also aims to expand awareness of the significance of landscape for architecture more generally through its focus on Aalto's architectural work and thinking. It proceeds by investigating examples of Aalto's work (buildings, projects, drawings), organised by this author into historical thematic categories of White, Waves and Ruins, to conceptualise landscape in his architecture, through existing phenomenological concepts of Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment. The study argues that Aalto created a heterodox form of modern architecture whose difference is based in an ontology of landscape, which forms a central, originary part of the meaning of Aalto's architecture and remains essential to its enduring historical-theoretical significance. In this way the study represents a departure from current, largely historical studies of Aalto's architecture, so that it can be seen in a new and productive light. It aims to extend existing historical views of Aalto by focusing in detail on a number of selected examples of his work, and to expand theoretical perspectives on Aalto through a systematic analysis of his work using discourses of phenomenology.

The study identifies the importance of landscape in Aalto's architectural imagination, and argues, through a series of architectural examples, using phenomenological discourse, to show Aalto's work in a new light. It argues that landscape – *as a reality, both involving people in the living world, and as encountered through experience, by walking, seeing and sensing* – offers a basis for extending thinking on Aalto. Landscape helps to both complexify and clarify Aalto's historical position, to theorise experience of his work, and to recognise the phenomenological humanism of his work as an alternative to modernism's abstract, geometric, and technologised forms.

Landscape is thus identified as a source for Aalto's thinking and as intrinsic to experience of his architecture. Conceptualised through phenomenology, landscape emerges through this study as the single constant factor that makes Aalto's architecture at once specifically local, identifiably national and Finnish, and universally welcoming to the individual. Landscape distances Aalto's architecture from orthodox modernism, as it rescues the figure of the 'little person' or 'the little

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[17] Alvar Aalto, 'The Architect's Conception for Paradise' (1957), in Alvar Aalto, *Sketches*, ed. Göran Schildt, trans. Stuart Wrede (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 1978), 158.

man' (*pikku ihminen*)[18] from the crudity of industrialised production and from the excesses of scale and speed of the contemporary global city.

The study's method suggests that phenomenology, articulated in terms of Place, Atmosphere or Embodiment, may offer a mode of design that extends architectural practice or education to recognise, embrace, and draw more closely together human presence and landscape elements. Paired with technologies of drawing, modeling, design and fabrication, the syntheses made possible by emergent phenomenological methods could inform architecture practice with philosophy, psychology, biology and landscape, to innovate harmonies between people and their environments.

1.2 Research gap

In architectural history Aalto is considered both a leading modernist practitioner and a 'northern outlier' who does not quite fit the mainstream model of the technology-adept practitioner of abstract geometric modernism.[19] Aalto developed his practice of architecture from a historical Nordic neoclassicism in the early 1920s, to take up a white modernism through which he gained international fame in the early 1930s. Through the 1930s Aalto distanced himself from a modernism concerned with abstraction, geometry, efficiency and technology, developing instead a divergent, heterodox form of modern architecture informed by sciences of biology, human senses and psychology, and formally involved with nature and landscape.

It is argued through the present study that Aalto's heterodox modern architecture relates not to abstract ideas but to context, culture, people and landscape. Aalto's design method, rather than concerning itself with abstract form or expression of technological logic, was preoccupied with the body, senses and mind of the user. Further, Aalto involved landscape in his work, in the location, composition, forms, details and finishes of his buildings, creating an architecture of place, atmosphere and embodiment – an architecture grounded in perceptual awareness and phenomenology.[20]

However, Aalto's work has generally been analysed and interpreted in historical, formal, biographical and geopolitical terms, and only occasionally through a lens of phenomenology.[21] As a result, the living and experiential side of Aalto's architecture, evident in its sensory breadth and related to the urge to harmony that Aalto expressed in his writings, remains only partly explored in a close and methodical

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[18] Finnish translation in Sofia Singler and Maximilian Sternberg, 'The Civic and the Sacred: Alvar Aalto's Churches and Parish Centres in Wolfsburg, 1960-68', *Architectural History* 62 (2019): 209.

[19] Goldhagen notes Aalto as 'the most important early Modernist who doesn't fit.' Sarah Williams Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet: Alvar Aalto's Embodied Rationalism', *Harvard Design Magazine* 27 (2008): 38.

[20] Goldhagen argues that Aalto 'developed his singular and lasting approach to Modernism in architecture partly by learning and partly by intuiting a model of human cognition and reason grounded in phenomenology.' Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet': 39.

[21] Exceptions include: Pallasmaa's references to Aalto's phenomenology, in Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester, UK: Wiley, 2005), 43-77; Norberg-Schulz's mention of the 'topographical forms' of Aalto's postwar architecture, in Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a phenomenology of architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1980), 105-106; and Goldhagen's analysis of Aalto's NPI building, Helsinki, in Sarah Williams Goldhagen, *Welcome to your World: How the built environment shapes our lives* (New York: Harper, 2017), 169-175.

manner. Similarly, while themes of nature, organic form, and landscape recur constantly in the Aalto literature, beginning with Sigfried Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture* (1947),[22] the involvement of Aalto's work with landscape is largely regarded as a matter of formal setting and visual background, but has rarely been methodically investigated in terms of its complex, nuanced realities or meanings.

Thus a research gap emerges, inviting an extended investigation of phenomenological aspects of Aalto's buildings, to consider the significance of landscape in the creation and the experience of his architecture.

As the pre-existing condition for architecture, involving the natural world, site, climate, and topography, landscape is proposed as fundamental to architectural creation and experience. Landscape, regarded as essential to the being of Aalto's architecture, is argued as giving the ontological basis of Aalto's work in this enquiry. Noted widely, including by Aalto himself, yet rarely explored in depth, landscape forms both the basis and the essential object of this enquiry into the significance and meaning of Aalto's architecture.

1.3 Nature of the research

The study organises selected Aalto works into thematic historical categories of White, Waves and Ruins, themes that may be associated respectively with questions of surface, form, and materiality. These historical categories reflect problems radiating from a central question of inside-outside relations in Aalto's version of modern architecture, which he developed and theorised from the 1920s. Aalto's self-styled modernism continued to evolve from the 1930s through World War II, into the 1950s and 1960s, with works being completed posthumously by the Aalto office into the 1980s, after Aalto's death in 1976. Works are selected from across this historical spectrum, from paintings made before 1920 to buildings completed after 1980, such as Essen Opera (competition won 1959, built 1983-88), to reflect both the centrality of the inside-outside problem and Aalto's evolving responses in terms of involvement of landscape in his architecture.

To examine Aalto's work the study uses the theoretical construct of architectural phenomenology, through three conceptual strands, Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment. Through this structure the study is able to investigate Aalto's work at different ranges of proximity and detail, from context to interiors, to building elements and surface details, to identify and interpret some of the means by which Aalto involved landscape with his architecture.

The three conceptual phenomenological areas of this study include, first, a generally understood theoretical concept of Place, associating architecture with ideas and experiences of dwelling on a particular portion of the earth's surface. Second, the notion of Atmosphere, which can relate to meteorology, in the present study relates conceptually either to the ambient and changeable mood of a natural or built space,

[22] Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, 5th edn (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 1967).

or to the moods and feelings of a person dwelling in, visiting or using that space. Third, the concept of Embodiment builds on notions of experience, empathy and embodied cognition, to consider the role of the body and senses in understanding the significance of landscape in architecture.

This study, by using phenomenology to analyse Aalto's involvement of landscape in his architecture, re-presents landscape, through its integration with Aalto's architecture, as being drawn closer to human imagination, thought, perception and everyday experience. This enhanced proximity of landscape to people, enabled by architecture, contributes to realising Aalto's greater purpose of harmony between people and the environment, and becomes the focus of the closer investigation of the present study.

1.4 Limits of the research

The present research is limited to reflection on historical and theoretical concepts of landscape in the architecture and thinking of Finnish modernist architect Alvar Aalto. It presents neither a hagiography of Aalto, nor a revisionist study of Aalto's historical position. By investigating significances of landscape in Aalto's work, it seeks to extend current insight into his renowned historical position. It aims to use landscape to augment theoretical knowledge of Aalto and to counter Aalto's theoretical marginalisation. It argues for landscape to be used as a valid lens for investigation of architecture, to expand and evolve existing historical and theoretical understanding of Aalto's work, and of the largely unacknowledged fundamental role of landscape in his architecture.

The present study concentrates on Aalto's modern architecture, from the late 1920s to after his death in the 1980s; it does not engage with material outside of that historical narrative. The scope of the study does not allow engagement with a number of areas of Aalto's work, such as his pre-modern Nordic Classical work, town planning, industrial buildings and housing designs, unbuilt work, and the furniture, lighting, and tableware designs undertaken with Aino Marsio-Aalto. The study acknowledges Aalto's architectural collaborations on numerous projects with architects Aino Marsio-Aalto, Elissa Aalto, Jean-Paul Bernoulli and others from his studio; however, it attributes the works investigated to Aalto's authorship, unless otherwise noted.[23]

In terms of landscape, the present study is not concerned with the historical or theoretical fields of landscape architecture or landscape design, nor with garden history, modernist gardens or the practices of horticulture, beyond examples noted in the study. Similarly, the present work is not intended as a study of landscape

[23] See for example: Renja Suominen-Kokkonen, trans. Jüri Kokkonen, *Aino and Alvar Aalto: A shared journey: Interpretations of an everyday modernism* (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Foundation / Alvar Aalto Museum, 2007); Renja Kristella Suominen-Kokkonen, 'Aaltos' Concept of Total Work of Art and the Collaboration of the Architects Aino and Alvar Aalto', in *Alvar Aalto. Modern Finnish Architecture: Mimar Sinan Memorial Panel, Istanbul 2014* (Istanbul: Yeditepe University, 2015): 72-102; Fátima Pombo and Pauliina Rumbin, 'Aino Marsio-Aalto (1894-1949) the Architect of Interiors and Everyday Objects to Unveil', *Architectonica* 4 (2016): 46-59.

aesthetics, as in Appleton's approach of 'What is it that we like about landscape, and why do we like it?'[24] Although this study does not seek to frame Aalto's work as 'romantic' or 'picturesque', within its phenomenological approach it may refer to historical and theoretical scholarship that discusses questions of architecture, art and landscape in visual or 'picturesque' terms, as in the work of Constant, Krauss, or Bois.[25]

1.5 On historical-theoretical interpretation

Reflecting on history, Leach notes that architecture

> is architectural history's substance. The material, ephemeral and conceptual traces of that content are architectural history's evidence. The definition of architecture as a subject of historical study lies between architectural history's conceptual and technical content and its traces in the world.[26]

A historical-theoretical interpretive research method, adapted from the 'interpretive-historical' method outlined by Groat and Wang,[27] is adopted in this study, providing a methodological framework through which to analyse Aalto's work. This method allows a gathering of evidence to create a narrative from which conclusions can be drawn to respond to the research question, concerning the significance or meaning of landscape in Aalto's architecture.

The present study is framed as a historical-theoretical interpretation of landscape based on a phenomenological analysis of selected examples of Aalto's architectural work. Rather than being argued from archival material, its arguments refer to architectural historical and related interdisciplinary literature to 2020. The work acknowledges the empirical value of a phenomenological method, and is informed by the author's visits to Aalto buildings in Finland and in Denmark in 2008, 2011 and 2017. These 'site visits' were undertaken both as part of Alvar Aalto Institute / Alvar Aalto Museum symposia, and also as self-directed individual research visits to Helsinki, Jyväskylä, Seinäjoki, Noormarkku and Aalborg, Denmark. These research visits were funded in part by travel grants from University of Newcastle, NSW, and from University of Tasmania.

The study aims to be analytical rather than descriptive, looking at buildings, elements, details, drawings and Aalto's own words in the context of the ontological framework offered to architecture by landscape.

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[24] Appleton, *Experience of Landscape*, 1.

[25] Caroline Constant, 'The Barcelona Pavilion as Landscape Garden: Modernity and the Picturesque', *AA Files* 20 (1990): 46; Rosalind Krauss, 'The Grid, the / Cloud /, and the Detail', in Detlef Mertins, ed., *Presence of Mies* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 112-125; Yve-Alain Bois, trans. John Shepley, 'A Picturesque Stroll around *Clara-Clara*', *October* 29 (1984): 32-62.

[26] Andrew Leach, *What is Architectural History?* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010), 78.

[27] See Linda Groat and David Wang, 'Interpretive-historical research', in *Architectural Research Methods* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2002), 135-171.

1.6 Expected results of the research

In this analytical and non-hagiographic study of Aalto's work, which avoids personal, aesthetic and picturesque discourses, landscape thinking in architecture can be separated from garden history,[28] from 'landscape urbanism',[29] and from the history and theory of landscape architecture,[30] both because Aalto did not work as a landscape architect, and because this study is not an analysis of Aalto's gardens or 'landscape designs'. Aalto's experience in working with his father as an assistant surveyor and cartographer before 1918 appears to have given him grounding in essential skills of surveying, and confidence to measure, document and assess existing landscape conditions in his projects, and to design landscape strategies integral with his architecture, largely without collaboration with a landscape architect.

Thus the research area of the present study navigates its boundaries between, on one hand, Aalto's self-styled extended or 'other' version of modernism, and, on the other, a discourse referring to landscape, definable as the small or vast area beyond the building's 'footprint' or ground plan. This allows the study to include within its scope of 'landscape' such non-architectural spaces as the domestic yard, courtyard or garden; the university campus; the adjacent forest, hillside or park; a real or artificial stream; and the 'borrowed landscape' of a lake or a distant horizon. Some of these landscapes are seen, some are traversed for access, and some provide settings for buildings, while others form backdrops beside, behind or beneath buildings. This informal definition of landscape allows the present study to reflect on the possible relationships that Aalto imagined between his buildings and landscape, whether such landscape might be designed, under-designed, or undesigned, in remote or suburban locations.

The research sets out to examine the significance of aspects of landscape in Aalto's work, using a phenomenological method to evaluate his heterodox version of modernist architecture. It surveys his work to argue two key things: that landscape, identified throughout Aalto's oeuvre, can be regarded as essential and integral to the creative *methods* of his heterodox modernism; and that landscape, regarded in this way, can be seen as instrumental in the *experience* of his architecture. This involvement of landscape, in both Aalto's method and in the experience of his architecture, opens new areas of understanding of his heterodox modernism, illustrating how his work comprised a different modernism. The connection of landscape and phenomenology in Aalto's work also points to the value of Aalto's complex commitment to landscape as an essential ethical dimension of both his difference and his relevance in the twenty-first century. Through a theoretical framework based in the architectural phenomenology of Norberg-Schulz and Pallasmaa, the study's sequence of close readings of 'iconic' and less-known Aalto works brings landscape into the centre of the conceptual mix – creative, experiential

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[28] John Dixon Hunt, *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

[29] Charles Waldheim, ed., *The Landscape Urbanism Reader* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006).

[30] Simon Swaffield, ed., *Theory in Landscape Architecture: A Reader* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); Ian Thompson, ed., *Rethinking Landscape: A critical reader* (Abingdon, UK; New York: Routledge, 2009).

and critical – of a relevant contemporary understanding of Aalto's complex architecture.

Aalto's complexity as considered here is evident, as critics acknowledge, in his dualities and their conceptual tensions. For example, Venturi, observing Aalto's contribution in 1976, remarks that 'Aalto's buildings no longer look simple and serene. Their contradictions now evoke complexity and tension',[31] as in the dualities that compound to create the 'quality of Aalto's elements' at Otaniemi University, where 'The auditorium ... combines collective scale and intimate scale, expressionistic forms and conventional forms, plain and fancy symbolism, and pure order interrupted by inconsistencies planned for the right places.'[32] The tensions in Venturi's architectural dualities of scale, form, symbolism and order may be produced or resolved by involvement with landscape; the present study aims to investigate the involvement of landscape in the phenomenology of Aalto's work, and to consider the ontological significance of landscape in his architecture.

Through these methods, outlined above, of historical-theoretical description, analysis, comparison and interpretation, the following chapters of the thesis proceed to respond to the research question: *What is the significance of landscape in Aalto's architecture?*

The Literature Review follows, introducing the literature relevant to the present study, and indicating the body of knowledge that the study seeks to expand and to which it aims to contribute through this investigation of landscape in Aalto's work.

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[31] Robert Venturi, 'Alvar Aalto' (1976), in Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, *A View from the Campidoglio: Selected Essays 1953-1984*, eds Peter Arnell, Ted Bickford, Catherine Bergart (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 60.
[32] Venturi, 'Alvar Aalto', 60.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This literature review sets out the essential literature, from architecture and interdisciplinary fields, from which the essential information for the thesis is drawn. Section 2.1 *Aalto* frames the historical figure of Finnish modernist architect Alvar Aalto, and relevant elements of his biography and influences. It notes historical and theoretical perspectives on Aalto's work, and reviews selected 'own words' from Aalto's speeches, interviews and articles that illustrate his aims and philosophy, and reveal the inherent duality of his thinking and work.

Section 2.2 *History* looks at views on Aalto's modernism, and outlines the occurrence of the key themes of White, Waves and Ruins and their contexts in the literature of architectural history. Within the theme of Ruins an interdisciplinary area of 'ruin studies' has emerged in recent decades, with its own framework and discourses.

Section 2.3 *Theory* introduces the historical-theoretical construct of architectural phenomenology, tracing the emergence of the three strands of phenomenology, Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment, which constitute the conceptual framework of the study's investigation of landscape in Aalto's architecture.

Lastly, section 2.4 *Landscape* reviews the broad area of landscape within architecture, and beyond architecture. It notes key landscape terms and usages, including nature and forest, and human relationship with landscape through dwelling. It notes Aalto's attitudes to relationships between nature and landscape, and between landscape and culture.

This review of the literature provides a critical assessment of the literature around the compound subject of landscape and Aalto's architecture. It leads to and informs the study's methodology, including the identification of a research gap. The review also informs the study's interpretation of Aalto's architecture and the significance of landscape in his work.

2.1 AALTO: Finnish modernist architect

2.1.1 The white table

Aalto said in 1957, 'Residing in a place is, *per se*, one of the great mysteries of human life. Why is the poor human creature fated to work, eat and live in a dwelling?'[33] He continues his query: 'Our entire culture rests on the nature of our dwellings. Is happy living really guaranteed by the small house in a large park or by the undisturbed privacy of a family or by the densely packed great city?' Aalto's skepticism and optimism are contrasted in posing such a question – which, he exclaims in concluding, 'has yet to be and never will be answered!'[34]

Landscape historian Marc Treib notes Aalto's creative doubt about the singularity of a conception of architecture concerned solely with buildings: 'To the young Aalto, the land possessed far more than a single, physical dimension. Born in the outer reaches of Central Finland, Aalto was more immersed in the world of nature than the world of domestic space.'[35] Aalto remarked to Göran Schildt in 1972, 'As for the Finnish landscape, it was there around me, all the time ... The white table taught me that we must be tactful with nature, that we must foster life.'[36]

The large white drawing table in the Aalto house, in his surveyor father J.H. Aalto's office, remained a tutelary presence in Aalto's consciousness from his childhood, as he played under the heavy white surface of the table, until being allowed to join his father's young 'surveyor apprentices' on the table top, as they drew exacting cadastral survey maps of 'large parts of Finland' with large precision drawing instruments.[37] Aalto memorialised the white table in late interviews with Schildt, as noted above, and in a dictated text from the 1970s; the white table, reflected Aalto, 'is big. Possibly the biggest table in the world'. On its surface he learned 'the philosophy of pencil and paper', in a world where the phenomenology of drawing media became embedded in his memory in a dualism: 'the hard, sharp brown pencils were called Eagle. The soft ones were called Koh-i-noor.'[38] The enduring significance of the white table should not be underestimated in Aalto's work, for its sense of security, its expansiveness, its associated ethic of collaborative endeavour, and for its infinitely expansive whiteness; as Aalto concluded, 'The white table of my childhood was a big table. It has kept on growing. I have done my life's work on it.'[39] As a partial manifesto, his recollection of its all-encompassing whiteness reveals much of his attitude towards the latencies of creative work and its necessary liberty:

> What is a white table? A neutral plane in combination with man, so neutral a plane that it can receive anything, depending on man's imagination and skill. A white table is as white as white can be, it has no recipe, nothing obliges man to do this or that. In other words, it is a strange and unique relationship.[40]

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[33] Alvar Aalto, '"Schöner Wohnen" / More beautiful housing', (1957), in *Own Words*, 261.
[34] Aalto, "Schöner Wohnen", 261.
[35] Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', 48.
[36] Aalto, Interview for Finnish television, 274.
[37] Aalto, 'The White Table', 11.
[38] Aalto, 'The White Table', 12.
[39] Aalto, 'The White Table', 12.
[40] Aalto, 'The White Table', 12.

2.1.2 Aalto's Own Words

Important in forming a perspective on Aalto's work and thought is the collection of Aalto's 'own words', speeches, articles and interviews edited by Göran Schildt in *Sketches* (1978), and expanded and edited by Schildt in *Alvar Aalto in His Own Words* (1997).[41] From Schildt's edited selections appear various tendencies peculiar to Aalto: an instinct for duality in forging harmony out of two or more different things, evident in his dialectical argumentation method; support for the ideals of modernism while also distancing himself from its fixations with technology and abstraction; Aalto's principle of skepticism or 'positive doubt'; Aalto's intuition as an artist-architect to evolve a radical formal agenda related to nature and landscape; and Aalto's motivation to improve the built and natural environment for the 'little person', the 'poor little man in the street', visitor and user of his architecture, through phenomenological or, as he said, 'psychological' means.

Aalto's articles provide a portal and a point of reference for many of the key concerns of the present study. In Aalto's *Own Words* can be found a spectrum of relevant references in Aalto's thinking: to landscape in 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland' (1925); to biological variation in cherry tree blossoms, and also to war devastation, in 'The Reconstruction of Europe' (1941); to the whiteness of Aalto's mythic childhood white table in 'Interview for Finnish television' (1972); to Greek ruins and modernism in 'The Latest Trends in Architecture' (1928); to modern ruins and war destruction in Lapland and London in 'Finland Wonderland' (1950). While Aalto said little directly about his undulating wave-forms, he refers in 'Mairea' (1939) to rhythm, senses, materiality and harmony, aiming 'to avoid artificial architectural rhythm in the building without giving up pure "form"', as long as it could be 'obtained in harmony with the structure or with an increased use of materials and surface treatments that are inherently pleasing to the senses.'[42]

In an odd reference to undulating forms, Schildt notes Maire Gullichsen (Aalto's friend and Villa Mairea client) relating how Aalto described the beginnings of his fluid glassware forms: 'Alvar told me about his mother, how lovely she was. She had such and such embroidered knickers, and it was from them – Mama's underwear – that Alvar had got the inspiration for his vases and lamps.'[43] Not all of Aalto's curved forms should be given solely natural inspiration in a critical study.

2.1.3 Theoretical contexts

Aalto, despite his strong presence in architectural histories, remains largely neglected by writers in architectural theory. Aalto's work, despite his creative output over five decades in Finland, Europe, USA and the Middle East, remains largely absent from architecture's theoretical register. However, in Nesbitt's survey anthology *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture* (1996), a compendium of

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[41] Aalto, *Sketches*; *Own Words*.

[42] Alvar Aalto, 'Mairea' (1939), in *Own Words*, 230.

[43] Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Decisive Years* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), 136.

postmodern critical and theoretical writing from 1965 to 1995, Le Corbusier has over 48 notations, Mies van der Rohe 16, Gropius 4, while Aalto has 9 notations. While Le Corbusier attracts most theoretical interest, Aalto remains (in these statistics) close to Mies as a continuing figure of interest, through topics emphasising his modernist heterodoxy.[44]

Nesbitt's collection is partly focused on the (then-recent) modernist past, where Le Corbusier is linked with the social disaster of the Pruitt-Igoe housing, demolished in 1972; with the 'hegemony of International Style Functionalism'; and with 'applying cubist painters' ideas to architecture', following which Arthur Drexler in 1969 can note modernism as 'only architecture, not the salvation of man and the redemption of the earth.'[45] Nesbitt's postmodern critics seem to aim to bury, rather than praise, modernism.

Gropius is associated by Broadbent with the rightness of architects and historians standing against 'mere superficial styling, applied cosmetically to the outside of buildings', and supporting a 'functionalist ethic', expressed in concrete and steel framed buildings 'simple and rectangular in form and clad in white stucco, grey concrete, or glass.' Yet few of the 'pioneering' 1920s functionalist buildings remain in their original state or function, many having become useable only as museums, notes Broadbent, judging conclusively that 'the functionalists' dream of a machine-like and meaning-free architecture never was anything more than a dream.'[46]

Nesbitt notes the difficulty for some to feel bodily 'centered' in the 'continuous space of modernism' of Mies's Barcelona Pavilion, lacking 'clearly differentiated elements like floor, ceiling, wall, and window.'[47] Other comments on Mies include Venturi's note of his 'magnificent paradox, "less is more"', which 'risks separating his architecture from life and the needs of society,' with the possible result that 'less is a bore'.[48] Colquhoun diagnoses a 'thoroughly nineteenth-century rationalism' deployed via a 'received neoclassical aesthetic to create simple cubes, regular frames, and cores';[49] while Frampton recognises that Mies maintained his distinction between architecture and building, asserting 'the mediatory realm of *Baukunst* (the "art of building"), a Teutonic term for which there is no English equivalent.'[50]

By contrast to these critical views of Le Corbusier, Gropius and Mies, Aalto's reputation is curated positively in Nesbitt's anthology. Venturi praises Aalto for his 'complexity', not as an 'expressive device', but relative to program and composition of the whole,[51] while Porphyrios claims Aalto as 'the first modern eclectic and by extension the first Post-Modernist' for his non-modern interest in style and 'the

[44] Nesbitt, *Theorizing*, *passim*.
[45] Nesbitt, Introduction, 22, 42, 26. Cites Arthur Drexler, Preface, Museum of Modern Art, *Five Architects* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1.
[46] Geoffrey Broadbent, 'A plan man's guide to the theory of signs in architecture', *Architectural Design* 47, no.7-8 (1978): 474-482, in Nesbitt, *Theorizing*, 138.
[47] Nesbitt, Introduction, 63.
[48] Nesbitt, *Theorizing*, 74-75.
[49] Nesbitt, *Theorizing*, 255.
[50] Nesbitt, *Theorizing*, 442.
[51] Nesbitt, *Theorizing*, 76.

primacy of context'.[52] Nesbitt brackets Aalto as central to Frampton's Critical Regionalism, in 'building the site', engaging with and accentuating topography, in contrast to international modernism's 'ideal of a flat, cleared site',[53] which Frampton notes as influential on Alvaro Siza's grounding of buildings in topography and local context.[54] Also in Nesbitt, Schumacher cites Florence Cathedral as ground for comparison with Aalto's 'rare' response to context in his Pensions Institute, different to the 'typical picturesque modern building' composed merely of 'connected pavilions';[55] and Tzonis and Lefaivre suggest the influence of Aalto's Scandinavian regionalism on British 'new empiricist' practices.[56]

Despite these favourable critiques, missing is a sense of other essential Aalto elements: his socio-ethical agenda, his rhythmic approach to form, and the experience of his work as key to his historical phenomenological 'humanism'. Perhaps these diagnoses of complexity, context, site and regionalism in Aalto's work – in short, its 'situatedness' – indirectly mitigate against Aalto's deeper theoretical recognition.

However, in pursuing a humanist, situated architecture contingent on the everyday user, Aalto was not completely alone. According to modernist historian Sarah Williams Goldhagen, Louis Kahn's (1901-1974) architecture and urbanism were considered and designed as a 'situated modernism' which involved grounding and situating people 'by eliciting and reinforcing the social, physical and psychological distinctiveness of a place.'[57] Like Aalto, Kahn conceived of 'placemaking', in the 'geographical, topographical, and phenomenological sense of an architecture oriented around a person's experience of a specific site and unique building.'[58] Thus Kahn, from the 1940s and 1950s, using tactics, again like Aalto, that included rejecting transparency, resisting technologised production, and opposing the open plan of modernism with 'enveloping, static spaces exquisitely scaled to the human body', developed an architecture that prompted his user to make a 'bodily, tactile, phenomenological connection' with architecture.[59]

While Kahn's shift toward a 'situated' version of modernism suggests an affiliation with Aalto's practices, Aalto remains defined historically by historian Robert McCarter in *Aalto* (2014) as 'virtually alone, a voice in the wilderness' through his career, joined only in his late years in his resistance to orthodox modernism by Aldo van Eyck (1918-1999), interested in 'place and occasion' rather than 'space and time', and by Kahn with his architectural faith in the balance of 'the eternal and the circumstantial'.[60] Aalto's ideals, of the 'little person' and of harmony with the natural world, seem to have cemented his lonely presence during a period of architecture

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[52] Nesbitt, *Theorizing*, 93.
[53] Nesbitt, *Theorizing*, 468.
[54] Nesbitt, *Theorizing*, 473.
[55] Nesbitt, *Theorizing*, 303.
[56] Nesbitt, *Theorizing*, 487.
[57] Sarah Williams Goldhagen, *Louis Kahn's Situated Modernism* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2001), 202.
[58] Goldhagen, *Kahn's Situated Modernism*, 202.
[59] Goldhagen, *Kahn's Situated Modernism*, 203.
[60] Robert McCarter, *Aalto* (London: Phaidon, 2014), 236-237.

'invariably characterised by an almost complete disregard for ecology, energy use and the environment'.[61] Aalto's interest in extra-architectural matters such as social and ecological harmony, and his commitment to realising the finer grain of architecture's relationship with actual landscape, rather than in writing tracts on nature's picturesque qualities, may be contributing factors in his broader theoretical obscurity.

In an intense formal analysis of Aalto, architect Andres Duany in 'Principles in the Architecture of Alvar Aalto' (1986) observes that Aalto's architectural vocabulary has not been conceptualised, nor has an 'Aalto maniera' been formulated; he argues that far from being 'irrational' or 'organic' in his methods, Aalto followed a 'systematic architectural syntax', with rational principles underlying his seemingly 'arbitrary', 'willful' or 'idiosyncratic' patterns of form and organisation.[62]

Duany sets out three key strategies of Aalto's systematic methods: first, a dualistic process that organises contradictory elements into comprehensive designs; second, Aalto's manipulation of perception of buildings in their settings from the level of the human eye, enhancing the visual effects of a building and recording it in memory; and third, Aalto's use of classical Greek architecture as precedent for organising program, articulating form and defining space.[63] Duany points to organised systems of thought in Aalto's architectural strategies: silhouette; perceived perspectives; the play between form and surface; subtle slippages in plan and visual re-alignments of plan angles; and also Aalto's adaptation of sensuous and social principles from ancient Greek architecture.[64] Duany's findings may be used and extended to argue for relations with landscape in modernist architecture, underlining also Aalto's contribution to the continuity of architecture as culture.

2.1.4 Goethe, Aalto, Schildt

Aalto, educated in northern Europe in the early twentieth century, was invariably affected by the teachings, and in his adult life by the literature, scientific work and memoirs, of German philosopher, naturalist and poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1842). Goethe's ideas were central to Aalto's early learning, according to Schild: 'Goethe's demand for purposeful interaction with nature, for untiring endeavour to live up to ideals of balance and health, was for him a self-evident complement to a Darwinist belief in progress.'[65] Schildt describes Aalto as having a different sense of the relationship of man and nature, and of creative activity, from his contemporaries; he sees Aalto as 'a Goethean in Modernist disguise, an adherent of ancient Greek cosmology in an age of technology.'[66] Menin and Samuel also note

[61] McCarter, *Aalto*, 237.

[62] Andres Duany, 'Principles in the Architecture of Alvar Aalto', *Harvard Architecture Review* 5 (1986): 105.

[63] Duany, 'Principles': 105.

[64] Duany, 'Principles': 119.

[65] Göran Schildt, 'Between Darwin and Goethe', in *Early Years*, 194-213, 200.

[66] Schildt, *Early Years*, 200.

that Aalto was influenced by his mother's interest in Goethe, along with Ibsen, Jules Verne, and Anatole France.[67]

Finnish writer, journalist, sailor and scholar Göran Schildt (1917-2009) first met Aalto in 1952, and remained his friend, biographer and editor until Aalto's death in 1976.[68] Schildt collected Aalto's articles, speeches and unpublished writings in *Sketches* (1978) and *Own Words* (1989), noting Aalto's ideological and theoretical inconsistencies.[69] He remains Aalto's chief biographer,[70] and the leading authority on Aalto's life, oeuvre and philosophy,[71] although those who knew Aalto personally and professionally query certain of Schildt's accounts.[72] Schildt's work and commentary provide reference points for effectively all scholarship on Aalto since *Sketches* in 1978.

Schildt, a biographer and critic rather than a hagiographer, explains Aalto's shifting ideologies as a distinction between 'the material arts and the verbal arts', between words and building: 'Aalto had nothing against discussing the theoretical aspects ... but in his actual work he followed his artistic instinct almost as irresistibly and spontaneously as the insects, the wild animals and the birds in the wood do in adapting to the demands of their environment.'[73] Schildt also notes that Aalto shared Goethe's view that humankind is 'an integral part of nature's cycle, and therefore cannot stand on the outside as an ostensibly objective observer of isolated phenomena,' an ideal that permeated Aalto's views on culture, art, architecture and life.[74]

2.1.5 Historical context

> The modern movement was complex, but it was not a myth, not to Alvar Aalto, Gropius, Le Corbusier, El Lissitsky, Mies, Richard Neutra, Gerrit Rietveld, Hans Scharoun, Mart Stam, Bruno Taut, or the many other practitioners or theorists who were there from the start – as internally inconsistent as their ideas were, or as much as their approaches and ideologies varied.[75]
>
> Goldhagen, 'Reconceptualizing the Modern' (2000)

In architectural historical terms, Aalto's work evolved through the early twentieth century through a sequence of expressive modes, from Nordic classicism in the

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[67] Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, 32.

[68] https://www.villakolkis.org/en/villakolkis/goran-schildt-history.html Noted 1 June 2020.

[69] Schildt, 'Theoretician and Practitioner', in *Own Words*, 9.

[70] Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: His Life* (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Museum, 2007).

[71] Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Complete Catalogue of Architecture, Design and Art* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994).

[72] Vezio Nava, 'Tiilimäki 20', in Harry Charrington and Vezio Nava, eds, *Alvar Aalto: The Mark of the Hand* (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2011).

[73] Schildt, Epilogue, in *Own Words*, 286.

[74] Schildt, note to 'Finnish Church Art', in *Own Words*, 37.

[75] Sarah Williams Goldhagen, 'Reconceptualizing the Modern', in Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Réjean Legault, eds, *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture* (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture; Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2000), 302.

1920s, to white functionalism in the 1930s, to an original heterodox version of modernism from the early 1950s. In the present study, modernism and modern architecture form the historical context for its investigation of landscape in the work of architect Alvar Aalto.

Modernism in architecture can be traced (as by historian Mary McLeod) from pre-nineteenth-century beginnings to the 1890s, when Art Nouveau emerged in Europe as a 'modern' movement, and when Austrian architect Otto Wagner published *Moderne Architektur* (1896), using terms such as 'modern life', 'modern man' and 'modern social conditions'.[76] Wagner gave the term 'modern architecture' ideological meaning, in a book which, remarks McLeod, 'led to the association of functionalism, rationalism, and the elimination of "useless" decoration with the words "modern architecture."'[77] The recently current usage of modernism reflects three things: modernism's own diversity and its self-critique; the influence of other fields of thinking, including art criticism, literary criticism and cultural theory; and the international spread of architectural theory, influenced by American and British architectural history and theory, shaping historical narratives, ideas, and the language of architectural practice.[78]

Modernism is critiqued by Goldhagen in *Anxious Modernisms*, questioning the unity and 'viability' of the Modern Movement as a concept.[79] Goldhagen identifies a 'situated modernism' within a polymorphic twentieth century modernism, in Kahn's practice and thinking.[80] The idea of a situated modernism (unrelated to Guy Debord's Situationist International movement)[81] is connected by Goldhagen to Aalto, Eileen Gray and Bruno Taut, each of whom, notes Goldhagen, 'had developed their own, very different, versions of situated modernism before Kahn came to his.'[82] This situated modernism, as a corrective to 1950s consumption and suburbanisation, would act by 'situating and grounding a building's user', and 'by eliciting and reinforcing the social, physical, and psychological distinctiveness of a place.'[83] Thus Kahn's user would (ideally) be situated 'socially... personally, temporally, and spatially' by an architecture related to city and community, which rejected modernist tropes of the machine, transparency, mass production and technologised construction, proposing instead solid, opaque buildings made of rooms that offered 'enveloping, static spaces exquisitely scaled to the human body', thus reflecting a social vision at personal, individual scale.[84] Kahn's aim, argues Goldhagen, was for buildings symbolic of community identity, which could also foster 'agency and individual participation', and where the individual would feel she stood 'in a

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[76] Mary McLeod, 'Modernism', in Iain Borden, Murray Fraser, Barbara Penner, eds, *Forty Ways to Think About Architecture: Architectural History and Theory Today* (London: Wiley, 2014), 186.

[77] McLeod, 'Modernism', 186.

[78] McLeod, 'Modernism', 187, 189-190.

[79] Goldhagen, 'Reconceptualizing the Modern', 301.

[80] Goldhagen, 'Reconceptualizing the Modern', 306-307. See also Goldhagen, *Kahn's Situated Modernism*, 199-215.

[81] See Mark Wigley, *Constant's New Babylon: The hyper-architecture of desire* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1998), 9-16.

[82] Goldhagen, *Kahn's Situated Modernism*, n.2 265.

[83] Goldhagen, *Kahn's Situated Modernism*, 201-202.

[84] Goldhagen, *Kahn's Situated Modernism*, 203.

constructed object' made for a specific place and time. Ultimately Kahn's situated modernism would effect social and individual improvement by involving 'bodily, tactile, phenomenological' connections between user and building, to conceive 'the situated person, defined in both social and phenomenological terms.'[85] Yet Kahn's ideal, while emphasising bodily connection to architecture, seems to neglect possibilities of involvement with landscape, while also gambling on the difficulty of realising a multi-layered social idealism through building.

In 'Something to talk about' (2005) Goldhagen questions core assumptions of modernist historiography and argues that modernist architecture, enacted as a discourse of diverse approaches and expressive forms rather than as a singular operation or homogeneous 'style', was a way of dealing with modernity itself.[86] Goldhagen includes phenomenology in the work of modernist historians (Hitchcock, Pevsner) and their methods, noting also St John Wilson's 'other tradition' proposals,[87] and Frampton's development of the idea of 'critical regionalism'.[88] Goldhagen finds a heterogeneity of multiple discourses, rather than a narrow modernist style, in the methods of the modernist architects, and notes phenomenology as a conceptual method for both Eileen Gray (1878-1976) and Aalto.[89]

Goldhagen notes Gray's and Le Corbusier's separate missions to develop an architecture 'that accommodated the needs of a new era and took a position in modern life'; moreover, 'each sought to do so by creating an enmeshed relationship between the user and the site.'[90] Goldhagen points out that Le Corbusier (1887-1965) emphasised views and perspectives, while Gray designed in a 'straightforward manner ... less visually than phenomenologically, accommodating the movements and patterns of daily rituals.'[91] In Gray's work, involving 'enmeshed' relations between people and site, and accommodation of everyday life, can be seen a partial template for seeing Aalto's emergent phenomenology and its involvement of people with landscape through the medium of architecture.

2.1.6 Key studies of Aalto

Certain historical works on Aalto offer a basic resource for the present study, introducing Aalto and his work, and balancing objective description with critical opinion. These works frame a multifaceted picture of Aalto the architect, artist, and

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85 Goldhagen, *Kahn's Situated Modernism*, 203.

86 Sarah Williams Goldhagen, 'Something to Talk About: Modernism, Discourse, Style', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 64, no.2 (2005): 144-167.

87 Colin St John Wilson, *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture: The Uncompleted Project* (London: Academy Editions, 1995).

88 Kenneth Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance', in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983).

89 Goldhagen, 'Something to Talk About': 150.

90 Goldhagen, 'Something to Talk About': 150.

91 Goldhagen, 'Something to Talk About': 150-151.

thinker whose work is examined in this investigation of landscape and phenomenology in architecture.

Key works include the following books and articles, a number associated with an upsurge of historical interest around the Aalto birth centenary of 1998: Richard Weston, *Alvar Aalto* (1995);[92] William J.R. Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes' (1998);[93] Kenneth Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto' (1998);[94] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image' (1998);[95] Marc Treib, 'Aalto's Nature' (1998);[96] Nicholas Ray, *Alvar Aalto* (2005);[97] Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet' (2008);[98] Mateo Kries and Jochen Eisenbrand, *Alvar Aalto: Second Nature* (2014);[99] and McCarter, *Aalto* (2014).[100]

It becomes apparent that 'definitive' works of criticism or history, focused on 'great men' and similarly 'great works', are not being compiled as they were until around the Aalto birth centenary in 1998, at the end of the twentieth century. Instead, in more recent works such as Cohen's *Atlas of Modern Landscapes* (2013) and Weston's *Materials, Form and Architecture* (2013), a singular thematic notion, of, for example, 'landscape' or 'materiality', establishes a broader study without either necessarily eulogising great individuals and works, or following a pre-ordained historical or biographical 'narrative'.[101]

More recently, Kries and Eisenbrand's *Alvar Aalto: Second Nature*, an exhibition-related collection of essays, interviews and commissioned photographs, offers diverse perspectives and illustrations of Aalto's work, perhaps following the example of Ursprung's edited study of the work of Herzog & de Meuron, *Natural Histories* (2002).[102] Thus the present study does not purport to make a broad introduction of Aalto or his work; it is not a hagiography of a 'great artist' or architectural 'masterpieces', nor is it a chronological biography or timeline of works. Instead, it aims to *organise* by historical themes, and to *investigate* by reference to theoretical concepts. Its purpose is to look more closely, to consider a building, a drawing, or a wall or stair element, to complement and extend existing commentary on Aalto's work, whether renowned, obscure or even posthumous. The ultimate strategy of the present work is to investigate landscape in architecture through a phenomenological study that looks closely at selected aspects and examples of Aalto's work, exploiting and reflecting on the attention that Aalto appears to have invested in relating his

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[92] Richard Weston, *Alvar Aalto* (London: Phaidon, 1995).
[93] William J.R. Curtis, 'Alvar Aalto: Mythic Landscapes', *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 315 (1998): 4-19.
[94] Frampton, ''The Legacy of Alvar Aalto'.
[95] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', *Journal of Architecture* 3, no.4 (1998): 289-299.
[96] Marc Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', in Reed, *Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism*.
[97] Nicholas Ray, *Alvar Aalto* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005).
[98] Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet'.
[99] Mateo Kries and Jochen Eisenbrand, eds, *Alvar Aalto: Second Nature* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2014).
[100] McCarter, *Aalto*.
[101] Jean-Louis Cohen, ed., *Le Corbusier: An Atlas of Modern Landscapes* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013); Weston, *Materials*.
[102] Philip Ursprung, ed., *Herzog and de Meuron: Natural Histories* (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture / Lars Müller Publishers, 2002).

users and visitors to landscape and the natural world through his minutely observed and finished architecture.

The works of the Aalto literature noted here offer a resource both for basic enquiry and for questioning relations between architecture and landscape. Yet considered in terms of the three themes of the present study, White, Waves and Ruins, historians and critics rarely acknowledge the whiteness and the diverse haptic or visual states of snow as a conceptual resource for Aalto; they seem only marginally interested in the recurrence, variety and potential significances of wave-forms in Aalto's work; while writers making superficial or passing architectural references to Aalto's 'ruins' remain generally oblivious to an academic and popular 'ruin culture' in the humanities.[103]

In response the present study argues for recognition of landscape in architectural thinking. It installs the whiteness of the Finnish winter, with its fogs, darkness and snow, as a constant ephemeral factor in landscape conception, creation and experience. It includes as landscape the diverse wave-forms of the natural world, from mountains to waves, rippled waters and shivering shadows. And it considers how the physical or metaphorical ruination of architecture opens it to the landscape, to the ravages and liberties of natural agency, and to human consciousness of time and mortality.

2.1.7 Modernism and biology: Moholy-Nagy and Aalto

In adapting to the emergent modernism in architecture and modernity in European culture, Aalto was greatly influenced by Hungarian artist, designer and Bauhaus educator László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946), his close friend from their meeting in 1929 until Moholy-Nagy's death in 1946. Through the 1930s, the 'years of dry Rationalism and reactionary public architecture', Aalto learned to balance his utopian social realism with 'nature lyricism and human emotion', through his contact with the energetic Moholy-Nagy, whose thinking he developed into his architecture, using the idea of biological nature as a model for architectural creation, and through 'a new concept of open space'.[104] Aalto linked his 1930s experiments in wood and other materials to Finnish aestheticist Yrjo Hirn's idea of play, but Schildt stresses the Bauhaus influence of Josef Albers and Moholy-Nagy.[105]

Biology, as theorised in the work of Austro-Hungarian botanist and philosopher Raoul Francé (1874-1943), was a fundamental element of Moholy-Nagy's philosophy. Moholy-Nagy embraced Francé's thinking on biology, botany and 'biotechnical science',[106] and sought to unify biotechnics, human psychology and space experience in architecture, perceived through sight, hearing, equilibrium and

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[103] See for example: Brian Dillon, ed., *Ruins* (Cambridge, MA; London: Whitechapel Gallery / The MIT Press, 2011); Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, eds, *Ruins of Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

[104] Schildt, *Decisive Years*, 77-78.

[105] Schildt, *Decisive Years*, 77-78.

[106] See Raoul Francé, *Plants as Inventors* (New York: Boni, 1923).

movement, in his Bauhaus teaching guide, *von material zu architektur* (*The New Vision*, 1929).[107] Moholy-Nagy argues for 'the biological pure and simple' as the guiding principle for architecture,[108] stressing an experiential understanding of materials, and regarding architecture as the medium of 'space creation', wherein spatial experience, of 'a life *in* space', is viewed as a psychological necessity.[109]

From Moholy-Nagy's concepts of a biological modern architecture Aalto could derive a largely unacknowledged theoretical underpinning from around 1930, merging natural and biological principles and combining human senses and psychology with technologised manufacture of materials, all leavened by the energies of modern art. Moholy-Nagy's thinking offered a theoretical dissent that Aalto could draw on selectively to formulate his heterodox modernism, based in biological, psychological and spatial methods, counter to the abstract geometrical principles and romanticised views of nature of Le Corbusier, Mies and Gropius. Schildt emphasises that Aalto never lost his 'forest voice', that of 'the "backwoodsman" that always remained a part of him'.[110] Thus Aalto's earlier sense of nature and Finnish landscape remained as a creative reserve to balance the contemporary artistic impulses absorbed from the cosmopolitan energies of his friend Moholy-Nagy.[111]

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[107] László Moholy-Nagy, *von material zu architektur* / *The New Vision*, (New York: Wittenborn, 1946). See also Schildt, 'The precepts of Moholy-Nagy', in *Decisive Years*, 219-221.

[108] Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision*, 63.

[109] Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision*, 59-60.

[110] Schildt, 'The precepts of Moholy-Nagy', in *Decisive Years*, 221.

[111] See also Oliver A.I. Botar, 'The Origins of László Moholy-Nagy's Biocentric Constructivism', in Eduardo Kac, ed., *Signs of life: Bio art and beyond* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2007); Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, 'Symbolic Imageries: Alvar Aalto's Encounters with Modern Art', and Jochen Eisenbrand, 'New Vision, New Spatial Concepts and the Aesthetics of the Avant-garde', both in Kries and Eisenbrand, *Alvar Aalto: Second Nature*; Marianna Charitonidou, 'László Moholy-Nagy and Alvar Aalto's Connections Between Biotechnik and Umwelt', *Enquiry. The ARCC Journal for Architectural Research* 17, no.1 (2020): 28-46.

2.2 HISTORY: Towards historical themes: White, Waves, Ruins

2.2.1 Architectural history: Aalto and modernism

Jormakka, Gargus and Graf in *The Use and Abuse of Paper* (1999) indicate Aalto's position in architectural modernism, while also questioning a straightforward acceptance of his status of modernist outsider:

> The [1998] centenary of Alvar Aalto's birth brought with it a wealth of new publications but few new approaches to understanding his work. For the most part, the new publications continued to celebrate Aalto as "the secret opponent within the Modern Movement," whose architecture is Finnish, human, democratic, anarchist, sensitive to site, natural, organic, free-form, synthetic, random, and intuitive. This canonical description is applied to almost every one of Aalto's works without much scrutiny.[112]

This critique includes potential themes for selecting and arranging Aalto's work for investigation, including Nordic, social, political, 'natural' and 'intuitive' framings of his oeuvre. Noting Jormakka, Gargus and Graf's critical skepticism towards conventional historical narratives, this section outlines this oppositional framing of Aalto and his architecture.

In three early studies of Aalto, by historians George Baird, William C. Miller, and Malcolm Quantrill, Aalto emerges as a complex modernist practitioner engaged with problems of time, materiality, growth, form, nature, history and landscape.

Baird in *Alvar Aalto* (1971) selects three Aalto themes – ruins, balustrades, and politics – 'to take three rather particular soundings of Aalto's as yet unexplored depth.'[113] Baird contends that Aalto's buildings after Paimio Sanatorium (1929-33) '*give the impression of having been aged in advance* ... are metaphors of ruins',[114] evident in Aalto's preference for brick and stone rather than concrete and steel in his buildings after the Paimio Sanatorium project. Baird notes the vulnerability to time of early Modernist architecture, where the buildings were 'compared to boats; it turned out that it was the kind of care customarily extended to boats that they required for themselves.'[115] Aalto's building *with* time, rather than to defy time and change, 'seems almost deliberately intended to save his work from time's painful ravages.'[116]

Baird also observes that Aalto's time-friendly buildings are not softened by plant materials but are rather overrun by 'extraordinary outgrowths of planting' at odds with the built form.[117] The overgrowing greenery is read as aggressive and disharmonious: 'the built-form and the planting represent a fundamental and ironic antagonism. It is as though the final victory of nature over the vulnerable creations of

[112] Kari Jormakka, Jacqueline Gargus, Douglas Graf, *The Use and Abuse of Paper: Essays on Alvar Aalto,* Datutop 20 (Tampere: Tampere University of Technology, 1999): 9.
[113] George Baird, *Alvar Aalto*, photographs by Yukio Futagawa (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 11.
[114] Baird, *Alvar Aalto,* 12.
[115] Baird, *Alvar Aalto,* 12.
[116] Baird, *Alvar Aalto,* 12.
[117] Baird, *Alvar Aalto,* 12.

mankind had already been conceded in Aalto's works at their inception.'[118] The presence of overgrown vegetation, inside and out of Aalto's buildings, adds to the perception of a 'ruined' quality in his work.

Miller in 'Alvar Aalto: A Thematic Analysis' (1979) discerns a recurrent undulating line in Aalto's curved walls and surfaces, a detached wall, in fan plans for high-rise apartments, in libraries, and in Vuoksenniska Church, Imatra (1958): 'an undulating flowing ensemble ... a resolved rhythmic whole'.[119] Aalto's curves have four sources: the Finnish landscape; Finnish vernacular architecture; specifics of program, function or context; and Aalto's own design process.[120] Miller notes the Finnish landscape as 'a direct source and a metaphor for the undulating surface',[121] an idea supported by Giedion in *Space, Time and Architecture*.[122]

Miller observes 'the power of the Finnish landscape; the lakes, the forests, the logs on the rivers and mill ponds all contain the abstract quality of the undulating surface', yet adding testily that the Finnish landscape 'has for too long been the primary source for most writers' who write of Aalto's curves.[123] Miller concludes by claiming that 'the truth about Aalto, the architect, is to be found in his buildings.'[124] The present study offers an extended refutation of Miller's closing remark, arguing that part of Aalto's significance lies in the involvement of his buildings with their urban, social and landscape contexts.

Quantrill in *Alvar Aalto: A Critical Study* (1983) locates Aalto's work within both a Scandinavian architectural tradition and a European urban tradition that embraces the Mannerism of Michelangelo and Borromini.[125] Quantrill observes an affinity with nature shared by Aalto and Borromini,[126] and claims that 'the architects of both the High Gothic and Baroque embodied the vocabulary of the natural landscape into their structures.'[127] Quantrill notes also that for Aalto the 'importance of Nature as our guide and teacher, our natural resource for inspiration,' remained a constant theme.[128]

These earlier interpretations by Baird, Miller, and Quantrill testify to aspects of Aalto's evident 'difference' from mainstream modernism, and frame the following review of themes of White, Waves and Ruins in literature on Aalto's architecture.

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[118] Baird, *Alvar Aalto,* 13.
[119] William C. Miller, 'Alvar Aalto: A Thematic Analysis', *Oz* 1 (1979): 9.
[120] Miller, 'A Thematic Analysis': 8.
[121] Miller, 'A Thematic Analysis': 9.
[122] Miller, 'A Thematic Analysis': 9. Cites Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, 620, 640.
[123] Miller, 'A Thematic Analysis': 9.
[124] Miller, 'A Thematic Analysis': 16.
[125] Malcolm Quantrill, *Alvar Aalto: A Critical Study* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1989).
[126] In an endnote Quantrill connects Aalto and the Baroque: 'Elissa Aalto's remark that her husband was particularly interested in the work of Francesco Borromini, made during a conversation with the author in Helsinki in February 1978.' Quantrill, *A Critical Study*, 273-274.
[127] Quantrill, *A Critical Study*, 7.
[128] Quantrill, *A Critical Study*, 7.

2.2.2 White

Herman Melville famously writes of ‘a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows’, conjured by the thought of an indeterminate absence of colour in the whiteness of the great sperm whale in *Moby Dick* (1851):

> Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a colour as the visible absence of colour; and at the same time the concrete of all colours; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows – a colourless, all-colour of atheism from which we shrink?[129]

However, there appears to be a limited critical literature of white as a colour or non-colour in cultural or art studies, nor a ‘white studies’ in painting or architecture to rival the ‘ruin studies’ devoted to abandoned or destroyed industrial, military, and other architecture of the early 2000s (noted below).[130] White colour is noted as a literary element in David Batchelor’s *Chromophobia* (2000),[131] and as a phenomenon of design culture by Kenya Hara in *White* (2007).[132] On a different discursive level, addressing issues of social justice beyond the scope of the present study, the phenomenon of ‘whiteness’ underlies an emergent social / cultural / political critique of racialised white European colonialism, violence and bigotry, as seen in the work of Frantz Fanon,[133] bell hooks,[134] Toni Morrison,[135] Richard Dyer,[136] Sara Ahmed,[137] and others.[138]

In an artistic, cultural sense, White carries conceptual, visual and material significance for artists, designers and craftspeople. British ceramicist Edmund de Waal writes in 2015 of white:

> White is aura. White is a staging post to look at the world from. White is not neutral; it forces other colours to reveal themselves. It moralises – it is clean when nothing else is clean, it is light when most things are heavy. It is about impossibility. Think of *Moby Dick* and Captain Ahab, the question crying out, “What is this thing of whiteness?” White is a place to begin and a place to end.

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[129] Herman Melville, ‘The Whiteness Of The Whale’, in *Moby Dick* (London: Harper, 2010), 200-201.

[130] Brian Dillon, ed., *Ruins* (Cambridge, MA; London: Whitechapel Gallery / The MIT Press, 2011).

[131] David Batchelor, ‘Whitescapes’, on Melville, *Moby Dick*, and Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899), in *Chromophobia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 6-19.

[132] Kenya Hara, *White* (Baden: Lars Müller, 2007).

[133] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986).

[134] bell hooks, ‘Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination’, in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 165-178.

[135] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[136] Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997).

[137] Sara Ahmed, ‘A Phenomenology of Whiteness’, *Feminist Theory* 8, no.2 (2007): 149-168.

[138] See for example Peter Kolchin, ‘Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America’, *The Journal of American History* 89, no.1 (2002): 154-173.

> I have spent my life thinking about white.[139]

De Waal works in porcelain and produces writings and art installations around themes of whiteness, stillness, time, and silence. He writes of the feeling of working a piece of white porcelain clay: 'It feels endless. You feel it will get thinner and thinner until it is as thin as gold leaf and lifts into the air. And it feels clean. Your hands feel cleaner after you have used it. It feels white. By which I mean it is full of anticipation, of possibility.'[140] This materiality of white clay, the feeling of making, its impressionability, its cleanness, its potentiality, is also like the materiality of white. Yet porcelain for de Waal is not just like white, but is itself a definitive white matter: 'It is a material that records every movement of thinking, every change of thought ... It is white, returning to white.'[141]

Modernism is associated, as a style, with white paint and the white painting of buildings. Le Corbusier wrote in 1925 of the longstanding 'moral' qualities of white painted buildings:

> Whitewash has been associated with human habitation since the birth of mankind. Stones are burnt, crushed and thinned with water – and the walls take on the purest white, an extraordinary and beautiful white.
>
> If the house is all white, the outline of things stands out from it without any possibility of mistake; their volume shows clearly; their colour is distinct. The white of whitewash is absolute, everything stands out from it and is recorded absolutely, black on white: it is honest and dependable.[142]

Aalto wrote in homage to Le Corbusier that 'his spirit sprung from classical roots, deriving its strength from the distinctive Mediterranean character, which formed a counterbalance to his versatile work, difficult as that work was owing to his combative position'.[143] The whiteness of early modernism that sprang partly from Le Corbusier's polemical example is itself a transformative metaphorical 'whitewash' where simply burnt stones and water can bridge from the atavistic Mediterranean to the 'absolute' authority of the modern white surface.

[139] Edmund de Waal, 'White: A project', *RA Magazine* (2015), 71.
[140] Edmund de Waal, *The White Road* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), 5.
[141] de Waal, *The White Road*, 5.
[142] Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today*, trans. James I. Dunnett (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 190.
[143] Alvar Aalto, 'Le Corbusier' (1965), in *Own Words*, 248.

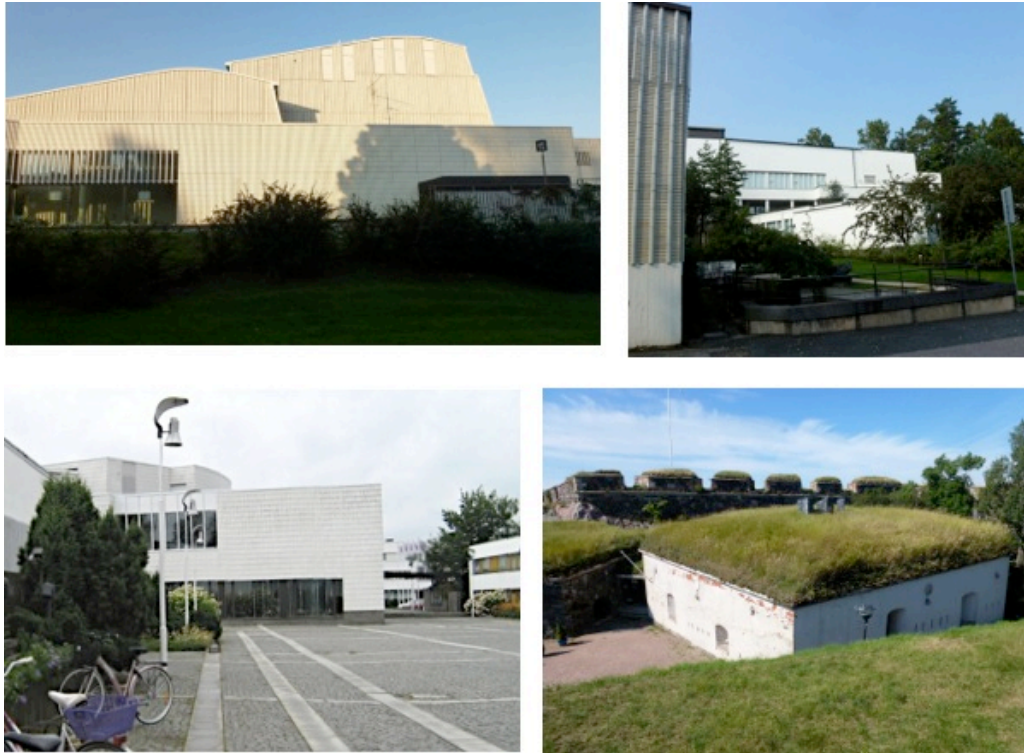

Figure 2.1 AALTO White buildings (from lower left): Seinäjoki Theatre, Jyväskylä Theatre, Museum of Central Finland; Suomenlinna, Helsinki (c.1750)
Photographs by John Roberts, 2008, 2011

White occupies a prominent position both in the Finnish landscape of Aalto's world and in critical commentary on his work. White is commonly abundant in the Finnish natural world, in foams, rapids, clouds, fogs, snow and ice, in fungi, fur and feathers, shells and birch bark. White is found similarly throughout Aalto's architecture (Fig.2.1), in whitewashed outer walls, painted towers and painted concrete ceilings, painted steel fittings, in marble and ceramic claddings, and in Aalto's paintings.

Yet white is barely mentioned in critical discourse on Aalto, outside of description and stylistic categorisation of modern 'white' architecture. As a key example, Mark Wigley in *White Walls, Designer Dresses* (1995) follows Adolf Loos's and Le Corbusier's polemical and sexualised interests in women's fashion, disregards Aalto's work entirely, footnoting the young Aalto only for his bumptious dress sense in the early 1920s.[144]

While Wigley in 'Le Corbusier and the Emperor's New Paint' (1990)[145] remarks at length on the omission or erasure of the question of white and whiteness from modern histories, in *White Walls* he notes historian Henry Russell Hitchcock's defense of the smooth white architectural surface, and that Hitchcock and Phillip Johnson's *The International Style* 'turns on a theory of surface.'[146] Wigley sees the

[144] Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 1995), 355, n.152 414.
[145] Mark Wigley, 'Architecture and Philosophy: Le Corbusier and the Emperor's New Paint', *Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts*, Philosophy & Architecture (1990): n.4 93.
[146] Wigley, *White Walls,* 349.

diminution of the discourse between architecture and fashion in Hitchcock's emphasis after 1932 on the smooth, white, continuous architectural surface at the discursive expense of clothing and colour: 'With the success of white in practice, white gradually fades away from the historiography.'[147] Even further, in Pevsner's and Giedion's 'monumental histories', 'neither colour nor white make an appearance ... The argument about surface can be reproduced while overlooking the colour of the surface.'[148] Beyond Wigley, the polymorphic whiteness of Aalto's work remains to be observed, charted, and reflected on.

More recently Italian-American visual arts theorist Giuliana Bruno reviews surfaces and screens in 'visual space' in art and architecture, in a context of their materiality, a turn that 'enhances the exploration of the phenomenal and the sensible worlds, including attention to haptic matters such as texturality – the visual fabric and the "feel" of spatial phenomena.'[149] With this 'material turn' comes a steady implication of hapticity, texture, the senses, and thus phenomenology, concerning the surface and the screen. Bruno also widens her discourse of surface to include space, place and concepts or metaphors of landscape, suggesting that the distance between the visual screen and the conceptual 'landscape' may be no more than the thin pellicle of space between the built surface and the living landscape of foliage, slope and sunlight. [150]

Figure 2.2 CEZANNE *Still Life with Carafe, Bottle and Fruit*
Source: Princeton University Art Museum

Writing on post-Impressionist painter Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), critic Yve-Alain Bois observes the literally underlying presence of white in the 'molecular process' of his painting method: 'His works are geologically constructed of layers, or rather of levels, of skeins of molecules more or less loose, each skein responding both to the one that precedes it and to the whiteness of the support.'[151] Bois also mentions 'the

[147] Wigley, *White Walls,* 352.
[148] Wigley, *White Walls,* 352.
[149] Giuliana Bruno, in David Joselit, Carrie Lambert-Beatty, and Hal Foster, eds, 'A Questionnaire on Materialisms', *October* 155 (2016): 14-15.
[150] Giuliana Bruno, *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 135-137.
[151] Yve-Alain Bois, trans. Rosalind Krauss, 'Cézanne: Words and Deeds', *October* 84 (1998): 39.

omnipresence of the whites' in Cézanne's paintings, seeing white as the 'support' or background of the painting in the sense that 'the major difference between the space of drawing and that of painting concerns the nature of the support.' [152] This ubiquity of white in Cézanne can be seen in *Still Life with Carafe, Bottle and Fruit* (1906) (Fig.2.2). Bois emphasises Cézanne's apparent wish 'to splice vision and touch together at the very moment when the two sensory fields were in the process of splitting apart: in some way to invent a tactile vision.'[153] This white ground fulfils a cubist role but is also part of Cézanne's goal 'to paint perception itself'.[154]

The presence of white in Aalto's work seems to have landscape-related roots in the long Finnish winters, with their dominant weather phenomena of snow, ice, fog, short days of weak sun, and long dark nights. From youth to late in life Aalto painted white paintings as though meditating on the connections between solid, fluid and void in natural winter space. In these conditions snow and reduced light can induce a sense of whiteout, a perceptual phenomenon largely unexplored in the literature, suggested by Aalto's dressing buildings in white as though they were clad in winter plumage or pelage like arctic fox and ptarmigan (as noted in chapter 3), or loomed like polar bears in the dimensionless winter daylight.

2.2.3 Waves

While there appears to be little architectural literature relating building form to waves, curves, mountains or landform generally, outside of architecture this question of the form or morphology of landscape appears as a topic of cultural geography, whose task, geographer John Wylie notes, includes describing the morphology of landscape as terrain or topography: the 'shape, form and structure ... of a given landscape, and in so doing to reveal the ... human cultures that had inhabited and moulded it.'[155] Historian David Leatherbarrow has coined his concept of 'topography' to discuss landscape and terrain in architectural contexts, seeking to understand both architecture and landscape architecture as 'topographic arts', in a rapport or *rapprochement* between landscape and architecture.[156] He stresses the qualities of this topography, including 'its horizontal character, its mosaic heterogeneity or contrariness, its recessiveness, nonformality, and its full temporality',[157] suggesting a hermetic discourse more applicable in the settings of Leatherbarrow's architectural thinking, providing a background of conceptually dramatic, engaging, and 'surprising' discourses against which architecture might be viewed.[158]

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[152] Bois, 'Cézanne': 42.

[153] Bois, 'Cézanne': 37.

[154] Bois, 'Cézanne': 43.

[155] John Wylie, *Landscape* (London: Routledge, 2007), 23.

[156] David Leatherbarrow, *Topographical Stories: Studies in Landscape and Architecture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

[157] David Leatherbarrow, 'Topographical Premises', *Journal of Architectural Education* 57, no.3, Landscape and Architecture (2004): 72.

[158] Leatherbarrow, 'Topographical Premises': 73.

Figure 2.3 AALTO Wave-form ceilings
Source: Ruusuvuori and Pallasmaa, *Alvar Aalto 1898-1976*

The theme of Waves in Aalto's work is observed by a number of historians. As a visual testament to the presence of wave-forms in Aalto's work, the ceilings of four Aalto works are illustrated in Ruusuvuori's catalogue (Fig.2.3).[159] Clearly these ceilings, and the elaborate design and construction work entailed in their making, have a compound purpose, relating in form and details to practicalities of light or acoustics, to generation of mood through materiality and finish, and perhaps to more abstruse ideals of myth or symbolism of natural form.

In the present context these ceiling forms need to be considered in terms of landscape, not just as nature-like forms but as elements derived from the viewed and sensed phenomena of the world outside and beyond the building. American architect Randall Ott refers to the ceilings of old Finnish church ceilings to explain the attention that Aalto gave over decades to his modern yet 'a-tectonic' ceilings from Viipuri to Vuoksenniska, working against modernist precepts to transform modernism from its supposed *diktat* of clear structure to a more expressive, less constrained mode of building.[160] While the play between surface and structure in Aalto's ceilings is noted though not fully explored by Ott, his study of regional precedent in the construction and interiors of old Finnish churches gives a historical and material base for exploring surfaces, experience and landscape in Aalto's works.

[159] Aarno Ruusuvuori and Juhani Pallasmaa, eds, *Alvar Aalto 1898-1976* (Helsinki: Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1978), 112. 'Acoustical ceilings', from top left: Viipuri Library (1935), Vuoksenniska Church (1958), Finlandia Hall (1971), Insinöörtalo office building, Helsinki (1952).

[160] Randall Ott, 'Surface Versus Structure: Alvar Aalto and the Finnish Wooden Churches', 84th ACSA Annual Meeting (1998): 511-521.

2.2.4 Ruins

The theme of Ruins in Aalto's work is observed by a number of historians including Quantrill, Baird, Menin and Samuel, and Weston.[161] Colquhoun notes the compositional strategy through which Aalto makes and unmakes built forms:

> A number of functions are classified into a closed set, each of which is partially opened up again into the neighbouring set or into the core itself. This 'peeling away' of forms is an important ingredient of Aalto's work: the *subtraction* of forms is as important as their addition or juxtaposition.
> This characteristic leads to the extraordinary impression that parts of Aalto's buildings are, in fact, ruins.[162]

Seen as surprising, extraordinary architectural elements made by a mildly destructive, ruinous process, ruin images in Aalto's work combine form, materiality, surface, and the temporality of the green growth of the living natural world, to create moods and feelings from architecture.

Finnish architect and theorist Juhani Pallasmaa argues that matter can be more important and evocative than modern form in creating atmosphere in an architectural setting. He notes Aalto's work, along with that of Sigurd Lewerentz, Hans Scharoun and E.G. Asplund, all included in St John Wilson's 'other tradition' of modernism,[163] as 'highly atmospheric', arguing that 'Ruination, destruction, weathering and wear strengthen the atmospheric impact of architecture.'[164]

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[161] See Quantrill, *A Critical Study*; Baird, *Alvar Aalto;* Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*; Weston, *Alvar Aalto*.

[162] Alan Colquhoun, 'Alvar Aalto: Type versus Function' (1976), in *Essays in Architectural Criticism: Modern Architecture and Historical* Change (Cambridge, MA; London, UK: The MIT Press, 1981), 78.

[163] St John Wilson, *The Other Tradition*.

[164] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Space, place and atmosphere', in Christian Borch, ed., *Architectural Atmospheres: On the Experience and Politics of Architecture* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2014), 35.

Figure 2.4 AALTO Ruins: (from top left) Aalto Atelier; Jyväskylä Main Building, side elevation, campus entry; Otaniemi University Library
Photographs by John Roberts, 2008, 2011

A consequence of ruin images in modernism can be a nostalgia or melancholy, as Pallasmaa proposes in 'Logic of the Image' (1998), referring to Aalto: 'A distinctive device of Aalto's to capture the sense of time is his repeated use of the ruin image. He utilises images of ruins to evoke a melancholic experience of the past, and of the inevitability of erosion and decay'[165] (Fig.2.4). A mood of melancholy can be attached to ruins, particularly ruined houses, notes Pallasmaa in 'Identity, Intimacy and Domicile' (1994), seeing 'a strange melancholy' in abandoned dwellings, 'a melancholy that reveals traces and scars of intimate lives to the public gaze. The remains of foundations or the hearth of a ruined or burned house, half buried in the forest grass, are touching in their melancholy.'[166]

Writing on ruins in the context of Frank Lloyd Wright's search for monumentality and 'timelessness' at Taliesin West (1938-49), historian Neil Levine notes that the modern architectural ruin may stand for both reversion and regeneration, and that the ruin can embody, as in Mircea Eliade's thinking, principles of 'archetype' and 'repetition', central to 'the cyclical character of mythic thought'.[167] Hence a mythic dimension may be observed in modern architectural ideas of ruins.

[165] Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', 294.

[166] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Identity, Intimacy and Domicile: Notes on the Phenomenology of Home' (1994), in *Encounters: Architectural Essays*, ed. Peter MacKeith (Helsinki: Rakennustieto Oy, 2005), 117.

[167] Neil Levine, *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 295. Reference is to Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper, 1959).

2.3 THEORY: Towards Phenomenology

2.3.1 Phenomenology: Interdisciplinary introduction

> Our everyday life-world consists of concrete "phenomena". It consists of people, of animals, of flowers, trees and forests, of stone, earth, wood and water, of towns, streets and houses, doors, windows and furniture. And it consists of sun, moon and stars, of drifting clouds, of night and day and changing seasons. But it also comprises more intangible phenomena such as feelings. This is what is "given", this is the "content" of our existence.[168]
>
> Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci* (1980)

> ... architecture is a discipline seeking self-definition, and for that self-definition it looks outside of itself, to see what others say about it. This, I would argue, is a very good and healthy thing.[169]
>
> Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside* (2000)

It should be noted that phenomenology is not based in architecture, but rather in the field of philosophy, in the work of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. The relation, possibly the translation, of philosophy into architecture is occasionally attempted by architects; the outstanding success of this process seems to be Norberg-Schulz who from the 1960s to the 1990s developed a series of evolving perspectives on phenomenological approaches to architecture, particularly in *Genius Loci*.[170]

Philosopher Elizabeth Grosz writes in *Architecture from the Outside* (2000) that architecture habitually looks beyond its own disciplinary boundaries to define its identity and to clarify its thinking:

> What's interesting about architecture is that it has always been unsure as to where to position itself and its own identity as a discipline: it is itself internally divided about whether it is a science, a technological discipline, or a mode of art or aesthetic production ... Architecture is a discipline seeking self-definition, and for that self-definition it looks outside of itself, to see what others say about it.[171]

Following Grosz's proposition, while this study looks largely within architectural history, tempered with art history and twentieth century modernism, in theoretical terms it looks both within and beyond architecture for its sources. Key thinkers on phenomenology of place, atmosphere and embodiment tend not to look to architecture for sources and beginnings. However, a number of writers have written on or into architecture, or to contextualise their thinking and expand its base of

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[168] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 6.

[169] Elizabeth Grosz, 'Embodying Space' in *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2001), 4-5.

[170] See Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space & Architecture* (New York: Praeger, 1971); Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci.*

[171] Grosz, 'Embodying Space', 4-5.

reference. Contemporary scholars from fields such as anthropology and archaeology (Ingold, Edensor), philosophy (Grosz, Harries), art history (Bois), literature (Mitchell, Harrison), along with philosophers writing on place (Casey, Malpas), on atmosphere (Böhme, Griffero), and on embodiment (Johnson, Dreyfus), have all focused part of their thinking on problems of architecture.

Thus a literature of phenomenology in architecture can be identified, written from extra-disciplinary perspectives more than from architecture alone. Selected writers from architecture, such as Norberg-Schulz, Pallasmaa, and Pérez-Gómez, along with Frampton, St John Wilson, Rasmussen, Vesely, Scully, Duany, Weston, write from a position that can be described as phenomenological, though only the first three overtly identify as phenomenologists, while the others may hesitate to be associated with the 'architectural phenomenology' of Norberg-Schulz, possibly due to connections with non-architecture areas such as landscape and geography which threaten architecture's modern autonomy with hybridised interdisciplinary thinking.

The present study builds partly on the critical work of architectural theorist-historians such as Frampton and Pallasmaa, who have since the 1980s cautioned architectural praxis and criticism against its uncritical acceptance of contemporary power structures and ideologies, which they frame as both destructive of the natural world and largely oblivious to human cultural principles.[172]

In a more clearly theoretical way, and fundamentally for the present study, the architectural phenomenology initiated by Norwegian architect and theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz (1926-2000) is set out in 'The Phenomenon of Place' (1976), where he urges a 'return to things' over abstract thought and 'mental constructions'.[173] The theorizing of Norberg-Schulz is based in Heidegger's essay 'Building Dwelling Thinking' (1966),[174] and also in Husserl's phenomenology, summarised as a 'systematic investigation of consciousness and its objects'.[175] Arguing that place refers to more than location, Norberg-Schulz differentiates his philosophical approach from mentally constructed approaches, referring instead to an understanding of natural places: 'Various attempts at a description of natural places are offered by current literature on "landscape",' he notes, but 'again we find that the usual approach is too abstract, being based on "functional" or perhaps "visual" considerations.' He adds a decisive rejoinder as a way out of this impasse: 'Again we must turn to philosophy for help.'[176] Thus Norberg-Schulz looks to philosophy, over the functional-visual approach of Appleton's prospect-refuge theory, originally put

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172 See for example: Kenneth Frampton, 'Intimations of Tactility: Excerpts from a Fragmentary Polemic', *Artforum* 19, no.7 (1981): 52-58; Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism'; Juhani Pallasmaa, 'The Geometry of Feeling: A Look at the Phenomenology of Architecture' (1986), in Nesbitt, *Theorizing*; Juhani Pallasmaa, 'An architecture of imagery: Conception and experience in Alvar Aalto's architecture', in Ben Farmer and Hentie Louw, eds, *Companion to Contemporary Architectural Thought* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993).

173 Christian Norberg-Schulz, 'The Phenomenon of Place' (1976), in Nesbitt, *Theorizing*, 412.

174 Martin Heidegger, trans. Albert Hofstadter, 'Building Dwelling Thinking' (1954), in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

175 Nesbitt, Introduction, 29.

176 Norberg-Schulz, 'Phenomenon of Place', 417.

forward in 1975 as a framework for evaluating aesthetic preference in landscape painting.[177]

Norberg-Schulz, setting out his architectural phenomenology, describes phenomena of place as the ‘content’ of human existence in terms of concrete phenomena such as people, animals, buildings and landscape, along with ‘intangible phenomena’ of feelings.[178] Norberg-Schulz remarks, following Heidegger, ‘An inhabited landscape obviously is a *known* landscape ... This landscape is brought close to us by the buildings, or in other words, the landscape is revealed as what it is in truth.’ Norberg-Schulz emphasises landscape, as ‘a space where human life takes place. It is therefore not a mathematical, isomorphic space but a “lived space” between earth and sky.’[179]

Notably, Norberg-Schulz consistently rejects a visual view of landscape, instead choosing one of participation, habitation and encounter. In this he seems close to philosopher Edward S. Casey’s more directly carnal view that an inhabitant’s ‘lived body’ may be at stake in considerations of dwelling and place, as when Casey argues that the body turns sites into places: ‘This body has everything to do with the transformation of a mere *site* into a dwelling *place*. Indeed, *bodies build places*.’[180] The activity of such bodies in ‘building’ places in this sense includes not only literal fabrication but also bodily activities of inhabiting and travelling, ‘actions in which residing and wandering combine’, and where journeying includes ‘tourism, *Wanderlust*, pilgrimage and walking through arcades’, activities through which ‘the living-moving body converts the flatland of sheer sites into the variegated landscape of habitable or traversable places.’[181]

[177] First published as: Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape* (Chichester, UK: Wiley, 1975).
[178] Norberg-Schulz, ‘Phenomenon of Place’, 414.
[179] Christian Norberg-Schulz, ‘Heidegger’s thinking on architecture’ (1983), in Nesbitt, *Theorizing*, 430-439. Norberg-Schulz refers to Martin Heidegger, *Hebel der Hausfreund* (Pfullingen: G. Neske,1957).
[180] Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a renewed understanding of the place-world* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 116.
[181] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 116.

Figure 2.5 FRA ANGELICO *Annunciation* (Cortona, 1430s)
Source: www.travellingintuscany.com/art/fraangelico/annunciation.htm

Importantly, this closeness in experience between buildings and landscape in Norberg-Schulz's thinking is found in Aalto's early writings, particularly his manifesto-like article 'From Doorstep to Living Room' (1926), where Aalto writes of the inside-outside relationship of building and landscape, demonstrated by the hall or arcade, 'that part of our home which most closely unites the more intimate rooms with the open air', and which can be enacted through construction, 'the task of fitting the building into the landscape correctly'.[182] More carnally, Aalto stresses the role of the human body as participant in this relationship when he chooses the Fra Angelico *Annunciation* (1430s) to illustrate his thesis (Fig.2.5), explaining that 'the picture provides an ideal example of "entering a room"' – by nothing less than the figure of an angel arriving to address the seated Virgin Mary – while adding that the 'trinity of *human being, room and garden*' makes the painting 'an unattainable ideal image of the home.'[183]

Pallasmaa refers to nature less as 'landscape' than as a ground for ecological relations between humankind and the non-human living world, through biophilia, bio-mimicry and garden architecture.[184] Pallasmaa explains his understanding of landscape in architecture indirectly through the medium of painting, noting Aalto's interest in the paintings of Mantegna,[185] and also his own method of understanding architecture both as culture and through culture: 'Paintings, films and literary works

[182] Alvar Aalto, 'From Doorstep to Living Room' (1926), in *Own Words*, 50.
[183] Aalto, 'Doorstep', 50-51; Aalto's italics.
[184] Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image: Imagination and Imagery in Architecture* (Chichester, UK: Wiley, 2011), 135.
[185] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'From tectonics to painterly architecture', trans. Timothy Binham, in Pirkko Tuukkanen-Beckers, ed., *Alvar Aalto: Points of Contact* (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Museum, 1994), 40.

have revealed to me the essential connections of life, space, buildings, cities and the human mind.'[186]

Indeed Pallasmaa refers to Appleton's prospect-refuge theory as a key spatial theory of landscape, particularly in its application by Hildebrand to reviewing aesthetics of landscape in Wright's architecture.[187] Pallasmaa only occasionally refers to landscape in his work, referring more commonly to the work of landscape architects such as Dimitri Pikionis and Lawrence Halprin.[188] This leaves the field of architectural phenomenology with only limited analysis of architecture and landscape in combination. As a consequence this study's interpretive methodology develops its own modes of comparison and contrast to argue for the significance of landscape in Aalto's architecture.

2.3.2 Phenomenology and Aalto

Aalto's humanism

Aalto's sense of human 'biological needs' and of the allure of Italian hill towns should be seen as a combination of learning and experience leavened by acquired knowledge of the precepts of what can be seen as phenomenology.[189] By the mid-1930s, notes Finnish historian Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, Aalto was familiar with then-current 'psychoanalytical and psychological theories, which saw the mind as a dynamic entity existing in a reciprocal relationship with the surrounding world', where the mind saw the world not as an objective empirical fact understood through rationality, but instead 'as a series of complex interacting relationships.'[190] Thus Aalto was informed, knowledgeable and interested in psychology and phenomenology from the mid-1930s, a time of relatively little work for the Aalto office, but also of significant stimulus from a milieu that included modernist artists such as his friends Georges Braque, Hans Arp and Moholy-Nagy.

While writers such as Nerdinger and Weston observe Aalto's 'humanism',[191] Aalto was not necessarily limited to the ideas of a liberal humanism that looked to Renaissance Italy for its principles, with which Aalto would have been familiar and which were, as Menin and Samuel note, 'confirmed by the writings of his friend, the eminent Finnish philosopher G.H. von Wright, who wrote on the subject of humanism.'[192] For Aalto, philosophical and theoretical frameworks were only of value if they could be translated into architectural work; intellectual architectural thinking only held meaning in terms of what was at stake in the greater context, as Aalto affirmed in 1957: 'the more we occupy ourselves with these purely theoretical games in the wide blue yonder, the more we forget Mother Earth, where man, after all, has

[186] Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image*, 112.
[187] Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image*, 43-44.
[188] Pallasmaa, *The Embodied Image*, 135-137.
[189] See Alvar Aalto 'The Hilltop Town' (1924), in *Own Words*, 49.
[190] Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, *Alvar Aalto: Architecture, Modernity, and Geopolitics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 152.
[191] Winfried Nerdinger, 'Alvar Aalto's Human Modernism', in Winfried Nerdinger, ed., *Alvar Aalto: Toward a Human Modernism* (Munich: Prestel, 1999).
[192] Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, 46-47.

his habitat and where happiness – in any case the temporal – is to be created.'[193] Aalto's aim was to build 'an earthly paradise for people'; he wanted to concentrate his architecture towards a goal of 'human happiness'; and to do this it was necessary 'to discard as much as possible of the dead weight that keeps us from creating a humane architecture.'[194]

Aalto in 'The Humanizing of Architecture' (1940) indicates his desire to progress his architecture to new levels of art and human social happiness, but through rational methods. Aalto compounded his social and artistic agendas with a mission to include both the natural and the psychological in his methods, as he struggled to articulate in his 1940 eulogy for his late friend Swedish architect E.G. Asplund (1885-1940):

> ... an even newer form has emerged which builds further using socio-artistic methods, but extends them to include psychological problems ... architecture still has untapped resources and means open to it which draw directly on nature and on reactions of the human psyche that written words are unable to explain.[195]

Aalto thus set himself the task, inspired by Asplund, of allying nature with human psychology, using an undeniably rational design method that would include the science of the human psyche:

> It is not the rationalization itself which was wrong in the first and now past period of Modern architecture. The fault lies in the fact that the rationalization has not gone deep enough.
>
> The present phase of Modern architecture is doubtless a new one, with the special aim of solving problems in the humanitarian and psychological fields ... it is to be understood as an enlargement of rational methods to encompass related fields.[196]

While Alvar and Aino Aalto had travelled to Italy in 1924, finding the northern Italian hill towns culturally, emotionally, and artistically inspiring,[197] even regarding the Mediterranean as a 'Promised Land',[198] Aalto was not looking solely to Italy for inspiration. Aalto, in 1940 still a resolutely modern architect, sought to ground his work closer to the individual human as the source and end of his work, incorporating humanitarian and psychological insights.

Humanism and phenomenology

As if to complement his cultural obsession with Italy, by the late 1920s Aalto had developed an architecture grounded in phenomenology, which he connected to the

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193 Aalto, 'The Architect's Conception for Paradise', 158.

194 Aalto, 'The Architect's Conception for Paradise', 157-159.

195 Alvar Aalto, 'In Memoriam, E.G. Asplund' (1940), in Ruusuvuori and Pallasmaa, *Alvar Aalto*, 49.

196 Alvar Aalto, 'The Humanizing of Architecture' (1940), in *Own Words*, 102.

197 Silvia Micheli, 'Alvar Aalto and Italy: a Relationship of Exchange', in Kries and Eisenbrand, *Alvar Aalto: Second Nature*, 317-319.

198 Göran Schildt, interview, in Louna Lahti, *Alvar Aalto, Ex Intimo: Alvar Aalto through the eyes of family, friends & colleagues* (Helsinki: Building Information Ltd, 2001), 54.

sensing body, identified by Goldhagen as 'degree zero of human cognitive experience'.[199] In 'Ultraviolet', an extensive argument for Aalto's 'embodied rationalism', Goldhagen frames Aalto's phenomenology in terms of his continuing interest in 'the human mind's fundamentally intersensory and metaphoric apprehension of the world', that is, its sensing of both the building and the 'world' beyond the building, understood as landscape.[200] This potentially close connection between architecture, the non-conscious mind, the body, and landscape supports a 'close reading' approach to making a phenomenological analysis of the significance of landscape in Aalto's architecture.

Goldhagen observes that as a young architect Aalto fabricated for himself, through conceptualisation and intuition, a basis for practice combining active elements of the senses, consciousness, cognition, reason, emotion and embodiment – in Goldhagen's words: 'the intersensory and often unconscious nature of cognition and the deep enmeshment of reason with emotion and bodily experience'.[201] Aalto wove these strands together in the later 1920s into a synthesis of contemporary art, German space theory involving empathy (notably the thinking of Schmarsow and Lipps), science of the mind, and design experimentation, to establish the version of modernism which he went on to develop through use in his long career. Aalto thus located himself theoretically in a modernist European avant-garde during the 1920s, at a distance from his Neo-Romantic Scandinavian contemporaries.

Onomatopoeia and metaphor

The resemblance in Aalto's modernist architecture of built elements to natural things could be framed, following Porphyrios, in terms of a poetic discourse involving onomatopoeia and metaphor. Architectural things might resemble natural things through onomatopoeia, a trope of similarity based on resemblance and likeness, where a cluster of columns may resemble a cluster of trees.[202] Alternatively verisimilitude in architecture might be discussed as metaphor, whereby an unfamiliar thing, for example the Villa Mairea pool, can be described by allusion to a more familiar thing, such as a lake, a fountain, or an egg. These tropes in architecture can become complicated; as critic Kenneth Burke notes of literary metaphor, 'the seeing of something in terms of something else involves the "carrying-over" of a term from one realm to another, a process that involves varying degrees of incongruity in that the two realms are never identical.'[203]

In the present study, where the 'two realms' of particular interest for investigating Aalto's work are architecture and landscape, the relation of architectural elements to landscape may well be prompted by similarities, allusions, rhymes or echoes of natural forms in built forms. However, in considering Aalto's work, the topic of poetics offers more the distraction of description than the traction of analysis. It is important

[199] Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet': 49.
[200] Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet': 47.
[201] Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet': 45.
[202] Demetri Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism: Studies on Alvar Aalto* (London: Academy Editions, 1982), 42.
[203] Kenneth Burke, 'Four Master Tropes', *The Kenyon Review* 3, no.4 (1941): 423.

in the present study to come to terms with Aalto's approach to architectural materiality, less through poetic tropes than through the phenomenology of materials in his architecture.

Embodied rationalism

Beyond visual resonances can be found the 'humanism' that Aalto navigates in his work through the material strategies that engrossed him in making and finishing buildings. Aalto said that architectural materiality possessed 'a human dimension' beyond upkeep and cost, and argued that 'the social function of a building is relevant to the choice of materials. There is a relation between people and building materials that can't be pinpointed by any amount of theorising.'[204] This deep-seated and elusive relationship between people and materials is key to a revised view of Aalto's widely discussed 'humanism'. Aalto's 'humanism' can be revised to refer less to a cultural revival of Renaissance and Classical values and forms, than to Goldhagen's notion of 'embodied rationalism'.

In 'Aalto's Embodied Rationalism' (2012), Goldhagen re-frames Aalto's humanism as both rational and phenomenological: 'By "humanism" Aalto meant to exhort modernists to create a rationalist architecture of the human being: a physiological, perceiving, thinking creature whose experiences and cognitions are by their very nature phenomenological.'[205] Goldhagen effects a phenomenological turn in thinking about Aalto's work:

> ... many of his design practices and theoretical statements that appear to violate the basic premises of canonical modernism can be recast as a transparent project to articulate a modern architecture that takes advantage of the opportunities modernity presents, ameliorates the psychic casualties it leaves in its wake, and springs from the essentially embodied nature of cognition.[206]

While Goldhagen frames Aalto's phenomenological approach as being essentially and historically modern, she also looks forward, linking Aalto's modernist role to the emergent neuroscience revolution in architectural research, casting it in the domain of phenomenology:

> Aalto's conflation of rationalism with humanism makes sense only when each term is reflected through the prism of phenomenology ... Aalto developed his singular and lasting approach to modernism, which he conceptualized through the early-twentieth-century lenses of phenomenology and experimental psychology, party by imbuing, partly by intuiting a model of human cognition and reason grounded in what contemporary research in

[204] Aalto, 'Interview for Finnish television', 270.

[205] Sarah Williams Goldhagen, 'Aalto's Embodied Rationalism', in Stanford Anderson, Gail Fenske, and David Fixler, eds, *Aalto and America* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2012). 21.

[206] Goldhagen, 'Aalto's Embodied Rationalism', 20.

cognitive neuroscience has revealed about the workings of the human mind.[207]

Phenomenological method

However, despite this logical historical argument, phenomenology has not enjoyed universal support. Charrington takes issue with the 'exceptionalism' of critics (citing Tafuri and Dal Co, and Pallasmaa) whose phenomenological approach, he argues, might distance Aalto's work from 'modern practice':

> Just as earlier critics discounted Alvar Aalto's importance because of its perceived irrelevance to the problems and methodologies of mainstream Modernism, so contemporary attempts to formulate a purely phenomenological interpretation of his work marginalise the atelier's achievement and its commonality with so many of the concerns of modern practice.[208]

While a general phenomenology could seem biased, and the insights of a phenomenological method might in isolation be self-limiting, they arguably act to correct a general bias against understanding the phenomenology of Aalto's approach, particularly as articulated by Aalto himself. Although the threat of Tafuri and Dal Co's *Modern Architecture* (1979) to practice would seem remote in the 2020s,[209] Goldhagen's insights in *Welcome to Your World* (2017), in approaching materials, spatiality and surfaces, and in articulating junctures between architecture and neuroscience, seem to promise new horizons of discourse, for practice and critical understanding, if and when they might be taken up in the near future.[210]

Aalto's phenomenology can be seen in his attitude to the sensing human body, when Goldhagen notes his human-centred response to Marcel Breuer's 1926 Wassily Chair (which she claims 'fell short of humane design' despite its popularity 'especially amongst architects'); Aalto notes that 'everyday furniture in the home should not reflect too much light', and that furniture that makes 'close contact with the skin' should not be made of 'a material that is an effective heat conductor.'[211] Aalto's humanism deals with the sensations of the material world as received by the eye and the skin together, and understood as a product of 'human cognition and reason'.

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[207] Sarah Williams Goldhagen, 'Alvar Aalto's Astonishing Rationalism', in Barbara Maria Stafford, ed., *A Field Guide to a New Meta-field: Bridging the Humanities-Neurosciences Divide* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 271.

[208] Harry Charrington, 'Not a locked box: the everyday art of the Aalto atelier', *arq Architectural Research Quarterly* 14, no.3 (2010): 265.

[209] Charrington cites Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Modern Architecture*, trans. Robert Erich Wolf (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1979).

[210] Sarah Williams Goldhagen, *Welcome to your World: How the built environment shapes our lives* (New York: Harper, 2017).

[211] Goldhagen, *Welcome to your World*, 99-100.

2.3.3 Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment

Architecture is able, as a field of enquiry, to accommodate and include phenomenology as a key theoretical framework for analysis and for design synthesis. As an analytic theory for architecture, phenomenology is estimated by Mallgrave and Contandriopoulos merely as 'exalting' the idea of place over space, as in the early work of Norberg-Schulz, largely addressing abstract architectural ideas of form and spatiality.[212] As a theory useful for synthesis through architectural practice, phenomenology is advocated by writers such as Norberg-Schulz, Pallasmaa, Pérez-Gómez, Frampton, and, most recently, Goldhagen in *Welcome to Your World* (2017).

By the late 1920s, according to Goldhagen, Aalto had developed a 'phenomenologically grounded' architecture.[213] While Goldhagen connects phenomenological strands in Aalto's work to the sensing body, 'degree zero of human cognitive experience', her phenomenological approach to Aalto remains interested in 'the human mind's fundamentally intersensory and metaphoric apprehension of the world'.[214] This idea of 'the world' implies sensing of both the building and the 'world' beyond the building, which is interpreted and assumed in the present study as including landscape. A potentially close connection between architecture, mind, body, and landscape supports the legitimacy of a 'close reading' approach to making a phenomenological analysis of the significance of landscape in Aalto's architecture.

The three concepts of Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment represent different aspects or strands of architectural phenomenology, developed and articulated through the work of various thinkers in architecture and philosophy, and used to investigate landscape in Aalto's work in closer focus. The use of phenomenological concepts to consider architecture and landscape derives from Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture* (1996), and Wylie, *Landscape* (2007), both supporting the viability of phenomenology for ongoing theoretical investigation in their respective fields of architecture and geography.[215]

This study's phenomenological concepts of Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment are observed by Aalto, whose words reflect a profound interest, as can be shown. Aalto comments on *place* as fundamental to architecture, noting that architecture 'must be deeply rooted in place and circumstance; it requires a delicate sense of form; it must support human emotions.'[216]

Aalto remarks on *atmosphere* as the mood of a room in 1926: 'I thought I would do best to indicate merely the kind of atmosphere that should be evoked.'[217] Aalto also notes the atmosphere evoked at the Muuratsalo House, 'where the glow from the fire

[212] Harry Francis Mallgrave and Christina Contandriopoulos, eds, *Architectural Theory: Volume II: An Anthology from 1871-2005* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 425-427. Cites Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space & Architecture*, 11-12.
[213] Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet': 49.
[214] Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet': 47.
[215] Nesbitt, Introduction, 28-30; John Wylie, 'Landscape Phenomenology', in *Landscape*, 139-186.
[216] Alvar Aalto, 'In Memoriam: Eliel Saarinen' (1950), in *Own Words*, 246.
[217] Aalto, 'Doorstep', 55.

and its reflections from the surrounding snowbanks create a pleasant, almost mystical feeling of warmth.'[218]

Aalto attends to *embodiment* at Paimio Sanatorium in designing 'rooms for weak patients that would provide a peaceful atmosphere for people who have to stay in a horizontal position', advocating that 'it is for the architects to give life a more sensitive framework.'[219] Aalto also finds his overarching ideal of *harmony* between people, architecture and landscape touchingly represented in Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* (Fig.2.5), 'chosen to illustrate this article because of the harmony between the figures and the forms of both the building and the garden.'[220] Aalto's phenomenological understanding of architecture seems to operate comprehensively within his methods.

Elsewhere in the field of architecture, in terms of phenomenology, place is considered in depth by Norberg-Schulz;[221] atmosphere is regarded as part of architectural experience by Böhme;[222] and embodiment is discussed in architectural contexts by both Pallasmaa and Goldhagen.[223] These concepts are developed and connected to Aalto through this study, which makes a phenomenological examination of experiences of architecture related to landscape, initially after the architectural phenomenology of Norberg-Schulz, and also in response to historian Vincent Scully's investigations of the relations of Classical Greek architecture to landscape.[224]

The study's phenomenological investigation includes the work of Pallasmaa, looking at the role of the body's haptic and other senses in architectural experience and understanding. It owes some of its direction to interdisciplinary studies whose often overlapping methods involve landscape and experience, such as the anthropology of Tilley, Ingold and Edensor,[225] and the archaeology of Bender and Tilley.[226] The present study of landscape in Aalto's work, regarded through a phenomenological lens, is further informed by the methods and thinking of philosophers interested in the phenomenological aspects of architecture: Malpas, interested in place;[227] Böhme, interested in atmosphere;[228] Karsten Harries, interested in temporality;[229] and Grosz, as noted above, interested in questions of the 'outside' in architecture.[230]

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218 Alvar Aalto, 'Experimental House, Muuratsalo' (1953), in *Sketches*, 116.

219 Alvar Aalto, 'Between humanism and materialism' (1955), in *Own Words*, 178-179.

220 Aalto, 'Doorstep', 50.

221 Norberg-Schulz, 'Phenomenon of Place', 414-428.

222 Gernot Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces*, ed. and trans. A.-Chr. Engels-Schwarzpaul (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

223 Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, 3rd edn (Chichester, UK: Wiley, 2012); Goldhagen, *Welcome to your World.*

224 Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*, rev. edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

225 Christopher Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Tim Ingold, Comments on Christopher Tilley, The Materiality of Stone*, Norwegian Archaeological Review* 38, no.2 (2005): 122-129; Tim Edensor, 'Reconnecting with darkness: gloomy landscapes, lightless places', *Social & Cultural Geography* 14, no.4 (2013): 446-465.

226 Barbara Bender, 'Place and Landscape', in Christopher Tilley et al., eds, *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2006); Christopher Tilley, *Landscape in the Longue Durée: A History and Theory of Pebbles in a Pebbled Heathland Landscape* (London: UCL Press, 2017).

227 Jeff Malpas, 'Rethinking Dwelling: Heidegger and the Question of Place', *Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology* 25, no.1 (2014): 15-23.

228 Gernot Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces*, ed. and trans. A.-Chr. Engels-Schwarzpaul (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

Aalto notoriously showed little direct interest in pure tectonics, evident in Frampton's complaint that 'tectonic form, as a consistently repetitive articulation, manifests itself rather sporadically in Aalto's architecture'.[231] However, the materiality, surface qualities and hapticity, and the detailed material inventiveness of Aalto's buildings, evident to the visitor and part of their phenomenological reception, remains an important historical topic, particularly in Weston's work.[232]

2.3.4 Place: More than space

> The minimum physical pre-condition for place is the conscious placement of an object in nature, even if that artifice be nothing more than an object in the landscape or the rearrangement of nature herself.[233]
>
> Frampton, 'On reading Heidegger' (1974)

A number of authors have written on the concept of place in ways that both expand and help define 'place' as it might be used to investigate significances of landscape in Aalto's architecture. In terms of place in architecture and landscape, in 'On reading Heidegger' (1974), Frampton distinguishes between space and place by referring to language and terminology: the use of 'the Latin term "space" or spatium instead of "place" or the Germanic word Raum [which carries] the explicit connotation of a clearing in which to be, a place to come into being.'[234] He also notes 'the abstract connotations of "space" as opposed to the socially experienced nature of "place"; to confront construction *in extremis* with the act of significant containment.'[235]

Figure 2.6 AALTO Säynätsalo Town Hall
Photograph by John Roberts, 2011

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229 Karsten Harries, 'The Terror of Time', in *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1997).

230 Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside.*

231 Kenneth Frampton, ed. John Cava, *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 1995), 356.

232 See especially Weston, *Materials.*

233 Kenneth Frampton, 'On reading Heidegger' (1974), in Nesbitt, *Theorizing*, 444.

234 Frampton, 'On reading Heidegger', 443.

235 Frampton, 'On reading Heidegger', 443.

Reflecting theoretically on the history of place in *The Fate of Place* (1997), philosopher Edward S. Casey, distinguishing between point, limit and boundary in Aristotle's thinking, argues that boundary encloses and closes off space, and that to be a boundary 'is to be exterior to something or, more exactly, to be around it, enclosing it, acting as its surrounder'.[236] More particularly, the boundary belongs not to the contained, but to the 'surrounder' or container – as may be evident in Aalto's Säynätsalo Town Hall (Fig.2.6) – so that, as Casey argues, 'Like place itself, a boundary "shuts in and closes off something from what lies around it."[237]

2.3.5 Atmosphere: More than air

Rasmussen in *Experiencing Architecture* (1959) implies atmosphere in investigating interrelationships of natural light, windows and rooms for quality of light. Rasmussen considers the suitability of windows in their climatic and socio-cultural contexts, comparing old windows and interiors from southern and northern Europe, including those depicted in Vermeer's paintings, noting the quality of light for perception of forms, textures and surfaces.[238]

Atmosphere emerges in the twenty-first century as a category for understanding architecture, as Pallasmaa notes: 'Only during the past two decades has an experiential view begun to replace the formal understanding of this art form.'[239] Pallasmaa also writes of the possible atmosphere of a place, a room, a space, a landscape, a social encounter; atmosphere can give the feeling, coherence and character of experience, as in Aalto's fusion of architectural and forest space in the Villa Mairea.[240] Atmosphere may be associated with *Stimmung* (mood, attunement of a space) as Bollnow elaborates in *Human space* (*Mensch und Raum*) (1963),[241] and for Norberg-Schulz Bollnow gives a means to ground his interest in space, and his quest for architecture's existential foundations, in philosophy (rather than psychology or sociology), especially that of Heidegger.[242]

Atmosphere continues as a topic of continuing interest for architectural discourse, evident in a 2019 *JAE* special issue on atmosphere.[243] However, the issue concerns itself largely with buildings and the city, a context and entity over which the architect has little control, but which may appear to lie within the architect's creative and

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236 Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 63.

237 Casey, *The Fate of* Place, 63.

238 Steen Eiler Rasmussen, 'Daylight in Architecture', in *Experiencing Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1959), 186-214.

239 Pallasmaa, 'Space, Place, and Atmosphere', 19.

240 Pallasmaa, 'Space, Place, and Atmosphere', 31.

241 O.F. Bollnow, trans. Christine Shuttleworth, ed. Joseph Kohlmaier, *Human Space* (London: Hyphen Press, 2011).

242 Bollnow, *Human Space*; Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Architecture: Presence, Language and Place* (Milan: Skira, 2000), 15, 73-74.

243 Martin Bressani and Aaron Sprecher, 'Atmospheres', *Journal of Architectural Education* 73, no.1 (2019): 2-4.

critical remit. Bressani's interview with Swiss philosopher Miroslav Šik on atmosphere opens with the following exchange:

> Šik: Of course, everything is rooted in Aldo Rossi's view of architecture.
> Bressani: But he, himself, never used the word *atmosphere*.
> Šik: No, it was forbidden.[244]

Rossi's method, notes Šik, was analogical; however, the analogies of atmosphere and *Stimmung* noted by Šik refer exclusively to architects, buildings and cities, not to nature or landscape. An ambience of arrogant helplessness pervades these architectural discourses voicing the modernist rejection of nature, recalling the attitude of Baudelaire writing in 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1863) that 'Nature can teach us nothing ... Nature can counsel nothing but crime,' a theoretical rejection of nature that also informed van Doesburg's 'de-naturalised reality', and the Futurist Manifesto's call in 1914 to 'find inspiration in the elements of the immensely new mechanical world which we have created.'[245]

Figure 2.7 BÖCKLIN *Island of the Dead*
Source: Zumthor, *Atmospheres*

Atmosphere as a concept traverses history and theory, within and beyond architecture. Swiss architect Peter Zumthor in *Atmospheres* (2006) connects atmosphere with architectural situations and images, involving place, interiority, materials, sound, motion, and people, observing 'qualities' that can 'move' him, such as Arnold Böcklin's *Island of the Dead* (1880) (Fig.2.7).[246]

Michael Tawa, in 'Vaporous Circumambience' (2015), associates atmosphere with architecture and images through etymologies (of atmosphere, colour, tactic and technē, even complexion – through the etymon *plek*), ideas, and semantic resonances. In his notions of atmosphere Tawa also includes theorised notions of

[244] Martin Bressani, interview with Miroslav Šik, *Journal of Architectural Education* 73, no.1 (2019): 77.
[245] Adrian Forty, 'Nature', in *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), 236-237.
[246] Peter Zumthor, *Atmospheres: Architectural Environments, Surrounding Objects* (Berlin: Birkhauser, 2006).

ambiance, Benjaminian 'aura', porosity and conjugation, the *Stimmung* of Taviani brothers' films and Mozart's music.[247] Zumthor and Tawa reinforce arguments against a technically purified modernism through their appeals to heightened sensuous dimensions of architecture and space. Tawa notes a need for 'an anatomy of atmosphere':

> an inventory, codification or classification of atmospheres – aesthetic, certainly, but also metaphysical, political, religious, ethical, communitarian, theoretical, literary, musicological, spatial, temporal, theatrical, performative, environmental, climatic, civic, technological, computational, and so forth. This important work remains to be done, and must be done to avoid the concept of atmosphere in architecture remaining yet another unproductive trope.[248]

Tawa's account indicates the breadth of cultural reference stemming from architectural atmospheres; the present study may contribute to a quest for a landscape-related sense of atmosphere.

Norberg-Schulz in *Genius Loci* associates buildings and cities with landscape character and the natural 'concrete phenomena' of the sky (clouds, sun, colour), regarding their relation to the ground in terms of scale and weather as formative of atmosphere. Atmosphere is regarded as part of the essential environmental character of a place, in that 'a place is given as such a character or "atmosphere"'.[249]

Philosopher Tonino Griffero notices that what is termed mood, atmosphere or *Stimmung* in architecture and in landscape (atmosphere can, 'paradoxically, be everything and nothing, a bit like air') possesses a constitutive vagueness that can make it seem philosophically engaging or interesting.[250] That vagueness inheres in the pervading atmosphere noted by Norberg-Schulz in *Nightlands*, where the 'concrete phenomena' of sky, weather and ground that contribute to *genius loci* in Nordic countries become actively vague components of the landscape world where architecture is experienced.[251]

Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture

Addressing architectural readers, philosopher Gernot Böhme supports atmosphere as 'subject matter' for architecture, arguing that feeling offers architecture a truer mode of perceiving than seeing, and that perspective depicts things in space without depicting space or spatiality.[252] Böhme discerns a sensibility appropriate to architecture – 'the design of space' – whereby space is experienced through physical

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[247] Michael Tawa, 'Vaporous Circumambience: Towards an architectonics of atmosphere', *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts* 15: Atmospheres and Affect (2015): 12-23.

[248] Tawa, 'Vaporous Circumambience': 21.

[249] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 7; also 38-48.

[250] Tonino Griffero, trans. Sarah de Sanctis, *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 3, 60-63.

[251] Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands: Nordic Building* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 1996).

[252] Gernot Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture', in Ursprung, *Natural Histories*, 399-400.

presence within it.[253] Perspectival seeing, he argues, is a sense for establishing and understanding distance, rather than for gauging or defining being inside something. He acknowledges the sensing or feeling of one's own presence in a space as *mood*.[254] This sense of 'whereness' of the body in space, referring specifically to the character, the kind of space, is a sensing of the *atmosphere* of the surrounding space.[255]

Elsewhere Böhme cites the Greek *parousia* (presence, being present, arrival)[256] with his definition of atmosphere as not only the way things might be felt in space but also 'the felt presence of someone or something in space'.[257] This sensing of atmosphere requires the presence of the body to create a state of feeling and emotion, of attunement to the nature of a space; thus the human body, as Vitruvius noted, may become the measure of space, and of architecture.[258]

Böhme finely traces a phenomenological view of architecture as creative of atmosphere, while affirming the importance of the human as social user, as sensate, perceiving individual, and as measurer of mood and atmosphere in architectural space. Böhme offers a philosophic understanding that deepens architectural knowledge by questioning and refining the nature of architecture's purposes and meanings, rather than appending a philosophical interpretation of architecture.

While Böhme considers space in buildings as opposed to sculpture and theatre, he appears to overlook architecture's connections with natural or landscape space, with its array of visual perspectives, its range of distances and scales, and its sensuous dynamic stimuli of light, sound, weather, temperature. Norberg-Schulz in *Nightlands* (1996) describes Scandinavian landscapes as 'northern' space, 'an unsurveyable manifold of places' lacking clear boundaries or geometry.[259] The North's unclear, unstable spatiality is defined against the clear, unified spaces of the South, the Mediterranean, the classical: in the North, one's presence in nature implies nearness or empathy, living in the midst of things and participating in 'a web of phenomena', where 'mood' may be both basis and cause for participation.[260]

While the discourse on atmosphere in architecture may seem dominated by Böhme's thinking which alights accurately also on the atmospheres created (with perhaps clearer purpose than in architecture) in theatre and stagecraft, ideas of *Stimmung* have long been associated with atmosphere, as well as Benjamin's notion of 'aura'. Anthropologist and archaeologist Tim Ingold is interested in various phenomenological associations with buildings and landscapes, including weather,

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[253] Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture', 402.

[254] Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture', 402.

[255] Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture', 402.

[256] sv *parousia*, Henry George Liddell, *A Lexicon: Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

[257] Gernot Böhme, epigraph, in Tawa, 'Vaporous Circumambiance': 12.

[258] Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture', 402.

[259] Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands*, 6.

[260] Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands*, 47.

which he investigates in terms of air, light and the 'meteorological affective' in 'Lighting up the atmosphere' (2016).[261]

Figure 2.8 LEWERENTZ St Peter's, Klippan
Source: Beaumont, 'Revisit: Lewerentz's St Peter's' [262]

The trope of atmosphere as weather is connected closely with Scandinavian architecture by historian Jonathan Hill in *Weather Architecture* (2012). Hill notes the visuality, temporality and materiality of the work of Swedish architect Sigurd Lewerentz (1885-1975) in terms of a retinal reading of buildings in the 'fog, glare and gloom' of his chapter title.[263] Hill grounds his overall approach in Romanticism and 'the picturesque' at the expense of a sense of architectural experience that can be articulated through phenomenology, or understood in terms of the senses and the body more broadly than the visual. However, the sense of the gloom and darkness, shadows and muted glare that Hill records in visiting Lewerentz's St Peter's, Klippan (1963) (Fig.2.8) extends the sense of natural atmosphere as context for visiting Aalto's work in the dark of winter, an experience largely missing from the Aalto literature and its related images.[264]

2.3.6 Embodiment: More than words

Philosopher Mark L. Johnson, in 'The embodied meaning of architecture' (2015), argues that architecture gives sense and meaning to people through experience of

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[261] Tim Ingold, 'Lighting up the atmosphere', in Mikkel Bille and Tim Flohr Sørensen, eds, *Elements of Architecture: Assembling archaeology, atmosphere and the performance of building spaces* (Abingdon, UK; New York: Routledge, 2016).

[262] Eleanor Beaumont, 'Revisit: Lewerentz's St Peter's', *Architectural Review*, Aug 2018.

[263] Jonathan Hill, *Weather Architecture* (Oxford; New York: Routledge, 2012), 262-271.

[264] Atmosphere, embodiment, architecture and landscape are discussed as interwoven in John Roberts, 'Aalto and Utzon: Atmospheres beyond Finland', in Silvia Micheli and Esa Laaksonen, eds, *Aalto beyond Finland*, 2nd Alvar Aalto Researchers Network Seminar, Aalto beyond Finland: Architecture and design, Rovaniemi, Finland, 16-18 February 2015 (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation, 2015), 216-220.

place and buildings:

> *My hypothesis is that architectural structures are experienced by humans as both sense-giving and signifying. That is, architectural structures present us, first, with a way of situating ourselves in, or being "at home" in, and making sense of our world, and, second, they provide material and cultural affordances that are meaningful for our survival and flourishing as meaning-seeking creatures*. Consequently, any encounter with an architectural structure begins with the overall sense of place (of being in a particular world), followed almost immediately by a growing grasp of the numerous meanings afforded by its various parts, light patterns, structural relations, contrasts, flow, rhythms, and other significant elements of meaning within the work.[265]

Johnson focuses on architecture in an argument for embodied meaning, addressing an enduring problem of making architectural meaning, in the wake of verbal dominance in architectural thinking (for example by Agrest, Jencks, Broadbent and others, who theorised architectural linguistics and semiotics by interpreting the work of Saussure, Pierce and Chomsky in the later decades of the twentieth century).[266] Seeking to make meaning in architecture without language, Johnson suggests that 'the enactive, simulative processes of meaning and thought ... are equally present in experiences of meaning that are not merely linguistic.'[267] Referring to the thinking of pragmatist philosopher John Dewey and to J.J. Gibson's 'notion of "perceptual affordances"', Johnson argues that meaning is not an 'abstract, disembodied conceptual content, but rather involves the neural simulation of sensory, motor, and affective processes that we associate with the thing or event that has meaning for us.'[268]

This notion of the closeness of individual consciousness and environment is also noted by anthropologist Tim Ingold, in *The Perception of the Environment* (2000). Ingold, citing Gibson, rejects the inherited idea of perception operating as a mind in a body, arguing that it is achieved instead by 'the organism as a whole in its environment',

> and is tantamount to the organism's own exploratory movement through the world. If mind is anywhere, then, it is not "inside the head" rather than "out there" in the world. To the contrary, it is immanent in the network of sensory

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[265] Mark L. Johnson, 'The embodied meaning of architecture', in Sarah Robinson and Juhani Pallasmaa, eds, *Mind in Architecture: Neuroscience, Embodiment, and the Future of Design* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2015), 40; Johnson's italics.

[266] See for example, as cited in Nesbitt, *Theorizing* (1996): Charles Jencks and George Baird, eds, *Meaning in Architecture* (New York: Braziller, 1969); Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas, 'Semiotics and Architecture: Ideological consumption or theoretical work', *Oppositions* 1 (1973): 93-100; Geoffrey Broadbent, 'A plain man's guide to the theory of signs in architecture', *Architectural Design* 47, nos.7-8 (1978): 474-482.

[267] Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture', 37-38.

[268] Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture', 36, 38. Reference is to James J. Gibson, *An Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979). See also John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1934); John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover, 1958).

> pathways that are set up by virtue of the perceiver's immersion in his or her environment.[269]

Johnson also suggests that this framework of explaining 'the meaning and power of architectural affordances' makes architecture meaningful through the centrality of qualitative experience, by recognising the qualities of built and natural environments, of cities, buildings and people, which 'are experienced qualitatively without any need for reflective thought. Our world is a realm of immediately felt qualities that have meaning for us even before and without language.'[270] In bypassing language, Johnson (somewhat heretically) advocates the meaning of the things themselves as sufficient, and implies that architecture has the potential to bypass longstanding conventions of verbal exegesis and interpretation (where words and arguments formed the pathway to understanding meaning), and to exist as meaningful in its own right. Thus the meaning of architecture can be sensed by the visitor or user, rather than being articulated through verbal description and analysis.

Pallasmaa was a relatively early architectural thinker to include embodiment in his discourses. In 'Lived Space: Embodied Experience and Sensory Thought' (1999), he writes of architecture through tropes of embodied consciousness, linking Self and world. Thus images can be framed as experiential and emotionally connected to individual consciousness; space can be 'existential', laden with values and meanings; while architecture as an art 'always returns technique to its ahistorical and archaic mental and bodily connections.'[271] Pallasmaa also writes of embodied consciousness, of how human senses and bodily being 'structure, produce, and store silent knowledge'; of 'sensory thought'; and of how architecture can be 'a mode of existential and metaphysical philosophy, through its means of space, matter, gravity, scale, and light.'[272]

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[269] Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in livelihood, dwelling and skill* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 3.

[270] Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture', 38.

[271] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Lived Space: Embodied Experience and Sensory Thought' (1999), in McKeith, *Encounters*, 132.

[272] Pallasmaa, 'Lived Space', 132-137.

Figure 2.9 GIORGIONE *La Tempesta*
Source: Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice

Pallasmaa, in 'The Rooms of Memory: Architecture in Painting' (1985) sees emotion, human drama, dreams and metaphors, in paintings involving architectural subjects and settings. However, and extraordinarily, for an architecture writer, he connects architecture to landscape through eros, through the people and landscape in Pieter Brueghel the Elder's *The Harvesters*, through the relation of figure, landscape and buildings, and through Giorgione's *La Tempesta* (1508) (Fig.2.9), 'another sensual allegory, in which fragments of architecture tell their nostalgic tale of a lost age of glory.'[273] Ingold is interested in various phenomenological associations with buildings and landscapes, including work and embodiment, as he observes comprehensively in 'The Temporality of the Landscape' (1993).[274]

From these and other works, spanning conceptual territory between landscape and architecture, a framework is derived to consider Embodiment as a phenomenological concept for investigating Aalto's architecture.

[273] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'The Rooms of Memory: Architecture in Painting' (1985), in McKeith, *Encounters*, 100.
[274] Tim Ingold, 'The Temporality of the Landscape' (1993), in *Perception of the Environment*, 189-208.

2.4 LANDSCAPE

2.4.1 Landscape: Usages and definitions

Landscape historian John R. Stilgoe begins his lexicon of landscape terms *What is Landscape?* firmly: 'Landscape is a noun. First. It designates the surface of the earth people shaped and shape deliberately for permanent purposes.' Stilgoe obliquely includes architecture in his scope: 'As an adjective, "landscape" also designates types of architecture and building: landscape architecture and landscape gardening find core identities in ground shaped for beauty rather than for shelter and crops.' Stilgoe's analysis of landscape is as 'noun stripped of accessory and ornament, the word naming the skeleton and sinews of shaped land.'[275] Stilgoe's idea of landscape as 'the surface of the earth people shaped and shape deliberately' frames an unromantic sense of human involvement with the earth that informs this study of landscape in Aalto's architecture.

However, in the absence of a single definition of landscape in architectural terms, a brief survey of usages and commentary indicates the breadth of architectural and other senses of the term landscape.

The Macquarie Dictionary defines landscape as follows:

> 1. a view or prospect of rural scenery, more or less extensive, such as is comprehended within the scope or range of vision within a single point of view.
> 2. a piece of such scenery.
> 3. a picture representing natural inland or coastal scenery.
> 4. such pictures as a category.
> 5. *Printing* a page or illustration larger in width than depth.[276]

Appleton sees landscape as a natural or artificial setting, forming 'a kind of backcloth to the whole stage of human activity'.[277] J.B. Jackson describes landscape as a viewable entity, 'a portion of land which the eye can comprehend at a glance'.[278] In 1999 landscape architecture theorist James Corner, noting a then-expanding interest in landscape, described landscape as 'an ongoing project, an enterprising venture that enriches the cultural world through creative effort and imagination.'[279] Corner regards landscape as a cultural concept: 'landscape is less a quantifiable object than it is an idea, a cultural way of seeing, and as such it remains open to interpretation, design, and transformation.'[280]

Han Lorzing in *The Nature of Landscape* (2001) notes European words for landscape: landskab (Danish), landschap (Dutch), Landschaft (German), paysage

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[275] John R. Stilgoe, *What is Landscape?* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2015), ix-x.

[276] sv 'landscape', *The Macquarie Dictionary*, 3rd edn.

[277] Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, 2.

[278] J.B. Jackson, 'The Word', in John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*, ed. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1997), 299.

[279] James Corner, 'Recovering Landscape as a Critical Cultural Practice', in James Corner, ed., *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 1.

[280] James Corner, Preface, *Recovering Landscape*, ix.

(French), paesaggio (Italian), landskap (Swedish and Norwegian), and maisema (Finnish).[281] Lorzing's etymology tends to fuse 'visual' and 'territorial' aspects of landscape. He notes that the term originated in art discourse, 'where the emphasis on the visual side of landscape is obvious, but that the root ("land") of the word refers to the territorial aspects of the landscape.'[282]

Both the word landscape and its meanings are expansive and complex, and extend into multiple fields, as Doherty and Waldheim confirm in the breadth of their recent anthology *Is Landscape ...?*, which gathers fourteen writers from as many disciplines, asking whether landscape might be technology / history / theory / philosophy / life / architecture, inter alia.[283] Leatherbarrow, who asks, 'Is landscape architecture?', forms a response based around terrain and temporality, introducing his concept of 'topography', and embracing a topic which he describes as 'the historical and cultural context of land and building form.'[284]

2.4.2 Landscape, nature, and human presence

A number of writers on landscape have attempted to 'define' the term landscape, including Spirn, Meyer, Appleton, Cosgrove, and Jackson, as noted below. Landscape and architecture historian Marc Treib observes in 'Aalto's Nature' that since 'the idea of nature is itself a cultural construct, its definition varies with the people who articulate it and the times in which they do so.'[285] Landscape architect Ann Whiston Spirn, in *The Language of Landscape*, describes landscape as an entity shaped by primary authorities: nature, history, art, economics, power, asking of the identity of nature: 'Is nature a sacred entity and are humans one with all living creatures, or is nature a wilderness refuge requiring protection from the ravages of humankind?'[286] Spirn sees landscape as framed and constructed by human agency, while nature is a greater presence and force; both are seen in human perspective, and as constructed by human thought.

In a 1993 essay, Spirn advances a non-anthropocentric idea of the composition of landscape accommodating nature and culture, people, animals, plants and time:
The landscape is at once a natural phenomenon and a cultural artefact, a dynamic entity shaped by the processes of both nature and culture. The landscape is composed of air, earth, water, and living organisms (and recently of plastic, glass, and metal as well). Some of these elements are invisible or ephemeral; most are dynamic and interacting. Plants grow, reproduce and shape the landscape over time, as do people and other animals who inhabit the landscape.[287]

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[281] Han Lorzing, *The Nature of Landscape: A personal quest* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2001), 27.
[282] Lorzing, *Nature of Landscape*, 35.
[283] Gareth Doherty and Charles Waldheim, eds, *Is Landscape ...? Essays on the Identity of Landscape* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016).
[284] David Leatherbarrow, 'Is landscape architecture?', in Doherty and Waldheim, *Is Landscape …?*, 327.
[285] Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', 47.
[286] Anne Whiston Spirn, *The Language of Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 244.
[287] Anne Whiston Spirn, 'Seeing and Making the Landscape Whole', *Progressive Architecture* 72, no.8 (1993): 92.

Landscape emerges here as something that is both shaped and inhabited by various agents, developing over time. Spirn also suggests that 'landscape practice', what landscape architects do, involves a dual framing of nature: 'Landscape architects must confront nature as observable phenomena and Nature as an idea'.[288] Nature in landscape discourse appears to have both phenomenological and conceptual modes.

Theorist Elizabeth Meyer likens landscape theory to feminism. Meyer views landscape as senses and experience, as situational contingencies, and sees the form and meaning of the site contributing to the form and meaning of a design:

> Landscape theory is specific, not general. Like feminist criticism, landscape architectural design and theory are based on observation, on that which is known through experience, on the immediate and the sensory – that which is known by all the senses, not only the visual. Thus landscape architectural theory is situational – it is explicitly historical, contingent, pragmatic and ad hoc. It is not about idealist, absolute universals. It finds meaning, form, and structure in the site as given. The landscape does not sit silent awaiting the arrival of the architectural subject. The site speaks prior to the act of design.[289]

Meyer's idea of the primacy and priority of the site, addressed to thinkers and practitioners of landscape architecture, serves also to direct critical attention to the site as of primary ontological importance in Aalto's architecture.

Appleton defines landscape in *The Symbolism of Habitat* (1990), and upholds its perception as central to survival in the environment:

> For a concise working definition of 'landscape' I would suggest 'the environment visually perceived.' [Psychologist François Jacob] makes it clear that the process of perception ... is also the master activity on which all survival behaviour depends, and that there can be no environmental adaptation without environmental perception.[290]

Appleton's Darwinian observation suggests perception as key to survival of the organism outdoors in the natural world. The landscape becomes a biological setting of life and death, where individual survival depends in large part on perception of environment. Appleton emphasises the visual sense, although a phenomenological view suggests the far more wide-ranging inclusion of all senses, operating below conscious levels, as essential for landscape understanding.

Geographer Denis Cosgrove proposes a human-centred definition: 'Landscape is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of that world. Landscape is a way of seeing the world.'[291] Cosgrove's landscape is not a biological or

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[288] Spirn, 'Seeing and Making the Landscape Whole': 93.
[289] Elizabeth K. Meyer, 'Landscape Architecture as Modern *Other* and Post Modern *Ground*', in Harriet Edquist and Vanessa Bird, eds, *The Culture of Landscape Architecture* (Melbourne: Edge, 1994), 30-31.
[290] Jay Appleton, *The Symbolism of Habitat: An interpretation of landscape in the arts* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 21.
[291] Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 13-14.

topographical or phenomenological, but rather a conceptual ‘way of seeing’, a construct for intellectual study and argument.

A particularly American view holds that landscape is the everyday, made, built, inhabited environment, in the writing of geographer John Brinckerhoff (J.B.) Jackson (1909-1996), who ‘never saw the place without its people.’[292] Jackson’s magazine *Landscape* (founded 1951) provided a forum for discourse on American vernacular landscape and architecture. Jackson and his followers take little interest in either contemporary architecture or landscape design, nor even in the natural world (seen relentlessly through the outmoded term ‘wilderness’), promoting instead the ‘democratic’ values and aesthetics of ‘everyday landscape’, where nature is re-formed by human action.[293] Jackson sees landscape as a human social construct, ‘a *synthetic* space, a man-made system of spaces superimposed on the face of the land, functioning and evolving not according to natural laws but to serve a community.’[294] Jackson maintains human presence as central to his version of landscape:

> The older I grow and the longer I look at landscapes and seek to understand them, the more convinced I am that their beauty is not simply an aspect but their very essence and that that beauty derives from the human presence ... The beauty that we see in the vernacular landscape is the image of our common humanity.[295]

Jackson’s socially framed ideas of landscape, concerned with communities and individuals, continue to influence thinking about landscape in geography and architecture, as Venturi (an admirer of Jackson) writes, on ‘the significance of the American everyday / generic landscape.’[296]

Thus landscape may be seen as a vivacious interplay of natural and human things, presences and dynamics, taking place through particular sites and on particular occasions, where contexts and the nature of the visitor’s experience become decisive in its definition and its understanding, and ultimately the usage of the term ‘landscape’.

2.4.3 House and dwelling: The ‘little person’ and landscape

Within the relation of architecture to landscape, the very idea of living in a house is questioned by Aalto himself, who said in 1957, ‘Residing in a place is, *per se*, one of the great mysteries of human life. Why is the poor human creature fated to work, eat and live in a dwelling?’[297] He continues his query: ‘Our entire culture rests on the

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[292] Marc Treib, ‘The Measure of Wisdom: John Brinckerhoff Jackson’ (1996), in *Settings and Stray Paths: Writings on Landscapes and Gardens* (London; New York: Routledge, 2005), 187.

[293] Don Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

[294] John Brinckerhoff Jackson, ‘The Word Itself’, in *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1984), 8.

[295] Jackson, Preface, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, xii.

[296] Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, *Architecture as Signs and Systems: For a Mannerist Time* (Cambridge, MA; London: Belknap Press, 2004), 6.

[297] Aalto, “Schöner Wohnen”, 261.

nature of our dwellings. Is happy living really guaranteed by the small house in a large park or by the undisturbed privacy of a family or by the densely packed great city?' Aalto's skepticism and optimism are mixed in posing this compound question – which, he exclaims in conclusion, 'has yet to be and never will be answered!'[298]

The multiple dimensions of 'the land', of landscape, constituted a haven, a learning resource, a set of principles applicable to architecture and to life, implying harmony and tact. Aalto reflected in his 1972 interview with Schildt on a necessary and realistic balance between humankind and nature:

> Schildt: Was there some special experience that made you aware of the environmental problems caused by technology?
> Aalto: No, just my youthful experience of how man can treat nature in a responsible and positive way, or in an inept and disruptive way.[299]

While nature offered Aalto a philosophical background for thinking about architecture and its relation with the world, landscape provided experiences, examples and practical means of acting through architecture. While nature could be cerebral, scientific and cultural, landscape was actual and experiential: landscape could be seen, measured, built in, sensed, and remembered; importantly, it could also accommodate human presence and activity, entities excluded by definition from concepts of nature. Landscape, unlike nature, did not require philosophical explanations; it was an actuality, a reality that could be seen, painted, drawn and inhabited in its many forms and seasons through building. Landscape, as discussed below, appears thus to offer an ontological basis for Aalto's thinking and work in architecture.

In the context of this study, landscape is not a garden, conceived, controlled, planted and maintained by human activity, nor is landscape the domain of the paradigm of landscape architecture. And while this study is not concerned with 'vernacular landscape', the grounding of Jackson's idea of vernacular landscape in everyday life can provide a stabilising influence for discourses and designs that might lose their way in abstraction, aesthetics and ambition. Aalto determined that his work would be for the 'little man', and his challenge remained 'to create harmony with the means at our disposal in order to get the best possible society.'[300]

Interviewed by Schildt in 1977, Maire Gullichsen, a close associate of both Aalto and his wife Aino Marsio-Aalto, remembers that Aino 'was certainly his social conscience, besides which she was the practical one ... She actually balanced out his fantasies ... Had Alvar not been married to Aino, I believe he would never have become the Alvar Aalto he was.'[301] As an architect Aalto was actively interested in the everyday life and welfare of everyday people, referred to here as the 'little person'; he wrote to

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[298] Aalto, "Schöner Wohnen", 261.

[299] Aalto, Interview for Finnish television, 274.

[300] Aalto, Interview for Finnish television, 274-275.

[301] 'Göran Schildt interviews Maire Gullichsen at the Villa Mairea in January 1977', in Kirsi Gullichsen and Ulla Kinnunen, eds, trans. Maija Kasvio, *Inside the Villa Mairea: Art, design and interior architecture* (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Museum; Mairea Foundation, 2009), 265-266.

architecture patron Hélène de Mandrot in 1930, 'I think people psychologically need security.'[302]

Later, addressing his old school, Jyväskylä Lyceum, in 1958, Aalto made a sweeping critique, in his typical dialectical style, outlining his contrarian 'philosophy of doubt':

> The frequently despised philosophy of doubt is an absolute prerequisite for anyone wishing to contribute to culture, assuming that this doubt is transformed into a positive force. For criticism conveys the message 'I do not follow the tide', and on the highest plane doubt can be transformed into its apparent opposite, love in a critical sense, love that endures, because it rests on critically tested ground. It can result in a love for "the little man" which works as a safeguard whenever the mechanical forms of modernism threaten to smother individuality and harmonious life.[303]

Aalto's doubt, his dualism and idealism were intermeshed with his resistance to the socially and environmentally destructive powers of modernism, a topic that underwrites Frampton's approach to architectural history. Frampton notes that Aalto, like Pritzker laureate Paulo Mendes de Rocha (1928-2021), recognised that while architecture could not save 'the world's impoverished', nonetheless 'the world cannot be sustained ... through today's advanced media technology and the rapacity of the market.'[304]

The discipline of landscape architecture, for reasons not pursued in this study, appears generally to avoid overt critique of modernism or capital, despite its operative need for collaboration and cooperation with ecosystems, water, climate and biological frameworks threatened by what Aalto described as 'mechanical forms of modernism'.[305] Landscape for Aalto became foundational in his 'doubt', and in the 'positive force' of his creative response, and provided the platform through which his 'love for "the little man"' could become a common safeguard for his conceptions and designs, and for the everyday lived experience of the 'little person'. Aalto, speaking at Jyväskylä, placed everyday life and the 'little person' at the centre of his concerns, saying also that 'the deepest culture specifically belongs to everyday life, in all its forms'. Aalto underlined the seriousness of his vocation, remembering his school's 'contribution to what is the most difficult mission of our times: to stand up for the small man.'[306]

Aalto's term 'the little man' (*kadunmies*, the man in the street, little man; or *tavallinen ihminen*, common man, everyman) might seem to reflect condescension to everyday

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[302] Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, 55.

[303] Alvar Aalto, 'What is Culture?' (1958), in *Own Words,* 16.

[304] Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, 4th edn (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 389.

[305] See for example Simon Swaffield, ed., *Theory in Landscape Architecture: A Reader* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); also Ian Thompson, ed., *Rethinking Landscape: A critical reader* (Abingdon, UK; New York: Routledge, 2009). As an exception to a tendency of the landscape discipline to avoid political engagement, see W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Imperial Landscape', in W.J.T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power*, 2nd edn (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2002). See also Alexander Wilson, *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez* (Cambridge, MA; Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1992).

[306] Aalto, 'What is Culture?' 17.

users. Yet Aalto's phrase 'the little man' designates the condition of the human being confronted by modernism, implying Aalto's empathy with his fellow Finn, and hinting at the Finnish cultural construct of *sisu*, a resourceful courage or resilience, an 'enigmatic power that enables individuals to push through unbearable challenges.'[307] Giedion frames Aalto as modernism's populist architect, whose work 'encounters less difficulty in overcoming the resistance of the common man than that of others of his contemporaries.'[308] Reflecting Aalto's empathy in material terms, his buildings remain in good condition, maintained, and increasingly restored, as settings for everyday cultural, social, administrative, commercial and educational life throughout Finland.[309]

2.4.4 Nature, forest and landscape: a sense of reality

In a general sense architecture acknowledges the fact that a building is located somewhere on the earth's surface. This facticity was sufficient for an earlier generation of art-historical theorist such as Rudolf Arnheim, who, in his psychological study of visual perception of architecture, *The Dynamics of Architectural Form* (1977), held that 'the basic fact of architectural expression is that of the building as a manmade object placed in a natural setting', and that architecture 'supplements nature's resources and facilities, while at the same time insisting on a particularly human function.'[310] In terms of landscape, the architect could either 'conceive of man as an outgrowth of nature', thereby being licensed to make 'organic' buildings with 'curving deviations from the straight line', or, being a 'rational creature', could create an architecture of 'rational shapes'.[311] This abstract psychological approach, however, makes little allowance for landscape as other than a location for form-making.

The relationship between humankind and the natural world may be seen in this context as more involved than a dualistic 'man versus nature' opposition. Schildt notes Aalto's understanding of the relationship in terms of the Finnish forest: 'The forest is not hostile to man, quite the reverse, it confers on man all that he needs for a biologically sound life.'[312] Far from an irrational Romantic 'dreaming', the forest gave Aalto an awareness of nature's rationality, a landscape-based 'forest wisdom', gained through experience of nature, biology and landscape in 'the world of the forest'; as Schildt explains, Aalto developed 'an extreme sense of reality, a sharing in nature's wisdom and rationality.[313] Schildt comprehends the unromantic, rational and realistic framework offered to Aalto by the forest landscape:

> Insight into the world of the forest – forest wisdom – is at the heart of everything Aalto created, a biological experience which never allowed itself to be overpowered by technocratic civilisation or shortsighted rationalism. This is

[307] Emilia E. Lahti, 'Embodied fortitude: An introduction to the Finnish construct of sisu', *International Journal of Wellbeing* 9, no.1 (2019): 61.
[308] Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, 666.
[309] Michael Trencher, *The Alvar Aalto Guide* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), *passim*.
[310] Rudolf Arnheim, *The Dynamics of Architectural Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 213.
[311] Arnheim, *Dynamics of Architectural Form*, 214.
[312] Schildt, *Early Years*, 34.
[313] Schildt, *Early Years*, 34.

> not a matter of romanticism or mysticism, but of their opposite, an extreme sense of reality, a sharing in nature's wisdom and rationality.[314]

In Aalto's world the building can proclaim human presence intertwined with nature or landscape, in the form of forest, water or rocks, not only as a Finnish commonplace, but also as a critical triad, adopted by historian Simon Schama – as narrative themes of 'Wood, Water, Rock' – to discuss landscape in Western cultural histories.[315] For Schama, Western culture retains its old senses of nature; even though the culture of the West 'has evolved by sloughing off its nature myths, they have, in fact, never gone away.' Furthermore, he argues, the myths, cults, obsessions and memories of other cultures, 'of the primitive forest, of the river of life, of the sacred mountain – are in fact alive and well and all about us if only we knew where to look for them.'[316]

Indicating the evolution of ideas of nature and place, Norwegian architecture historian Mari Hvattum (2012) questions certain enduring assumptions of Nordic architecture's affinity with 'nature' and 'place'. She characterises contemporary Nordic work as 'an architecture that effectively debunks the myths of authenticity and "naturalness" that surround Nordic building, replacing it with a far more interesting kind of contextualism.'[317] Hvattum proposes that the basic topographical context of Nordic architecture becomes complexified by 'layers upon layers of human action, sedimented in memory, language, customs, *and* physical form',[318] reinterpretation of concepts of 'nature' and 'place'.[319]

In the present study *nature* and *landscape* are noted as key terms for discussion of Aalto's architecture. While the two terms may be at times conflated in the Aalto literature and in architectural writing, landscape, as discussed below, emerges as the fundamental term and concept for understanding the heterodoxy of Aalto's modernism.

2.4.5 Nature to Landscape: A synthetic landscape: Aalto's own words

While nature is associated with biological principles, and generally in Aalto's work with science, with art, and the design of furniture and objects, landscape involves the presence of people, ideas of place, body sensations, lived experience and designing for experience. Landscape is read in the present study as basic to Aalto's architecture, and as both the particular place where architecture is placed, and the

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[314] Schildt, *Early Years*, 34.

[315] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Collins, 1995).

[316] Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 14.

[317] Mari Hvattum, 'Making Place'; in Kjeld Kjeldsen, Jeanne Rank Schelde, Michael Asgaard Andersen and Michael Juul Holm, eds, *New Nordic: Architecture and Identity* (Humlebaek, DK: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 115.

[318] Hvattum, 'Making Place', 115.

[319] See also John Roberts, 'Landscape and the little man: Aalto, the institution and the individual', in Paul Hogben and Judith O'Callaghan, eds., SAHANZ 2015: *Architecture, Institutions and Change*, 32nd Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand, Sydney, 7-10 July 2015.

representation of that particular place in the fabric and inside the spaces of that architecture.

Aalto was involved in nature and the natural world from his earliest years, partly as a result of his childhood years spent playing, exploring, hunting and fishing in the woods and lakes around the rural towns of Kuortane and Alajärvi in Central Finland.[320] Nature in Finnish can be *luonto*, wildlife or scenery, to be manifested, seen and experienced in the forms of living things, the animated space of the forest, and vistas over. Alternatively nature in Finnish can be *olemus*, the essence, presence or spirit of that living, non-human world, evident in its forms and its invisible animating energies. Nature as a force and an ordering principle could be observed in living things, in the plant and animal world, in the seasons and cosmos, and in biological, cellular and microbiological structures.

Aalto's early experience of the lakes, hills and forests of Central Finland, and the large white drawing table in his father's office, were part of his childhood, and appear to have been integral to his work and thought.[321] Hunting and surveying are identified by Schildt as formative childhood experiences for his notions of nature and landscape: 'As far as Aalto's attitude to nature is concerned ... I would like to suggest his experiences as a young hunter in the game-filled backwoods of central Finland, and his involvement with his father's surveying work.'[322]

From as early as 1925, Aalto differentiates the terms nature and landscape, observing that 'The landscapes we meet outside towns no longer consist of untouched nature anywhere'. Aalto concedes that this modern landscape should be seen not as pure or untouched but as a hybrid, 'a combination of human efforts and the original environment.'[323] Aalto became interested in landscape – in Finnish, *maisema*, forest, water, landform – learning how to capture its character through paintings, and how to capture its dimensions through technical drawing on the great white drafting table of his father's surveying practice, working with young engineers and surveyors amongst large contour maps and drawing materials,[324] and through working with his father as an assistant surveyor and cartographer staking out railway routes in the forests of Central Finland.[325] For the young Aalto the Finnish landscape could be conceived as part of working life, an entity of space and animation that could be measured and drawn, and elided into his architectural methods using his skills of seeing, drawing and analysis.

Nature, despite its inherent dynamism, could offer relatively steadfast governing principles of form, organisation and matter, while landscape could be contingent, in its physically challenging scale and formations, its variable locations, slopes, climate, verdures, geologies and ecologies, and in its ways of interweaving people and buildings. Amidst such contingencies, variabilities, and interdependencies, Aalto

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[320] Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, 13, 21.
[321] Aalto, 'The White Table', 11-12.
[322] Schildt, *Early Years*, 200.
[323] Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland', 21-22.
[324] Aalto, 'The White Table', 11-12.
[325] Schildt, *Early Years*, 33.

could make buildings that mediated landscape conditions, so that people might be placed in the midst of the things of the landscape, while being sufficiently buffered to be comfortable, delighted, and involved in the surrounding world.

2.4.6 Landscape and culture: a Japanese influence

Beyond the Finnish lakes and landscape, Aalto took considerable interest in Japanese architecture, design, and cultural affinities with the natural world. Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen associates Aalto with Japanese culture, noting that the Villa Mairea sauna 'is very carefully contrived to look like a sort of old, primitive building. But it is combined with subtleties which ultimately make a nod to the Japanese tradition in its sensitive interplay between nature and culture.'[326]

Figure 2.10 AALTO Aalto House
Source: Pallasmaa, *Aalto House 1936*

Yet Aalto maintained more than a passing interest in Japanese culture. Pallasmaa writes of Aalto's interest in Japan, reflected in the numerous editions of Yoshida's *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* (1935) in Aalto's library,[327] noting his 'total and willing acceptance of Japanese aesthetics' in the late 1930s.[328] An emotive photograph made by Aino or Alvar Aalto in 1937 depicts the south-west corner of the Aalto House, Helsinki (Fig.2.10), where materials and details evoke 'a Japanese image.'[329] Stone paving, as in a Japanese garden, curves by the house like a wave and passes the small pond, beyond which Scots pines lean in the mist, in a sensuous landscape

[326] Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, 'In Conversation with Kenneth Frampton', in Kries and Eisenbrand, *Alvar Aalto: Second Nature*, 206-207.

[327] Tetsuro Yoshida, *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* (Tübingen: Wasmuth, 1935).

[328] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Image and Meaning', in Juhani Pallasmaa, ed., *Alvar Aalto, Villa Mairea 1938-39* (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation / Mairea Foundation, 1998), 98.

[329] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Rationality and Domesticity', in *Alvar Aalto Architect, Vol.6: The Aalto House 1936*, ed. Juhani Pallasmaa (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Academy, 2003), 74-75.

image, interweaving fragments of garden and forest with the house's finely haptic outer surfaces.

Aalto wrote in 1935 that Japanese culture had 'previously ... shown great delicacy and understanding of the individual'; he also praised Japanese culture, 'which with its limited raw materials and forms has implanted in the people a virtuosity in producing variety'; and he noted that for Japanese people, their 'contact with nature and the ever-enjoyable variation it produces is a way of life that makes them reluctant to dwell too long on formalistic concepts.'[330] In Japanese culture Aalto could sense an alternative to industrialised production, images of a harmony between culture and nature that aligned with his own ideals, which could counter the 'formalistic concepts' of European modernism, and which, in its connection between culture and nature, demonstrated a possible merging of concern for landscape and the individual in a simultaneous phenomenology, from general concepts through to the Villa Mairea sauna, employing the finest crafted levels of 'delicacy and understanding'.

To conclude, Stilgoe's closing advice in *What is Landscape?* suggests a landscape epistemology that bases reflection in empirical experience, typifying Aalto's preference that his work be visited, from early experience as a surveyor's field assistant, where drawing and design are preceded by fieldwork.[331] Stilgoe urges a balance of reflection and involvement in regarding landscape: 'Landscape designates something so complex and rich and overwhelming it is best not to take one's inquiries too seriously. Inquiring into landscape is often an excuse for a walk, a rewarding walk. This book is no field guide. Close it now, put it down, and go.'[332]

This Literature Review is followed by the three analytical chapters of the study, investigating landscape in Aalto's architecture through themes of White, Waves and Ruins.

[330] Alvar Aalto, 'Rationalism and Man' (1935), in *Own Words*, 93.
[331] Aalto, Interview for Finnish television, 273-275.
[332] Stilgoe, *What is Landscape?*, 219.

CHAPTER 3. WHITE

3.0 Introduction

3.0.1 Landscape ontology of White

This chapter investigates the colour white and the wider notion of whiteness as it involves conception and experience of landscape in Aalto's architecture. The chapter inquires into aspects of White through phenomenological concepts of Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment. It argues that White, largely evident in the built walls, surfaces, and finishes of Aalto's architecture, creates significance in Aalto's work, contributing to the thesis argument that landscape constitutes the essential reality, the ontology, of Aalto's architecture.

3.0.2 Note: On chapter structure

Chapter 3, like Chapters 4 and 5, is introduced by a note on the key discourses that underlie and inform the chapter's phenomenological directions. This is followed by a brief chapter preface that notes the topics of the episodes. Each section then begins with a summary of the episodes, and ends with a conclusion. The chapter ends with a chapter conclusion to link to other chapters.

3.0.3 White and phenomenology: Discourses of Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment

In terms of the phenomenological concept of *Place*, White can be conceived through Norberg-Schulz's thinking in *Genius Loci* (1980).[333] Norberg-Schulz refers to Heidegger in making a phenomenological commentary on Trakl's poem 'A winter evening', where place is made of concrete phenomena, including landscape, itself a 'comprehensive phenomenon' made of others.[334] Norberg-Schulz observes a 'concrete structure' of inside and outside, where natural place is made present by 'the falling snow which implies winter, and by the evening', thus identifying snow as an indicator of place.[335]

Norberg-Schulz proposes that the landscape, as inhabited by humankind, 'is not a mere flux of phenomena, it has structure and embodies meanings.'[336] The Nordic forest landscape he classifies as 'Romantic', made of a varied and discontinuous ground, a sky of shifting clouds and fogs, low sun, streams and ponds. This constitutes a 'mutable and rather incomprehensible world', a landscape where diverse natural forces are encountered, and where, rather than 'simple, univocal space', a visitor finds 'an indefinite multitude of different places' with mythic overtones, 'where natural impressions and moods play a primary role.'[337] In this

[333] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 6-48.
[334] Norberg-Schulz, 'Phenomenon of Place', 414.
[335] Norberg-Schulz, 'Phenomenon of Place', 416.
[336] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 23.
[337] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 42.

landscape people must ‘approach nature with *empathy*,’ and humankind ‘has to live *with* nature in an intimate sense.’[338]

In terms of the phenomenological concept of *Atmosphere*, White may be conceived through Tawa, ‘Vaporous Circumambience’ (2015), where etymology and vocabulary are deployed to expand thinking on atmosphere in architecture.[339] Tawa writes of the emotional tuning, the tinge, tincture, tone, mood, attunement or *Stimmung* of a setting, place or work of architecture, and of atmosphere in terms of colour, warmth, complexion, and the ‘circumambient environment’ of touch: the ‘density, weave, texture or tincture of the milieu ... To be touched is to experience the compressive circumradiance of another being.’[340] Tawa also views ambience as a matter of relationships: ‘The different senses that wander within the ambit of a world defer to others to produce webs of interrelated, circumstantial meanings. These interrelations are the discrete, aerated texture of atmosphere. They take place in the gaps and interstices of meaning’. Sense, Tawa notes, concerns sharing rather than individual possession.[341] While Tawa’s terminology involves porosity, the interstitial, surroundings, it can omit landscape from the realm of architecture, ultimately couching atmosphere in terms of the limited ambit of architectural matter: ‘in the final analysis atmosphere can only be delivered by the extance of architecture – that is, its concrete materiality and presence, its affective spatiality and temporality and its capacity to move us into the unforeclosed and the unforeseen.’[342] A whiteness common to architecture and landscape may be found in Aalto’s work, to be illuminated and articulated, further extending Tawa’s unfolding of the interrelations of atmosphere.

In terms of the phenomenological concept of *Embodiment*, the understanding of White is developed through Goldhagen’s relation of human dwelling to landscape in *Welcome to Your World* (2017). Goldhagen suggests human history as ‘a story of building’, connecting architecture to landscape through the sensing, mortal human organism, ‘we thinking, breathing, sentient creatures [who] sleep when it’s dark and amble in the light, [until] we dissolve to dust'.[343] Inhabiting precariously the niches and open spaces of originary natural landscapes, humans have learned to build both with and against nature, closely involved with essential landscape conditions, so that now, ‘our experience of ourselves is embodied – situated in our bodies [which] are also situated in the foundational environment of the natural world.’[344]

Goldhagen asserts that the surrounding natural conditions of landscape, natural space, and climate ‘radically shape human cognitive experience in myriad ways’, so that the presence or absence of nature pervades human emotions and cognitions. Not only did millennia of landscape experience create and evolve ‘the structures and capacities of our minds and bodies’, but evolutionary experience of the climate,

338 Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 42.
339 Tawa, ‘Vaporous Circumambience’: 12-23.
340 Tawa, ‘Vaporous Circumambience’: 13.
341 Tawa, ‘Vaporous Circumambience’: 14.
342 Tawa, ‘Vaporous Circumambience’: 21.
343 Goldhagen, *Welcome to your World*, 136.
344 Goldhagen, *Welcome to your World,* 136.

vegetation and topography of natural habitats and ecosystems 'imbued us with sensitivities to and proclivities for certain environmental patterns and ways of being in the landscape.'[345]

Human experience of inhabitation of the earth thus arguably frames preferences, responses and adjustments of architectural and landscape conditions. Through humankind's long pre-urban existence, inhabited environments were dominated by the patterns and rhythms of nature; thus architecture is able to exploit a human predisposition for natural landscape, in seeking out 'a singular kind of pleasure in environments where nature's presence is palpable.'[346]

3.0.4 Preface: Surface, Form, Im/materiality

In each of the three sections, episodes are organised around three topics through which White can be problematised in architecture or landscape, summarised as *surface*, *form* and *immateriality*. It follows that white walls, painting and light are considered as matters of *surface*; inflection, snow and *materia* are considered as matters of *form*; and winter whiteness and embodiment in a photograph are regarded as issues of materiality or *im/materiality*. These repeated and reinterpreted strategies focus each section on a limited range of topics, and relate the diverse threads of the chapter's episodes.

Section 3.1 **White and Place** considers the white surfaces of the Muuratsalo House; the form and landscape implications of white walls at Alajärvi; and the materiality and immateriality of white in the natural environment of the Finnish winter.

Section 3.2 **White and Atmosphere** looks at the surfaces and significances of painting, particularly at Villa Mairea; at the forms of white related to landscape in Aalto Atelier; and at the significance of the everyday materiality of a wall in Aalto's Seinäjoki Theatre.

Section 3.3 **White and Embodiment** investigates light and white surfaces inside and outside Seinäjoki Library; Aalto's idea of *materia* in the white form and matter of a stair and landing at Jyväskylä Festival Hall; and the ambiguous materiality or immateriality of a street photograph of Aalto Atelier.

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[345] Goldhagen, *Welcome to your World*, 136-137.
[346] Goldhagen, *Welcome to your World*, 138.

3.1 White and Place

3.1.0 Introduction: White and Place

> In our context “identification” means to become “friends” with a particular environment. Nordic man has to be friends with fog, ice, and cold winds; he has to enjoy the creaking sound of snow under the feet when he walks around, he has to experience the poetical value of being immersed in fog, as Hermann Hesse did when he wrote the lines: “strange to walk in fog! Lonely is every bush and stone, no tree sees the other, everything is alone...” ... it implies that the environment is experienced as *meaningful*.[347]
>
> Norberg-Schulz, ‘The Phenomenon of Place’ (1976)

In this section’s three episodes, the phenomenological concept of Place is used to consider surface, form and immateriality in aspects of White in Aalto’s architecture.

In this section, *White and Place*, three Aalto works – Muuratsalo House, Alajärvi Town Hall and Alvar Aalto Museum – are discussed to see how differing aspects of the concept of Place can emerge through architectural expression as it adopts strategies of whiteness related to winter and its seasonal ephemera of particular places. This is seen in the white surfaces of Muuratsalo House, the inflected forms of Alajärvi Town Hall, and the immaterial landscape factors at play in understanding the Alvar Aalto Museum in its urban hillside setting at Jyväskylä.

Summary

3.1.1 White walls and landscape: Place and surface at Muuratsalo

Episode 3.1.1 looks at white surfaces and landscape at Muuratsalo House, and at the role of the white wall in contributing to place at Muuratsalo. It cites Malpas’s thinking on boundedness and openness, to identify the white wall as a modern surface and to connect it to landscape. Aalto’s white walls in the landscape are framed as part of his heterodox modernism, to argue for their phenomenological significance in terms of place.

3.1.2 Inflection: Alajärvi Town Hall: form and landscape, light and dark

In episode 3.1.2 the phenomenological value of Aalto’s late but important town hall in rural Alajärvi is argued as heightened by the building’s non-modern inflection to local circumstance, relating to landscape by treating part of the building’s elevation arguably as an articulated black and white screen. This episode cites Venturi’s thinking on inflection of building to context, to consider how Aalto’s design, in its form, materiality and outdoor spatiality, can interweave Town Hall, church and landscape into a unified experience of place. Significances of whiteness at Alajärvi are reflected in Joyce’s 1914 story ‘The Dead’, where the narrative concludes by involving emotions and

[347] Norberg-Schulz, ‘Phenomenon of Place’, 424.

landscape, in a cultural resonance with the Aalto building's contexts as they involve emotions, place, season and circumstance.

3.1.3 Winter war, whiteness and place: Alvar Aalto Museum

Episode 3.1.3 discusses winter, war and place in Finland as a compound influence on Aalto's work. It considers winter and landscape in the Alvar Aalto Museum, Jyväskylä, with reference to the Finnish 'Winter War' of 1939-40. The Museum is considered theoretically in terms of human and non-human perception of landscape, referring to Delue's sense of a non-pictorial 'animal view' of landscape. Winter is proposed here as a historical, spatial and perceptual reality, reflected in relations of surface and form between the white-finished Alvar Aalto Museum and its urban and landscape settings at Jyväskylä.

3.1.1 Summerhouse walls: Place and surface at Muuratsalo

> Only when the constructive parts of a building, the forms derived from them logically, and our empirical knowledge is coloured with what we might seriously call the art of play, only then are we on the right path. Technology and economics must always be combined with a life-enhancing charm.[348]
>
> Aalto, 'Experimental House at Muuratsalo' (1953)

> The interplay of the bounded and the open that is at issue here has a significance for human being that goes beyond the architectural alone: the very possibility of human knowledge and experience, which is to say, the very possibility of human openness to the world, arises only out of the singular finitude of human being, that is to say, out of its concrete situatedness, its placedness, its "being there".[349]
>
> Malpas, 'What is architecture for?' (2017)

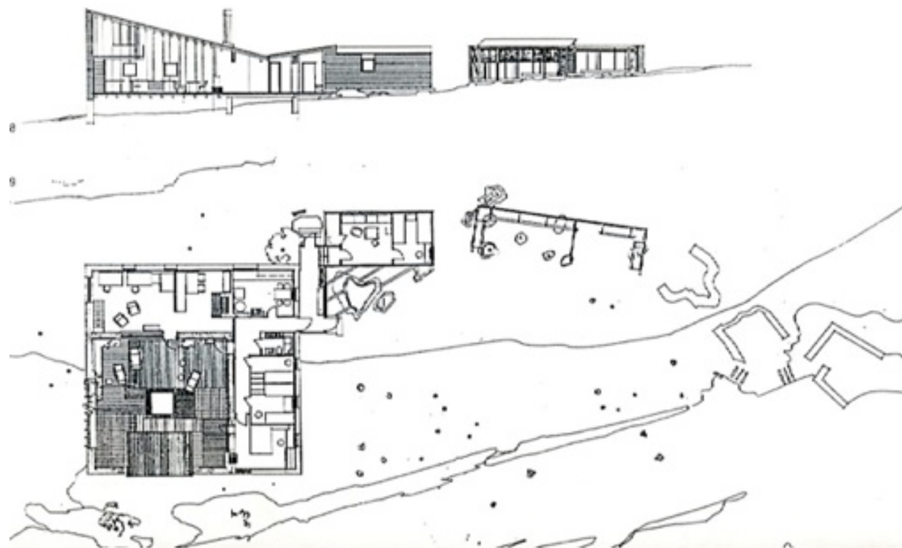

Figure 3.1. AALTO Muuratsalo House; section; floor plan
Source: AAM [350]

Aalto's Muuratsalo House (1953) may be described as a white building in the Finnish woods, on a sloping site on a granite island, overlooking water, and dominated by a square courtyard open to the sky, lined with reddish bricks and assorted ceramics. The building's abstract square plan, almost unique in Aalto's oeuvre, and its brief as both a summerhouse and as 'Experimental House', liberating it from everyday constraints of conception and dwelling, allow Muuratsalo to be regarded as a thought

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[348] Alvar Aalto, 'Experimental House at Muuratsalo' (1953), in *Own Words*, 234.

[349] Jeff Malpas, *'What Is Architecture For?' International Journal of Architectural Theory* 22, no.36 (2017): 121.

[350] Note: Alvar Aalto Museum / Alvar Aalto Museo is credited as a key image source, abbreviated in the present study as AAM.

experiment, a meditation on architecture, landscape, building and life in the modern world.

This episode investigates the role of the white wall in contributing to place at Aalto's Muuratsalo house, referring to works including Leatherbarrow's reflection on the play between visuality and physicality in connection with landscape in 'Facing and Spacing' (2009), Bruno's recent thinking on architecture's visual and material surfaces, and Malpas's ideas of 'bounded' and 'open' in 'What is architecture for?' (2017).

Le Corbusier in *Towards a New Architecture* (1930) proposed the essential purpose of the architect: 'architecture being ... the magnificent play of masses brought together in light, the task of the architect is to vitalise the surfaces which clothe these masses.'[351] The purpose of this first episode on White is to establish the identity of the white wall as a modern surface and to connect it to landscape. This may be sufficient to frame Aalto's white walls in the landscape as a significant part of his modernism, and to argue for the phenomenological significance of his white walls in terms of place. Given that the whiteness of Aalto's walls is at stake throughout this chapter, it seems valuable to establish a basis for the arguments of other episodes.

Philosopher Jeff Malpas, in 'What is architecture for?' (2017), argues that the ethical, human function of architecture, 'what architecture is *for*, and what it is', may be found in 'the dynamic interplay of bounded and open that lies at the heart of place.'[352] The Muuratsalo plan (Fig.3.1) is not centred indoors on the living room, a version of the traditional Finnish *tupa* main room, but about the outdoor room of the courtyard, a 15 x 15 metre square brick paved patio surrounded by a wall of profusely mottled brickwork. The courtyard's square central fire pit has classical overtones, recalling the Latin *focus*, the domestic hearth, as well as the ancient Roman *caput mundi* at the Capitol, and the Greek *omphalos*, the 'navel of the world', at Delphi.[353] Irish poet Seamus Heaney recalls the sound of a pump in a village centre as 'omphalos, omphalos'[354] (see also episode 5.1.3).

[351] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (London: John Rodker, 1930), 3.
[352] Malpas, 'What Is Architecture For?', 121.
[353] Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture*, 19.
[354] Seamus Heaney, 'Mossbawn', in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (London: Faber, 1980), 17.

Figure 3.2. AALTO Muuratsalo House; west, south walls
Photographs by John Roberts, 2008

Although the courtyard's square and centred plan may be conceptually abstract and geometrically pure, the would-be order of the colossal walls is ruptured by large openings cut dramatically out of the west and south brick walls (Fig.3.2). Suddenly the courtyard is open, no longer a complete enclosure, but a roofless and incomplete outdoor room open to the water and forest of the Finnish landscape beyond the walls.

This spatial sequence of nested elements at Muuratsalo may seem intellectually provocative in terms of inside-outside reciprocity,[355] aesthetically pleasing as prospect-and-refuge,[356] or historically identifiable as a *hortus conclusus*, a garden for contemplation or pleasure.[357] Yet the Muuratsalo courtyard can be viewed philosophically and more productively as place, if the courtyard and its containing walls are understood as *bounded*, together with the outside world of the landscape, as *open*. While the courtyard mediates between the house and the landscape, between inner and outer spaces, the freestanding brick walls mediate between the contained courtyard and the open world of the landscape.

Aalto termed the Muuratsalo house in Finnish *koetalo*, 'trying-things-out house', the 'experimental house', where, he noted, 'one can expect to try experiments that are not ready to be tried elsewhere, and where the proximity to nature can give fresh inspiration.'[358] In this summerhouse for pleasure and work, Aalto advised in his typical dualistic fashion, 'we should unite our experimental work with a play mentality or vice versa.'[359] This dualism of experimental work and holiday play, of cultural activity in the midst of nature, frames and prefigures the dualism of the white walls of Muuratsalo.

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[355] Anita Berrizbeitia and Linda Pollak*, Inside Outside: Between Architecture and Landscape,* (Gloucester, MA: Rockport, 1999).

[356] Grant Hildebrand, *The Wright Space: Pattern and Meaning in Frank Lloyd Wright's Houses* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991).

[357] Rob Aben and Saskia de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden: History and Development of the Hortus Conclusus and its Reintroduction into the Present-day Urban Landscape* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1999).

[358] Aalto, *Sketches*, 116.

[359] Aalto, *Sketches*, 116.

A focus on place, rather than on reciprocity, refuge or garden history, prompts the need for the philosophical approach of Malpas, interested in architecture in part for how it can make evident the philosophical idea of place. Malpas writes of place in architecture in terms of the bounded and the open, along with other dualities:

> Perhaps most important ... is the way in which the character of place – its encompassing of the bounded and the open, of the immanent and the transcendent, the sheltered and the free – carries over into the character of architecture and the built forms to which it gives rise. It suggests that what architecture is for, and what it is, is to be found precisely in the dynamic interplay of bounded and open that lies at the heart of place.[360]

Malpas suggests that the play between boundedness and openness that may be found in architecture is of utmost seriousness, is indeed 'what architecture is for.' This serious claim can be investigated by looking at the walls rather than the spaces. In the walls themselves, in the play and experiment of the white external surfaces of the bounding walls, can be found the serious understanding of architecture that extends the building so that it transcends itself, reaching outward to become intertwined with the landscape and to create its sense of place.

This claim for place, however, should be better made by framing the definitive walls as more than spatial containers, and more than limiting or dividing architectural elements. The two freestanding Muuratsalo walls' materiality, their position, and their outwardness makes them special in Aalto's architecture, and unique in modernism obsessed with white as an emblem of fashion, hygiene and universality. As freestanding walls they display two sides, the inner face red brick, the outer face texturally rich and whitewashed; where inside and outside meet at the courtyard portal becomes architecturally decisive. The walls are positioned to retain and contain the level courtyard, and they run down and across the topography; set on concrete footings their corner angle reinforces their structural stability, and they sit in bare air, capped with terracotta pantiles.

[360] Malpas, 'What Is Architecture For?': 121.

Figure 3.3. AALTO Muuratsalo House; west wall
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

The white outer face of the walls becomes the house’s visual and material interface with the surrounding landscape; here the seriousness of the walls mingles with play, as light and tree shadows move organic silhouettes animatedly across the faces of the walls, around their corners and over their ruts and gaps like a kind of landscape cinema (Fig.3.3). These childlike projections of living foliage animate the surfaces of the white walls and weave them into the mottled light and tangled surfaces of the forest, breaking down the intruding white masses of the building and dissolving its monochromy into the shades and the forms of the trees around its edges. The forest and the house exceed themselves and infiltrate each other in an interplay of the house’s boundedness and the forest’s openness, so that the house becomes open to the forest not only through its spaces but through the dissolving of its surfaces by the effects of light, shade, shadow and silhouette, of the forest loosening its bounds onto the open white screens of the walls.

Not only is Aalto’s summerhouse markedly *in* its landscape setting, but it is also engaged *with* the landscape, partly through the visual dynamic of the white surface acting in bright light as a screen for the projection of shadows from surrounding vegetation, creating an interconnection between building and landscape. Relation with the outer landscape is evident where the materiality of the white painted skin of the outer surface of the Muuratsalo courtyard wall, sensed together with the unpainted brick inner walls, creates a relationship with the outer environment. The character of place carries into and affirms the character of the architecture.

Figure 3.4. AALTO Muuratsalo House, portal
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

By using white to mediate between person and landscape, Aalto appears to address place in a particular detail at Muuratsalo, by defining a boundary at the courtyard portal, in a practical element endowed with mythic overtones (Fig.3.4). Open to the south, the jambs of the portal stand between inside and outside. Like pillars, with painted bases and copper cappings, the jambs guard a threshold between dual conditions: inside and outside, enclosed and open, manmade and natural, contained and container, determined and indeterminate, culture and nature, contributing an important juncture and a dramatic moment of transition for the whole building in its relations with the landscape. The portals recall the duality of the two-faced Janus, the ancient Roman deity of gates, transition, doorways, passages, and beginnings and endings.[361]

Figure 3.5. AALTO Muuratsalo House; portal detail
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

[361] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janus. Noted 1 Dec 2018.

Here, as if to acknowledge the significant hinge-like character of the Muuratsalo gateway, Aalto marks the inside-outside boundary, where cement render and white paint meet raw red brick, with a third element, a timber dowel nailed to the brickwork (Fig.3.5). While the dowel provides a practical stop for painting maintenance, its physically planted 'line' also marks the condition of boundary, effecting a vertical horizon (from Gk *horos*, boundary, border, limit) between surfaces and spaces. Against orthodox modernism's high-maintenance materiality, the heterodox Aalto combines everyday 'old' materials of brickwork, whitewash and dowel as sufficient means to define a limit and an edge, elaborating a key concept of boundary and place.

Thus at the Muuratsalo House, the portal as boundary may be seen as indicative of Aalto's 'trying-out' of ideas, an experimental extending of modernism, where he innovates through everyday material means in order to grapple in detail with inner questions of articulation and meaning, testing theory and using white in detail to create a key element of place. The relationship between inner and outer surfaces at Muuratsalo can establish a connection with the landscape beyond, through the subtly contrived duality of the wall, which becomes a key participant in 'the dynamic interplay of bounded and open that lies at the heart of place',[362] creating a significant marker of place for the white courtyard house in the landscape.

[362] Malpas, *'What Is Architecture For?'*: 121.

3.1.2 Inflection: Alajärvi Town Hall: form and landscape, light and dark

> A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward. Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland ... His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.[363]
>
> Joyce, 'The Dead' (1914)

Figure 3.6 AALTO Alajärvi Town Hall; Engel church
Source: Ray, *Alvar Aalto*

Strong personal bonds connected Aalto with the Central Finland lakeside town of Alajärvi, which became the Aalto family's 'emotional home' from 1918, and provided Aalto with early architectural commissions.[364] The earlier Neo-Classical church (1836), attributed to J.C.L. Engel, with its white walls and dark roofs, is sited in the town's lakeside park, where members of Aalto's immediate family are buried in the churchyard, a local landscape where the dark headstones stand against snow-covered ground in winter. The town hall site, then lightly wooded, could be seen from the Aalto family house in the 1920s.[365]

In the design of Alajärvi Town Hall (1966-69) Aalto created a small but significant work whose harmonies of architecture and place are dependent partly on the plan and surface articulation of its white outer wall (Fig.3.6). Elissa Aalto and Karl Fleig's description of Alajärvi underlines the building's non-modern inflection to its site and

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[363] James Joyce, 'The Dead' (1914), in *The Essential James Joyce* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1948), 174.

[364] Schildt, *Early Years*, 100-101. Aalto's personal and professional connections with Alajärvi are noted by architect Heikki Tarkka, interviewed in Charrington and Nava, *Mark of the Hand*, 212-215.

[365] Tarkka, Interview, *Mark of the Hand*, 213.

urban circumstance, and its intended relation to specifics of local place: ‘The new buildings are intended to be adapted to the surroundings, so that the rural character of the place can be observed.’[366] Part of this adaptation to context involves the unity achieved through attention to relations between white architectural and landscape elements.

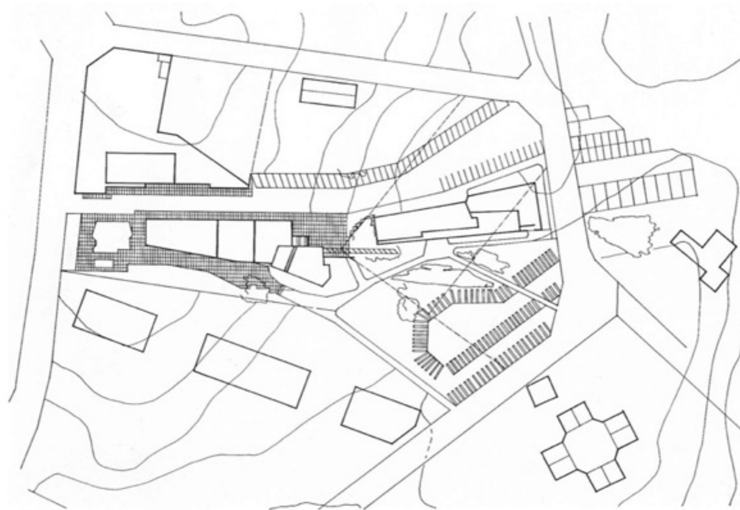

Figure 3.7 AALTO Alajärvi Town Hall, site plan, church lower right
Source: Alvar Aalto Band III

At Alajärvi Aalto goes beyond the idea of the independent autonomous modern building to adopt an arguably Mannerist strategy, inflecting the stepped white wall of the new building that faces the park towards both the older building and the existing landscape, directing the visitor along the wall toward the church in the park (Fig.3.7), and recalling Venturi’s note on context: ‘Context is important because it acknowledges the quality of a place, of a whole beyond the single building, and enhances an extended unity.’[367] Aalto creates a perceptual relationship, a mannered rhyme across space and time, between his building and Engel’s precedent, in creating the Town Hall wall as a stepped screen rendered in contrasting toned materials.[368] Melville in *Moby Dick* finds in the whiteness of the whale ‘the visible absence of colour; and at the same time the concrete of all colours’,[369] a paradox that seems to apply to the deliberate architectural, urban and landscape strategies at Alajärvi. Aalto aligns the Town Hall’s new whiteness with the older whiteness of the church by involving the ‘absence of colour’ of landscape space and the white ‘indefiniteness’ of the sky, using urban dualities to unify old and new architecture in urban space, against the dark shades of old roofs, new walls, and the dark vegetation of the park.

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[366] Elissa Aalto and Karl Fleig, eds, *Alvar Aalto: Band III / Volume III: Projects and Final Buildings* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1978), 54.
[367] Robert Venturi, ‘Architecture as Sign rather than Space: New Mannerism rather than Old Expressionism’, in Venturi and Scott Brown, *Architecture as Signs and Systems*, 10.
[368] Tim Edensor, *From Light to Dark: Daylight, illumination, and gloom* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
[369] Melville, ‘The Whiteness Of The Whale’, 200-201.

Aalto had personal connections with the Engel church. As a young architect he designed a number of buildings in Alajärvi, and painted and drew the historic church, noting its white body and dark roofs. In 1919 Aalto described the experience of a service in the church: 'when I am leaving the church, I feel what a complete human being I am ... For a moment one has received the gift of seeing the beautiful in everything.'[370] In this epiphany in the Engel church, the young Aalto senses social and personal oneness through communal gathering in the church. This sense of completeness and harmony emerges from a spiritually satisfying encounter with people, occasion and building, experienced on the threshold between the church and the lakeside landscape. From this experience Aalto glimpses a possible social and environmental harmony; architecture, if not the sole cause, seems to act at least as a catalyst in his place-related feeling of harmony.

This relation of architectural parts in a greater continuity 'involves the art of the fragment,' argues Venturi in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1977), noting that the fragment 'implies richness and meaning beyond itself,' and that in perceptual terms, 'it is dependent on something outside itself, and in whose direction it inflects.'[371] The difficult harmony that Aalto attempts to forge between the new Town Hall and the older church is noted by Porphyrios: 'To study inflectional tactics meant, therefore, both to work in spatial context and to travel in historical time.'[372] Venturi argues for inflection as a means of composing a whole by exploiting the character of individual parts: 'By inflecting toward something outside themselves, the parts contain their own linkage: inflected parts are more integral with the whole than are *un*inflected parts.'[373]

Aalto's inflection at Alajärvi involves two strategic moves, in plan and in elevation. First, in plan, an alignment and realignment of the wall plane around the doorway redirects a visitor's perception, then their movement, as they walk along the tapering path between building and park, toward the old church. Second, the building's elevation beyond the doorway relates new and old, by appropriating the church's dark and white surfaces and applying them to the Town Hall's dark stone and white rendered façade, and combining stepped silhouette, shadows, contrasting materials, sloping path, and artificially contrived perspective to tie buildings and the facing park landscape together as an urban whole.

Images of Alajärvi Town Hall show its meticulously executed park façade, which ends in a dark and light screen wall (Fig.3.6), articulated in white painted render and dark stone tiles, making a visual rhyme between the Town Hall and the church, while rendering the building with an ambiguous appearance of dark and light planes that recede and advance when viewed not obliquely but squarely, from the park. A winter image suggests Aalto's attention to a harmonious seasonality in the building's façade, anticipating both the shadows of summer foliage on its white surfaces, and

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[370] Schildt, *Early Years*, 102.
[371] Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 2nd edn (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 90.
[372] Porphyrios, *Sources*, 87-94.
[373] Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction*, 88.

the interplay between the dark and light building, and the snow, trees and shadows of the park in winter.

Aalto's deployment of light and dark reflects a basic phenomenological contrast of natural light and dark, identified by anthropologist Tim Edensor as 'the fluid, vital and processual qualities of the landscape [which] includes the endless play of light and the ways in which humans, as part of the landscape, respond to these unfolding conditions.'[374] These kinds of 'fluid and processual' landscape conditions unfold through natural light in the examples of night and day, billowing cumulonimbus storm clouds, the fleeting shadows of clouds and trees, and the profiles of dark forests and landforms against bright sky. Shifting conceptually from natural light to artificial white, Aalto, remembering nature and following Engel's church, proposes white walls, which are countered and also articulated by a dark base, dark wall tiles, and darker trim and shadows. Through dark and light built surfaces, Aalto makes architecture that involves landscape in a civic setting which also held deep personal meaning for himself.

Formally, visually, materially and functionally, the Alajärvi Town Hall plan expands, from the plan deflection at the entry, towards park and church, through the contrivance of its black and white façade, whose cuts, folds and steps integrate in a perspective view of the dark-roofed church. While the wall in elevation seems assertively tall, its silhouette perceived in perspective resolves to form a carefully curated urban design, enfolding the Town Hall, the Engel church and the adjacent landscape of churchyard, park and lake, in a harmonious composition of people, architecture and landscape.

This strategy recalls the inflections of Italian Mannerist urbanism, as in the example, noted by Dutch architect Herman Hertzberger, of Bramante's Piazza Ducale, Vigevano, Italy (1684), where parts of individual buildings, including a large church, are deliberately inflected to create the greater public ensemble of the piazza, unifying otherwise unrelated fragments to form a harmonious urban whole. Hertzberger notes that at Vigevano the buildings 'relinquish or play down their objectness. The form of the piazza prevails above the utterances of individual buildings'.[375] Aalto creates his modern urban harmony at Alajärvi through the addition of a new building that relinquishes the individual 'objectness' of its plan form and elevation, to make a new and unexpected synthesis through the contrast of white and landscape with their putative 'others', of dark surfaces and a built object.

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[374] Edensor, 'Seeing with landscape, seeing with light', in *From Light to Dark*.

[375] Herman Hertzberger, *Space and the Architect: Lessons in Architecture 2* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2000), 223-225.

Figure 3.8 AALTO *Tracks in Snow*
Source: Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: A Life's Work*

The close connection between Aalto and his family's history at Alajärvi, between the living and the dead, like the spatial and temporal resonance between the white and black buildings, involves building in a place with light and dark, a creative strategy whose cultural resonances can be found also beyond architecture. At around the same time as the young Alvar Aalto painted his 1914 winter landscape watercolour *Tracks in Snow* (Fig.3.8),[376] Irish modernist writer James Joyce (1882-1941) invoked an image of snow in the dark Irish rural landscape to conclude his story 'The Dead' (1914).[377]

Figure 3.9 AALTO Alajärvi Town Hall
Source: Internet image (2015)

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[376] In *Alvar Aalto: A Life's Work – Architecture, Design and Art*, ed. Göran Schildt, trans. Tomothy Binham (Helsinki: Otava, 1994), 274.
[377] Giedion, noting Aalto's 'personable' nature, connects 'Aalto the man' to Joyce, noting that Aalto 'draws incentive and stimulation from contact with men of varied callings, much as James Joyce did.' Giedion, *Space Time and Architecture*, 490.

As Joyce's story ends, following a deeply disappointing epiphany, the character Gabriel Conroy turns to look out from his bedroom window, to see and hear snow falling in the night across a churchyard, and falling beyond, across the dark Irish landscape in drift after drift of darkness and whiteness: 'A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight.'[378] The 'silver and dark' snow, falling generally, descends in a final unity of the living and the dead, while at Alajärvi, close by Aalto's light and dark civic building, snow settles on paths, headstones, town hall and churchyard in a rare winter landscape image (Fig.3.9). Before Joyce, and before Aalto, Melville in *Moby Dick* could sense in the whiteness of the great whale 'a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows – a colourless, all-colour of atheism'.[379]

The dark and light of winter involves building and landscape, interlacing place, architecture and history with individual human feeling. Landscape emerges as a fundamental reality for architecture, as it emerges at the end of Joyce's story, invoking the whole of Ireland, unified under snow. Unifying disparate elements and bringing to architecture a reality larger than itself, architecture is recognized by Aalto in ways that identify his approach to making architecture for the 'little person' and directed at forging harmony with the natural world.

[378] Joyce, 'The Dead', 174.
[379] Melville, 'The Whiteness Of The Whale'.

3.1.3 Winter war, whiteness, place: Alvar Aalto Museum, Jyväskylä

> The Finnish winter is long – at least six months – and the winter days short ... often fantastically illuminated by the intensity of brilliant sunlight playing on the snow. All of Aalto's work demonstrates that he had an acute awareness of the quality of light ... as it occurs in the Finnish landscape and is reflected in his interiors ... [380]
>
> Quantrill, *Alvar Aalto: A critical study* (1989)

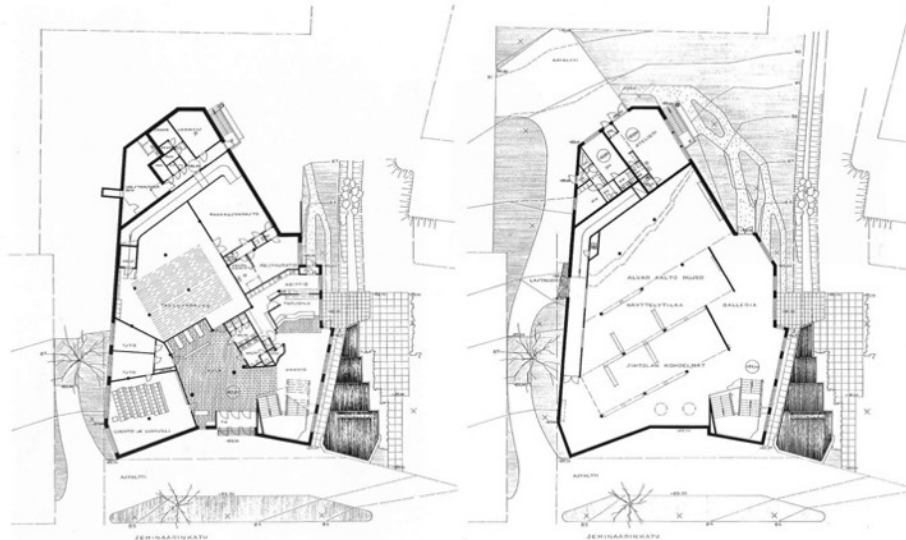

Figure 3.10 AALTO Alvar Aalto Museum, Jyväskylä, plans
Source: *Alvar Aalto Band III*

The relationship between a building and a larger historical narrative or story may be decisive in the creation of place, while the material whiteness of the building becomes no less significant than its form. As a result its whiteness may become in itself part of its local, national and historical significance. Winter is part of the 'story' of Finland, and Aalto's architecture in its whiteness becomes interwoven with a national story or narrative in a building which Aalto initially approached with reluctance in his seventies.

In the Alvar Aalto Museum, Jyväskylä (1971-73), a distinctively formless white building houses an art collection and part of the Aalto archive, and exhibits Aalto's own work. Inside, exhibition spaces on two levels, with a back wall formed as a miniature version of the New York Pavilion 'great wave' wall, are buffered with secondary program. The clustered spaces are wrapped in a continuous outer wall, a ribbed, undulating white curtain, minimally modulated, and articulated only at the openings (Fig.3.10).

[380] Quantrill, *A Critical Study*, 6.

Figure 3.11 AALTO Alvar Aalto Museum
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

The building façade folds at corners and pauses at the wide doorway, with copper-clad doors and a sensuous marble slab, which follows the street boundary, and steps to return to a side elevation that opens onto a terrace beside an artificial waterfall (Fig.3.11). This building of unclear form sits at the base of a slope, fronting a street, beside a natural gully, located as confidently as a boulder in its natural and urban place, on a green hillside above a lake. Aalto builds with matt white blockwork, clad with glazed ceramic baton tiles on its outer surfaces, creating a rippling white skin that wraps around corners and angles, with a unifying texture of corduroy.

Referring to the idea of a continuous 'skin-like' façade, Pallasmaa describes Aalto's buildings as other than geometric objects, especially relevant to the Aalto Museum:

> Instead of appearing as assembled planes, Aalto's façades are skin-like surfaces that wrap themselves around their volumes (in fact, many of his buildings appear to have a single continuous façade circumscribing the entire volume) enhancing an organic cohesion and animistic feeling.[381]

By relating the idea of a building's identity, unity and harmony to its 'animistic', 'skin-like' outer surface, Pallasmaa's notion can shift the discourse on a work such as the Museum away from the abstract modern visuality of 'assembled planes', towards landscape. Here, on the Jyväskylä hillside, considering a relatively formless white building with a 'single continuous façade circumscribing the entire volume', it seems possible to consider the consequences of a more 'natural' mode of perception and knowledge, to follow Pallasmaa's hint of 'animistic feeling' and admit a different beginning for understanding this late and close-to-home Aalto work, based on winter whiteness, landscape and place. It is argued here that an 'organic cohesion' is developed between the building, its site, and Aalto's personal connection to Jyväskylä and to the twentieth-century history of Finland, in the making of a building that settles in harmony with its social, cultural, historical and spatial contexts.

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[381] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', *Journal of Architecture* 3, no.4 (1998): 295.

Finland regularly transforms into a white landscape for six months of each year, an extreme seasonality that frames non-urban livelihood, resource use, dwelling and culture.[382] Novelist Toivo Pekkanen, in *The Youngest Brother* (1946) describes the significance of the Finnish winter:

> For the north, winter is the only real season of the year. Spring is but a promise ... summer is an illusion ... autumn is a dying, spring's promise and summer's illusion cast into the dark grave. But winter is indeed of our essence: snow, ice and cold are part of our nature. Winter never betrays us. Its arrival is a certainty.[383]

Indigenous Saami note eight seasons, including three stages of winter, in northern Finland.[384] Finnish winter's differences from summer, in temperature, ground surface, and food resources, create existential challenges for living things, whose evolved responses to winter's deep cold, scarcity of resources, and vast whiteness can be seen in the winter behaviour and camouflage of certain northern birds and mammals.

Figure 3.12 Arctic Fox and White-tailed Ptarmigan, in winter camouflage
Source: www.destinationwildlife.com; www.birdnote.com

Natural models of adaptation to seasonal difference are found in northern species such as the Arctic Fox *Vulpes lagopus*, and the White-tailed Ptarmigan *Lagopus leucura*, which have evolved seasonally variable pelage and plumage, bodily metabolisms and feeding behaviours to survive winter's cold and visual whiteness (Fig.3.12).[385] Shedding dark or mottled summer coats, these high latitudes animals grow white winter coats that conserve body heat and allow them to dissolve visually into a landscape of white forests, snow-covered hills and frozen lakes. The evolutionary adaptation of white coats, reducing detection of animals by predator or prey, becomes decisive for winter survival and existence.

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[382] Michael Jones, 'Seasonality and landscape in northern Europe: An introductory explanation', in Hannes Palang, Helen Sooväli and Anu Printsmann, eds, *Seasonal Landscapes* (Dordrecht, NL: Springer, 2007).

[383] Toivo Pekkanen, *Nuorin veli* / *The Youngest Brother* (Porvoo, Finland: Söderström, 1946); quoted in W.R. Mead and Helmer Smeds, *Winter in Finland* (London: Hugh Evelyn, 1967), 28.

[384] Jones, 'Seasonality and landscape', 20. See also W.R. Mead, *An Historical Geography of Scandinavia* (London; New York: Academic Press, 1981).

[385] For Arctic Fox, see also Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams* (London: Vintage, 2014), 266-268.

Figure 3.13 Winter War (1939-40), Finnish troops in white camouflage
Source: Google images[386]

In December 1939, Finland was confronted by an existential challenge when a large Russian military force invaded Finland's eastern border, and the Finnish army, not unlike Arctic animals, adapted to winter conditions to defend their country against the aggressor. Using knowledge of terrain and conditions and altering appearances and behaviours, the Finnish army improvised white 'winter coats', wearing skis and donning white clothes to reduce their visibility in the snowy landscape, attacking and vanishing in locally familiar forest environments (Fig.3.13). Partly through this adaptation to landscape conditions, after four months of brutal winter conflict, the Finns were able to contain the invasion, halting the 1939-40 Winter War in a truce.[387] The Winter War profoundly traumatised Aalto: six of his office staff died in the conflict, while his brother committed suicide.[388] Menin and Samuel remark that 'the desperate reality of war seems to have weighed him down, hindering his ability to play or create.'[389] 'Aalto's equilibrium,' they note, 'was shaken to the core by his terror of death.'[390]

At Jyväskylä, where Aalto lived in his youth, and where he designed the University campus in the 1950s, the later 1973 Museum design seems to conceal feelings, traumas and memory of experience inside a building of minimal material expression, wearing a 'white coat' to merge into a white landscape. In its animalist pelage, the Museum sits almost without expression, flat within the gravity of its site beside a created stream, quietly disguised in white. The building becomes an object for a kind of natural perception, one that seems either unrelated to conventional architectural or landscape perception, which may be part of its own perception.

The relationship between Aalto and the Aalto Museum building and its siting, form, materiality and whiteness can be seen as a story of Aalto's relationship to place. Michael Tawa in 'Place, Country, Chorography' (2002) links place with narrative, myth and story in describing indigenous Australian links with land, landscape, place,

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[386] Source: Google images <finnish winter war> Noted 1.2.2013.
[387] William R. Trotter, *A frozen hell: The Russo-Finnish winter war of 1939-1940* (New York: Algonquin Books, 2000).
[388] McCarter, *Aalto*, 110.
[389] Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, 89.
[390] Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, 89; cite Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Mature Years* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 14.

country, describing deep-seated interconnections of events and individuals to landscape and place, through story:

> Central to the encounter and engagement with place is the role of narrative. The experience of country is accompanied by storytelling. Narratives recount ancestral stories or myths, which are beyond living memory, as well as historical events in long and short term communal and individual memory. In each case, country is read directly in relation to these stories. Every place is a place where someone has come from, where something happened, where someone did something, where something was said or decided.[391]

Tawa's account of connection to land offers a way to see Aalto's national, regional, and personal narratives, to do with architecture and place, as Aalto implies in 'National-International'.[392] Consideration of Aalto's Finnish identity – perhaps his indigeneity, his belonging to country, his sense of landscape – as framing his design for a museum housing his own work can reveal the influence that narratives and stories of landscape or 'country' may have on architecture at different simultaneous scales. Indigenous narratives, intertwining place, country and story, resonate with the 'localness' of Aalto's act of designing this museum in Jyväskylä in Central Finland, where site, locality and region are nested relative to Aalto's narratives.

Casey in *Getting Back into Place* suggests that building's relationship to place is dependent on narratives of landscape and myth, in that building 'calls for heeding the parameters of the natural setting: a building, like a mythology, "reflects its region". Not to heed the natural features of a region is to build unreflectively; it is to occupy a site rather than to construct a place adequate to its setting.'[393] The exceptionally unified material whiteness of the building's outside skin becomes part of its architectural significance. Thus the wartime narrative (still part of the living memory of Aalto and many Finns in 1973) of Finnish resistance to invasion, including the indeterminacy of the localized winter landscapes where white-clad soldiers defended against the Russian army, can be included in the idea of place that informs understanding of the Aalto Museum.

[391] Michael Tawa, 'Place, Country, Chorography: Towards a Kinesthetic and Narrative Practice of Place', *Architectural Theory Review* 7, no.2 (2002): 46-47.

[392] Alvar Aalto, 'National – International' (1950), in *Own Words.*

[393] Casey, *Getting Back into* Place, 149. Casey refers to Wallace Stevens, 'A Mythology Reflects its Region', in *The Palm at the End of the Mind: Selected Poems and a Play* (1972), 398.

Figure 3.14 BARTRAM Alachua Savanna, drawing
Source: Delue, 'Is landscape theory?'

In this context of human, animal and place, art historian Rachel Ziady Delue raises a challenging questioning of landscape perception and knowledge in 'Is landscape theory?' (2014). Delue describes a hybrid map / landscape drawing (c.1765) by American botanist William Bartram, depicting the Alachua Savanna, a Florida prairie and marsh surrounded by woodland, where the space of the drawing, like that of the savanna, is enlivened by plants, birds and animals (Fig.3.14). Bartram, proposes Delue, was interested as an explorer scientist in 'what capacities nature might possess on its own, distinct from those of humans'; Bartram was interested in landscape, in possible ways of knowing new terrains, 'including a model of knowing that de-centred the human and put the animal or the plant in his place.'[394]

Delue suggests a landscape not viewed or claimed by human culture, but instead perceived by animal eyes and inhabited by non-human consciousnesses. A white winter landscape could be perceived and manipulated by white-camouflaged animals, or in human terms the wartime animal-like Finnish sharpshooter, concealed by white camouflage in the snow. The white-clad soldier, alert to hostile movement in the landscape, and with knowledge of topography and conditions, uses white camouflage of body and equipment to remain unseen.

Reflecting on Bartram's drawing, Delue raises the idea when thinking about architecture, landscape and place, that landscape might appear on its own terms, prior to or without a human observer: 'Might it be possible to situate theory and its attendant ways of seeing and understanding in the landscape itself, and not in the historical or the social?'[395] Thus landscape appears more radically, from an 'animal's eye' point of view, as distinct from a human vantage point:

> ... thinking about landscape prior to a human perceiver and about landscape as a thing that itself looks or posits a ground from which other non-human beings might perceive, could open up a new terrain of concepts and

[394] Rachael Ziady Delue, 'Is landscape theory?' in Doherty and Waldheim, *Is Landscape ...?*, 275.
[395] Delue, 'Is landscape theory?', 274.

> questions for use in imagining, describing, constructing, and questioning landscape ... [396]

Delue's 'new terrain of concepts and questions' suggests the 'terrain' where Aalto's formless building emerges in landscape understanding, resembling a natural creature at large in its environment, seeing and being seen, or not, mostly white in a sometimes white world.

Following Delue, the 'non-human' vantage point becomes uniquely appropriate for approaching Aalto's firmly located, finely placed but externally formless white Museum. From such a viewpoint, of the landscape perceiving itself, the building abuts and opens to the street at its wide front, accommodates people on a terrace by a stream at its side, and backs its docking and storage functionally against the hill behind. Greeting the visitor with little more than a name plate and bronze doors in a rift in the white wall, the Alvar Aalto Museum tucks itself into a compact mass, like the Arctic Fox, and lies still.

[396] Delue, 'Is landscape theory?', 275.

3.1.4 Conclusion: White and Place

In the Muuratsalo House, Alajärvi Town Hall and Alvar Aalto Museum, aspects of place emerge through architectural expression in strategies of whiteness, related to winter and regional seasonal ephemera. Whiteness manifests in readings of the white walls of Muuratsalo, the inflected forms of Alajärvi, and the animal and non-human landscape factors used to frame significances of the Museum in its Jyväskylä hillside setting.

Writing on place and phenomenology, Norberg-Schulz observes a 'concrete structure' of inside and outside, where natural place is made present by 'the falling snow which implies winter, and by the evening', thus identifying snow as an indicator of place.[397] The places of Alajärvi, Jyväskylä and Muuratsalo were all intimately known by Aalto through family history and personal connection; the descent of snow on these places both alters their appearance and cements their meaning as known place. Norberg-Schulz proposes that the landscape, as inhabited by humankind, 'is not a mere flux of phenomena, it has structure and embodies meanings.'[398] He classifies the Nordic forest landscape as a 'mutable and rather incomprehensible world', of varying ground, shifting clouds and fogs, low sun, streams and ponds. In this landscape of diverse natural forces a visitor finds 'an indefinite multitude of different places' with mythic overtones, 'where natural impressions and moods play a primary role.'[399] In this complex landscape the visitor approaches nature 'with *empathy*,' and the human dweller, like the animals, learns 'to live *with* nature in an intimate sense.'[400]

This landscape emerges as animated by the drama of seasonal change, where ephemera cover the ground, temperatures fall, the air thickens and shifts. The human dresses, travels and dwells differently in winter in the landscape. Responding to this winter-affected landscape, Aalto develops an architecture of surface, form and meaning, where local factors of winter influence thinking about Aalto's white architecture, relative to place.

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[397] Norberg-Schulz, 'Phenomenon of Place', 416.
[398] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 23.
[399] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 42.
[400] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 42.

3.2 White and Atmosphere

3.2.0 Introduction: White and Atmosphere

In the three episodes of this section the phenomenological strand of Atmosphere is used to consider surface, form and immateriality in aspects of White in Aalto's architecture.

This section considers how atmosphere can be associated with the landscape whiteness of winter snow, light and the white sky, and white in paintings and painted surfaces, light and interiors, to create feeling and mood for the visitor and everyday user of Aalto's buildings. This section investigates atmosphere through surfaces in painting in late nineteenth century Nordic landscape painting, Cézanne and Cubism as they influenced Aalto's painting and Villa Mairea; through forms in snow, and its formal resonances and atmospheric significance at Aalto Atelier; and in the landscape significance of a nearly immaterial white wall in Seinäjoki Theatre.

A general backdrop to thinking about white and atmosphere is the long winter of Finland and Scandinavia, when snow can cover the ground for half the year, becoming an ambient condition familiar to all who live in the Nordic world. In architectural terms Treib notes, when writing of Woodland Cemetery, Stockholm, by Asplund and Lewerentz (1915-40), that 'another world emerges. What was green is now white, and the buildings are the darker rather than the lighter items', with a 'beauty of perhaps an even higher order', and a setting where 'Light defines the soft topography of the surface.'[401] This alternate white landscape, which feels, looks, sounds and behaves differently as a material and surface to the summer landscape, becomes important in thinking about the phenomenology of landscape in Aalto's work.

At stake throughout this section, *White and Atmosphere* is a notion that atmosphere is central to architecture. In Aalto's work the sensing of atmosphere is facilitated and understood through its involvement with landscape.

Summary

3.2.1 It all began in painting: Villa Mairea: white surfaces and atmosphere

> Episode 3.2.1 looks at the influence of painting in Aalto's work, after the presence of white in Cézanne's painting. Painting was closely coupled with architecture in Aalto's creative method, performing an important role as a test-bed for ideas of form, expression and perception. Painting can also be connected to the creation of interior and exterior atmosphere in Aalto's architecture, particularly in Villa Mairea, widely regarded as aligned with modern art, including a Cubist collage technique. Referring to the thinking of Pallasmaa on Villa Mairea, and of Bois and of Berger on Cézanne, this episode considers white as essential to the involvement of Aalto's painterly architecture with landscape in creating atmosphere using white paint, particularly the presence of white in the work of Cézanne.

[401] Marc Treib, 'Inflected Landscapes' (1984), in *Settings and Stray Paths: Writings on Landscapes and Gardens* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2005), 66.

3.2.2 Snow: Aalto Atelier and atmosphere of form

Atmosphere is argued as the core phenomenology of Aalto's 1914 watercolour *Tracks in Snow*, which evidences his skills of perceiving and depicting phenomena of surface, shadow, silhouette, etc. in the snow-covered winter landscape. Episode 3.2.2 investigates the white forms of Aalto buildings, focusing on the Aalto Atelier, an all-white building linking inside and outside, and Aalto's office for over 20 years, to relate winter atmosphere as a natural precedent for Aalto's white architecture. The natural phenomenon of snow, understood as a chromatic and spatial landscape totality, is argued here, following the thinking of phenomenologist Schmitz (1969), as constituting an affective atmosphere.

It is further proposed, following the thinking of Riedel (2019), that an all-white building may constitute (an) atmosphere in its own right, in its spatiality, materiality and presence in space. In this sense Aalto Atelier appears to constitute its own particular atmosphere. This episode explores atmosphere in the snow-like whiteness of Aalto Atelier, manifest in its strategies, forms, elements and details, and sensed in its experience as merging architecture and landscape.

3.2.3 White walls, barely material: Seinäjoki Theatre

Episode 3.2.3 considers the perceivable atmosphere of landscape generated by a white indoor wall at Aalto's Seinäjoki Theatre. Informed by Aalto's recollection of the 'white table' of his childhood, this episode regards an indoor wall in terms of its resonances with landscape, as a white wall, sparsely materialized, with incidental, elements within their respective works of architecture. Depicted and perceived as more than a screen but less than a massive wall, these white walls raise their own questions on the articulation of everyday surfaces relative to the atmospheric potential of the white surface, and to landscape in the world beyond the walls.

3.2.1 It all began in painting: Villa Mairea: white surfaces and atmosphere

> But it all began in painting![402]
> Aalto, cited by Schildt (1984)

> Then, during the last 20 years of his life, Cézanne begins to apply those swabs of colour to the canvas, not where they correspond to the local colour of an object, but where they can indicate a path for our eyes through space, receding or oncoming. He leaves more and more patches of the white canvas untouched. These patches are not mute, though: they represent the emptiness, the hollow openness, from which the substantial emerges.[403]
> Berger, 'Cézanne: Paint it black' (2011)

Aalto's Villa Mairea, Noormarkku (1937-39) was conceived as a country villa for an artist and collector of modern art, partly as an art gallery and partly also as an architectural experiment, designed in collaboration with Aino Marsio-Aalto and client Maire Gullichsen, with a painterly method formative in its design and making. Aalto makes clear his intention to relate painting with the form and materiality of Villa Mairea: 'In this building the designer sought to apply a special concept of form connected to modern painting. He believes that modern painting gives a building and a home a deeper and ultimately more human material and formal accent.'[404]

Figure 3.15 MANTEGNA *Martyrdom of St James*
Source: Beck, *Italian Renaissance Painting*

Aalto writes of how he found in the paintings he saw in Italian towns a basis for the integration of building and landscape, as a civilised cultural, social and environmental

[402] Schildt, *Early Years*, 153.
[403] John Berger, 'Cézanne: Paint it black', *The Guardian*, 12 Dec 2011, np.
[404] Aalto, 'Mairea', 230.

synthesis. He noted the work of Renaissance painters such as Fra Angelico, whose *Annunciation* (Fig.2.3) illustrates and informs his 'Doorstep' article (1926), and Andrea Mantegna, whose *Martyrdom of St James* (1450s) in Padua (Fig.3.15), Aalto wrote, 'contains something that could be called synthetic landscape painting. It is an architect's drawing of a landscape ... Furthermore, it is a splendid analysis of terrain.'[405]

In Mantegna's 'synthetic landscape' Aalto would have observed white classical ruins against terraced hillside groves, Renaissance structures, and a general harmony of diverse elements, a 'religious beauty', set in 'an architect's drawing of a landscape' of hills, paths and geological strata, in bright Mediterranean sunlight. Such works echoed Aalto's lived experiences of the hill towns of northern Italy, experiences that Aalto was intent on emulating and even recreating through his architecture, in the hills and towns of Finland, for his fellow Finns.

These conceptions, derived from looking at paintings, are reflected in Aalto's argument that buildings 'should be placed in the landscape in a natural way, in harmony with its general contours.'[406] Aalto's concept of landscape was literally 'grounded' in landform, in the problems of where buildings might be placed in the 'general contours' of the land extending beneath, around, and beyond those buildings. Aalto was to represent landscape in technically drawn contour lines and sketched platforms, stairs, levels and horizons throughout his working life.

The further importance of painting in Aalto's work is made clear in Schildt's comment on Aalto's view of modern culture: 'He would often say, talking about the modern arts as a whole ... literature, music, fine art and architecture, "But it all began in painting!"'[407] Following Aalto's comments, it becomes important to consider how white paint and white built form contribute to a particular atmosphere, to be experienced as the result of Aalto's desire for 'a deeper and ultimately more human' version of modern architecture.

Schildt names Cézanne as the key influence on Aalto's architecture, and argues that while open space in Cézanne's works may seem 'formless' and undefined, the paintings nonetheless create harmony and unity: 'Cézanne's paintings are not "finished"', he notes, 'they contain unworked gaps, just as our perception does, but they still make up a harmonious, balanced system of forms, which gives us satisfaction.'[408] Schildt notes that 'Aalto's great discovery was that architectural interiors can be treated the same way.'[409] In this way, the colour white becomes a means to connect architecture and landscape through painting.

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[405] Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', 291. Pallasmaa cites the original Finnish version of *Aalto in his Own Words*, *Näin puhui Alvar Aalto* (1996), 49 (trans. Pallasmaa). See also James Beck, *Italian Renaissance Painting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 226-228.

[406] Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland', 21-22.

[407] Schildt, *Early Years*, 153.

[408] Schildt, 'Open and closed space', in *Early Years*, 223.

[409] Schildt, 'Open and closed space', 223.

While the Villa Mairea's white interiors, and its numerous rustic, vernacular and avant-garde elements are widely acknowledged as unified through a 'Cubist collage' compositional process,[410] the building's exteriors are less noticed in the same sense. Yet the surfaces and forms of the Villa's exterior elevations, seen on site, seem to constitute an experience of whiteness that not only complements, but arguably exceeds in scale and complexity the modernist 'collage' of the building's interiors. Indeed the experience of the whole exterior of Villa Mairea, seen from courtyard, garden, forest and more distant vantage points, appears to invite the visitor to participate in a rich matrix of temporality and perception, through changing angles of view of forest and house, where the visitor enjoys a contrived painterly experience of changing moods, animated by varying daily and seasonal landscape ephemera.

Aalto painted from childhood to his final years, though without seeking renown as a painter, and declining to exhibit or sell his paintings,[411] which were influenced in his early years by Finnish landscape painters who emerged around 1900, such as Eero Järnefelt,[412] and Pekka Halonen.[413] Aalto inherits a sensibility from these painters, many of whom he met and knew, learning lessons of colour and tone, of an empathy towards people's experience of landscape and cold, and of capturing the surfaces and transformed materiality of winter landscapes. From these early influences, Aalto could go on to experiment with forms, textures, composition and visuality, absorbing influences from modern artists who became his friends, including Arp, Braque, Calder, Léger and Moholy-Nagy.[414] From painters Aalto gained a sense of liberation, for himself and for his architecture, from conventions, fixed ways and established systems of thinking.[415]

Figure 3.16 CÉZANNE *La Montagne Sainte-Victoire vue des Lauves*
Source: www.paul-cezanne.org

[410] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'From Tectonics to Painterly Architecture', in Pirkko Tuukkanen-Beckers, ed., *Alvar Aalto: Points of Contact* (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Museum, 1994), 41-43.
[411] Schildt, *Early Years*, 149-159.
[412] McCarter, *Aalto*, 25.
[413] Pelkonen, 'Symbolic Imageries', 116-127.
[414] Pelkonen, 'Symbolic Imageries'.
[415] Schildt, *Early Years*, 153.

The work of Cézanne seems to have been the most powerful and enduring painterly influence on Aalto's architecture (Fig.3.16). Kenneth Clark in *Landscape into Art* (1949) sees a desire for harmony in Cézanne, recognizing 'the power to use visual appearances almost as an architect uses stone from a quarry to make a harmonious composition.'[416] Clark relates this hard-won architectonic dimension of Cézanne's painting at base to landscape and nature: 'the peculiarity of style which Cézanne evolved so painfully in order to express his *petite sensation avant la nature*, which was in fact his feeling that the subject must be seen in pattern and depth at once, and that form must be rendered by colour'.[417]

An atmospheric, phenomenological dimension to Cézanne is framed by art historian Yve-Alain Bois, noting that Cézanne proposed a fusion of theory and sensation aimed at creating 'an equivalence of relations', and 'a "harmony parallel to nature".[418] Bois argues that Cézanne sought to approach the feeling of touch through painting, and to ally his work's hapticity to nature, aspiring to invent a 'tactile vision' with 'the feeling of air', and regarding his own paintings as 'worlds under construction, similar – in their mode of existence for our perception – to nature itself.'[419] Bois points to the 'unfinished' quality of certain Cézanne works, where white areas seem little more than the bare ground of the painting. While Cézanne complained of these unpainted white areas as 'reserve zones', Bois posits that Cézanne's whites are in fact positive spaces, 'the unavoidable consequence of his way of working: they are void spaces that are as constructive as the filled-in ones.'[420]

Figure 3.17 AALTO Villa Mairea
Source: Pallasmaa, *Villa Mairea*

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416 Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art* (London: The Folio Society, 2013), 157.
417 Clark, *Landscape into Art*, 157.
418 Yve-Alain Bois, trans. Rosalind Krauss, 'Cézanne: Words and Deeds', *October* 84 (1998): 31.
419 Bois, 'Cézanne': 37-39.
420 Bois, 'Cézanne': 41.

Schildt's point, noted above, that 'Aalto's great discovery was that architectural interiors can be treated the same way', with formless indeterminate 'gaps', leads to the view that white acts as a medium that can interconnect architecture and landscape, forming a matrix or visual mortar, binding into perceptual wholes things seen in the interior by the moving visitor such as stairs, columns, screens, greenery, light and shadows, floor surfaces and window views, even paintings. Thus, through the interiors of the Villa Mairea (Fig.3.17) white-painted surfaces recede, hover and advance amongst contrasting elements, which they hold together in their diversity, in the manner of Cézanne's whites.

Figure 3.18 AALTO Villa Mairea
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

Similarly, outside, as in the view of the building from the courtyard (Fig.3.18), white acts to bind the landscape of forest and lawn together with architectural materials to create a painterly unity, a whole experience that shifts in space as the visitor moves about. The Villa's atmosphere is sustained by Aalto's methodical use of white, as in Cézanne's work: white is given a central, instrumental role in creating architectural atmosphere, related to painting.

A painter makes their painting as perception demands. In Villa Mairea, Cézanne's 'hollow openness' is transmuted into Aalto's white walls, where 'swabs of colour' like those of Cézanne – paintings, columns, rails, shadows, and glimpses of floors, edges, windows and trim – are composed to be perceived and unified with the white surfaces of the building's interior. However, a painterly strategy seems deployed more widely outdoors. Outdoors, between building and landscape, white makes a sometimes 'formless' visual ground where clearly defined objects – timber windows, stairs, rustic stone, woven materials, rails, timber-clad forms, the darkness of shadows and foliage – are located according to individual circumstance, while the seemingly residual white surfaces, including beams and chimneys, act to bind these heterogeneous materials into a complex visual unity relating building and landscape.

Through the outdoor elevations of the building Aalto makes, in art critic John Berger's words, 'a path for our eyes through space, receding or oncoming'.[421] Leading the eye into the tones of landscape space, around timber, stone and foliage, or rebounding from the white voids of architectural surfaces, the Villa's white walls hold the many materials, surfaces and objects of the building in a perceptual unity with the landscape. Thus as the viewer walks through the site and the building, the experience of visual and tectonic materials receding and oncoming, of colour merged in whiteness, creates a unity between building and landscape that can be perceived only by the active, embodied and sensing presence of the visitor on a particular occasion.

Berger asks of Cézanne's art, 'What is the secret behind this?' and in response cites its essential relatedness, and Cézanne's 'conviction that what we perceive as the visible is not a given but a construction, put together by nature and ourselves. "The landscape," he said, "thinks itself in me, and I am its consciousness."'[422] Through the painterly contrivances of Villa Mairea's visual composition Aalto allows the landscape to 'think itself' in his work, so as to invite the visitor to share in the privilege of being 'its consciousness'; white becomes the key means for this merging of architecture, painting, landscape and the individual viewer.

[421] Berger, 'Cézanne: Paint it black'.
[422] Berger, 'Cézanne: Paint it black'.

3.2.2 Snow: Aalto Atelier and atmosphere of form

> Amongst the examples [of felt space] I list in the first instance climatic space, that is, an undefined broad expanse of weather or climate which we spontaneously feel when, without consideration of our body and sense data in the ordinary sense, we are aware that today, for instance, it is muggy, damp, balmy or fresh and cool, or spring-like or exciting in a blustery and stormy way, or that something else is in the air. Phenomenologically, what we feel in those moments is actually not a condition of our body but an enveloping, formless, seamlessly diffused atmosphere.[423]
>
> Schmitz, *Felt Space* (1969)

> In rejecting the notion of a "red-brick period" in Aalto's work, Göran Schildt stated: "To me he explained that it's dictated by housing politics. It's a big house, you make it red. It's small, you paint it white."[424]
>
> Treib, *Landscapes of Modern Architecture* (2016)

Figure 3.19 AALTO Aalto Atelier
Source: AAM

The all-white building of the Aalto Atelier (1955), at Tiilimäki 20, where the Aalto office was based after moving from the Aalto House where it had been located since 1935, sits on a sloping site on a granite outcrop in suburban Munkkiemi, close to the Aalto House. The L-plan building turns a blank white wall to the street, and locks into its site with a white painted timber pergola-covered entry beside the bare rock. It further connects with its site by enclosing a garden amphitheatre with the curved wall

[423] Hermann Schmitz, *System der Philosophie, Bd. III.2 Der Gefühlsraum / Felt Space* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1969), 361. In Gernot Böhme, 'Atmospheres in Architecture', in *Atmospheric Architectures*, 70.

[424] Marc Treib, *Landscapes of Modern Architecture: Wright, Mies, Neutra, Aalto, Barragan* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2016), n.52 249. Treib cites Louna Lahti, ed., *Alvar Aalto: Ex Intimo*, trans Roger Connah and Tomi Snellman (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2001), 58.

of the office wing, which sculpturally combines a skillion roof with the curved plan to create the white solid form of a perceptually looming ‘great wave’ (Fig.3.19).

Aalto built many white buildings through his long career; some seem made of a plastic material, like snow or porcelain, where walls, cornices and ceilings are joined with little tectonic or structural distinction. Porcelain is like snow, according to potter Edmund de Waal, seeking its material likeness: ‘What can you compare white porcelain to? “The best is white in colour and as thin as paper ...” Or it can be as thin as silver. As white as driven snow. Or milk ...’[425] In Aalto’s work a plastic whiteness, like that of porcelain, is seen in the all-white Muurame Church (1926-29), whose front and lower porch merge visually with surrounding snow, and in the Aalto Atelier whose thorough inside-outside whiteness, connected to landscape, is discussed below.

At the Atelier, Aalto privileges a unity of mood, feeling or atmosphere over tectonic clarity. Landscape seems at stake not only through the trope of the outdoor room / courtyard / amphitheatre, but also, as argued here, because the building is all white. The Atelier appears completely whited-out, painted white or whitewashed – outside, across all surfaces, materials and details, and inside, on all surfaces, except for fittings and floors; fittingly, Aalto’s large work and meeting table also appears to be surfaced in white, suggesting his remembered great white table from his childhood. Schildt suggested to Aalto in his 1972 TV interview, ‘Your father’s white table may also have stimulated your work more concretely. Drawing maps must have trained your eye for terrain contours, for the geographical environment, for the Finnish landscape as a whole.’[426]

The question of atmosphere and whiteness merge in the Atelier to highlight the significance of landscape in a phenomenological understanding of Aalto’s work. The linkage of white winter landscape to architectural whiteness creates a hybrid topic, one largely avoided in discussion of Aalto’s work; an exception is Steven Holl’s memory of ‘the fresh white snow which had just fallen in Helsinki and the early thin ice’, whose danger causes him to reflect: ‘Finland’s is a tragic and mysterious beauty.’[427] The topic of white emerges from reflection on this singular work, Aalto’s office, built after Säynätsalo and Muuratsalo.

Atmosphere could be seen as the core phenomenology in Aalto’s youthful watercolour *Tracks in Snow* (Fig.3.8), noted above.[428] The crossover of visual and physical qualities of snow is explored in the picture in birch bark and snowy branches, ski tracks and stock marks, and shadows falling in weightless lines across the carved ski ruts. The painting reveals Aalto’s skill in perception and creation of relations between materiality and visuality, in landscape space and in the details of a white surface.

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[425] de Waal, *The White* Road, 78.
[426] Schildt, in Aalto, Interview for Finnish television, 274.
[427] Steven Holl, ‘Thin Ice’, in Pallasmaa, *Eyes of the Skin*, 7.
[428] See Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: A Life’s Work*, 274; also Pelkonen, ‘Symbolic Imageries’, 118-119.

Figure 3.20 GALLEN-KALLELA *Lair of the Lynx*, 1906-08
Source: Helsinki Ateneum

Aalto's winter painting seems to have learned something of whiteness from Akseli Gallen-Kallela's painting *The Lair of the Lynx* (1906-08), where a hillside is transformed into vivacious white sculpture by almost geological layers of wind-carved snow (Fig.3.20). Aalto's phenomenology of winter landscape foreshadows a later interest in architectural surface, landscape space and atmosphere. Snow seems to generate for Aalto a surprising transformation of the everyday world into a new realm of forms and possibilities.

Snow appears in images of Aalto Atelier, focusing attention on snow as weather, snow as temperature and light, snow as matter – aspects of snow as both landscape and atmosphere. Further, through their common, uncomplicated whiteness and plasticity, snow and building also come to resemble each other, to *feel like* each other. Landscape, atmosphere and architecture seem to share an ontology through their common affiliation through white. Aalto in 'From Doorstep to Living Room' wrote, 'I thought I would do best to indicate merely the kind of atmosphere that should be evoked',[429] giving atmosphere priority, and suggesting the value of its investigation.

[429] Aalto, 'Doorstep', 55.

Figure 3.21 AALTO Aalto Atelier
Source: AAM

Looking closely at Aalto Atelier, focused on Aalto's office, at least three aspects of the architecture become apparent as tactics connected with whiteness: freedom of form, in the curved plan, sloping roof and sharp corner; compression, of the white stair and balcony elements; and sculptural elements, of column, skylight and railings. Overwhelming these, however, a fourth tactical element, the long window in the curved wall, larger and more comprehensive than other elements, gives a 'fisheye' view that joins inside and outside, tying the room to the landscape in a visual and spatial unity made by the outwardly enfolding curve, which simultaneously compresses the room's interior volume (Fig.3.21). Each tactic individually could represent a certain expressive opportunity, a singular chance to turn away from modernist orthodoxy. Experienced together, they reflect a unified atmosphere, where the internal elements seem compressed by the curved wall, gathered in a white architectural laboratory with elements of sculpture and light arranged in view of the natural world.

Perceptually, the curved window can include both inner and outer building whiteness: the white walls, ceiling, columns, rails, and high lights of the enclosed room become unified with the corner, scalloped footings, cornice and window details of the outer walls. A strategy of atmosphere includes also the animating ephemeral elements: direct and reflected light, tree shadows, and winter's shining snowy ground. The image shows the building in the snow, while also, through the curve and window, the snow appears in the room, visually and spatially. This unity of inside and outside, and of white architecture with white landscape, shows the rich involvement of landscape in Aalto's architecture, explained in phenomenological terms as atmosphere.

The Atelier's overall whiteness seems to generate a surrounding mood in the way that weather conditions (wind, sun, rain, snow) can generate moods or atmospheres. Gernot Böhme cites Hermann Schmitz, *Felt Space* (1969), writing of feeling atmosphere as the effect of natural weather conditions on 'bodily felt space':

> Amongst the examples [of felt space] I list in the first instance climatic space, that is, an undefined broad expanse of weather or climate which we

> spontaneously feel when, without consideration of our body and sense data in the ordinary sense, we are aware that today, for instance, it is muggy, damp, balmy or fresh and cool, or spring-like or exciting in a blustery and stormy way, or that something else is in the air. Phenomenologically, what we feel in those moments is actually not a condition of our body but an enveloping, formless, seamlessly diffused atmosphere.[430]

Snow creates an 'enveloping, formless' atmosphere, falling and settling in the landscape to form Schmitz's 'climatic space'.

German phenomenologist and ethnomusicologist Friedlind Riedel in 2019 acknowledges the capacity for atmosphere inherent in architecture and in landscape. Reviewing the topic of atmosphere, she proposes that across disciplines, atmospheres have been seen as 'qualities of a space ... mediums of perception ... or as a non-representational social dimension,' notions of atmosphere aiming to deal with, even subvert, 'binary distinctions between inner and outer world, medium and content, meaning and matter, individual and collective, body and mind, subject and object.'[431]

Riedel proposes to move beyond the perceiving subject, to consider '*what* an atmosphere does and *how* it operates,' including 'its capacity to modulate situations and collectives into coherent wholes', a process termed mereology. This study of relations between part and whole is relevant to Aalto's compositional mode, especially at Aalto Atelier, with its abundant surfaces of white. The sense of architectural and landscape all-whiteness is argued here as formative of atmosphere. Riedel writes of climatic states as 'engulfing' the individual body, of 'engulfing the felt-body [Schmitz's term] in suggestions of movement, thus invoking feelings as atmospheres':[432]

> Albeit immobile, architecture and landscape may nevertheless suggest movements through lines of flight, height, narrowness, darkness, or expansiveness. Climatic states, too, take effect as felt atmospheres by engulfing the felt-body in suggestions of movement, thus invoking feelings as atmospheres.[433]

At Aalto Atelier the architecture merges Riedel's dynamic phenomenological elements of height, narrowness, and expansiveness with climatic states that effectively 'engulf' the visitor, while also 'invoking' atmosphere through its strategy of white. Through white, diverse parts are drawn together, as in Riedel's mereology, to make wholes that cohere, despite their inherent differences.

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[430] Schmitz, *Felt Space*, 361. Cited in Böhme, 'Atmospheres in Architecture', 70.

[431] Friedlind Riedel, 'Atmosphere', in Jan Slaby, Christian von Scheve, eds, *Affective Societies* (London: Routledge, 2019), 85-86.

[432] Riedel, 'Atmosphere', 93.

[433] Riedel, 'Atmosphere', 85-86.

3.2.3 A local wall: Seinäjoki Theatre: The taste of rye

> [Finland is] a highly architectural landscape; its regularity a counterpart to the fluidity of form and space in which Aalto excelled. The birch forests create a similar but lighter, more fragile effect: their gleaming white and impossibly slender-looking trunks are one of the Finnish landscape's most distinctive sights.[434]
>
> Weston, *Alvar Aalto* (1996)

Figure 3.22 AALTO Seinäjoki Theatre
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

In *Alvar Aalto Band II* the brief for Aalto's Seinäjoki City Theatre (designed 1968-69 by Aalto, and only completed in 1987 by the Aalto office) calls for 'a convention hall and clubhouse ... planned to suit the city and immediate environs.' The theatre is described as 'a small compact multi-purpose building', resembling in plan Aalto's Wolfsburg and Essen theatres (Fig.3.22), while Seinäjoki's 'simpler' inner workings include an adaptable stage, suited to amateur productions. Through its planning and fitting-out, the theatre's architecture is intended to welcome participation by local people: 'It is hoped that this conscious simplicity will inspire the visitor to be more than a mere spectator at cultural events and to participate actively.'[435] An Aalto alumnus comments of the project's earthy, regional, local atmospheric aspirations: 'Jouko Turkka was an interesting young director in the theatre ... he said the theatre should "taste of rye."'[436]

It becomes clear that Aalto's buildings are organised and finished not through the application of an inexorable logic or a relentless singular 'vision', but through a methodical creation of an episodic architecture of passages that correspond with people's actions and states of mind, for example at a theatre, of arriving, checking

[434] Weston, 'Sense of Place', *Alvar Aalto*, 125.
[435] Karl Fleig, ed., *Alvar Aalto: Collected Works: Band II / Volume II: 1963-1970* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1971), 56.
[436] Architect Jaakko Suihkonen, in Charrington and Nava, *The Mark of the Hand*, 246-247.

coats, mingling, chatting, finding doors and seats, enjoying a spectacle, and so on. The architecture is contrived not to overwhelm the visitor with form or geometry, but more gently to accommodate the nonconscious memory and senses as people move through the building. Aalto's architecture, as Weston reflects of Muuratsalo, 'infiltrates the senses and engages the mind in a poetic meditation on our place in the world.'[437] This episode introduces a white wall at Seinäjoki Theatre which exemplifies the tactics of Aalto's infiltration of the senses, by its relation to the white world of the landscape.

Figure 3.23 AALTO Seinäjoki Theatre, foyer
Photographs by John Roberts, 2008

Aalto's Seinäjoki Theatre, part of his competition-winning Seinäjoki Civic Centre (designed 1959) invites everyday local involvement through a ground floor café, used by theatre workers, public servants, police and the general public. From the café, views open to the town square and the other elements of the Civic Centre design: the wave-like Town Hall surmounting its grassy artificial hill, the Church, Tower, and Library. Above the café on the first floor a broad foyer with cloakroom, veranda, and theatre doors expands from an engaging white wall, encountered close by the stair landing (Fig.3.23).

In this largely unnoticed white wall in the Seinäjoki Theatre, atmosphere is created from everyday items and fittings: conduit, lamps, plants and painted surfaces, composed to poetically invoke landscape, and so elevating an architectural interior above the banal blankness and insignificance of other walls in everyday buildings. White elements are used to create an architectural atmosphere arguably responding to the natural world, and to bridge the gulf between people and landscape. A sense of the fleeting, the momentary, the ephemeral, and the 'subjective' attaches to the concept of atmosphere. Atmosphere can be marginalized as trivial in the midst of course commercial production, or ignored as 'irrational' in the analytical contemporary world. Pérez-Gómez, however, in *Attunement* (2016) urges resistance through architecture against a modernist tendency to reductive thought, language and building, arguing that technologized thought threatens to 'devalorize, exclude to

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[437] Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, 121.

the margins, and ultimately reduce to irrelevance all that cannot be rendered through clear, intelligible logic.'[438]

To define atmosphere, Pérez-Gómez uses the German word *Stimmung*, translated as 'attunement', and referring to tone or frame of mind, or to the potentially harmonic and unified resonance created by architecture between an external spatial condition and a person's internal state.[439] At Seinäjoki Theatre the idea of *Stimmung* as attunement, as it is elaborated by Pérez-Gómez, can be applied to the detailed making and experience of a white wall, bringing a blank wall into 'tune' through attending to its surface, and implying that the wall may act as more than a divider or encloser of space. The wall is 'attuned' or brought into harmony as a qualitative element, given extra purpose and emotional value, while the visitor is also 'attuned', given a new sense of completeness through noticing this ordinary yet unique wall, where the surface enhances and confirms the experience of arrival.

While the white lamps illuminating an Artek-furnished seating area may repeat the Aalto-designed streetlamps from the town square, they also recall Aalto's rooftop lights at Wolfsburg Cultural Centre, which illuminate rooflights by night.[440] Under the lamps, like vines or slim trunks, vertical conduits trace a graphic pattern of forms and shadows, recalling the contour lines, so familiar to Aalto, of a large survey map. Adding a further layer, the indoor plants silhouetted against the wall continue Aalto's inside-outside, landscape-to-architecture trope from the 1920s, bringing dark foliage indoors to vivify white spaces, a strategy for harmony, as in the potted plants and tree shadows on the broad balcony of Le Corbusier's 1925 Pavilion, noted in Aalto's 'Doorstep' essay (1926), which serve in both instances to unite 'the more intimate rooms with the open air'.[441]

As an ensemble, the lamps, conduit and foliage add layers to the wall's surface and begin to blur hard distinctions between the building and the outdoors, and between graphic and architectural conditions. These added layers and their shadows also seem to re-stabilise and give order to the otherwise floating and dimensionless wall surface with relief and organic form, vivifying the indoor whiteness with landscape elements, unobtrusively re-orienting theatre-goers as they alight in the white foyer from the outer world.

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[438] Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning after the Crisis of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2016), 90.
[439] Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement*, 216-217.
[440] Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, 184.
[441] Aalto, 'Doorstep', 50; note potted plants in Le Corbusier's 1925 Pavilion, 'Doorstep', 53.

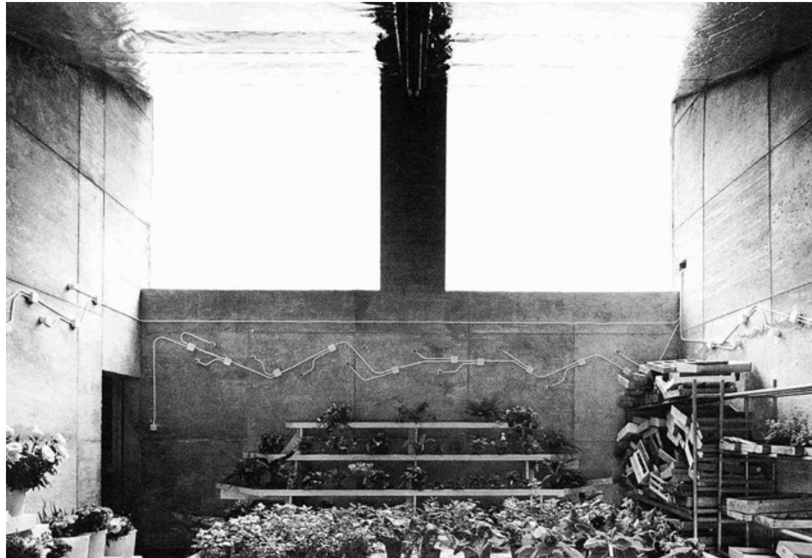

Figure 3.24 LEWERENTZ Flower kiosk, Eastern Cemetery, Malmö
Source: www.atlasofplaces.com [442]

Aalto's conduit tracery suggests the contours of topography, recalling the effusive contour lines that Aalto uses to describe landscape in many site plans. In terms of Aalto's earlier work, the traced lines and shadows both connect to his painting of ski tracks in snow, while also raising the image of the tutelary 'white table' with its promise of creative freedom. The whiteness of the wall is perceivable as animated with biological forms, with lamps as flower heads, amongst plants in silhouette against the white wall. The conduit also resembles the metal conduit used to trace across and animate the raw concrete surface of the brutalist concrete flower kiosk at Lewerentz's Eastern Cemetery, Malmö, Sweden (1969), where the conduit is post-fitted to the finished wall rather than chased into the surface (Fig.3.24). This separation of service installation from construction allows last-minute corrections judged by the architect's eye, facilitating a final 'attunement' to complete the design or building to suit the eye, the haptic sense or detailed mundane uses – a way of finely finishing buildings that characterised Aalto's working method, both in the office and on site, and which Aalto defended through his career.[443]

Pérez-Gómez writes in *Attunement* that architecture should 'address life as lived', and might also 'create appropriate transformative atmospheres accommodating habit as well as bringing about productive (poetic and ethical) change.'[444] Detailed attention to an otherwise blank white wall can transform the architecture from a neutral modernist condition to one interested and involved in the greater cultural and natural worlds. Whether by Aalto's design or by others, the Seinäjoki Theatre wall creates a particular atmosphere, rendering it, in Pérez-Gómez's words, 'responsive to the natural world and specific cultural values',[445] turning an otherwise ordinary wall into an architectural environment remembering and re-stating the outdoor world in

[442] www.atlasofplaces.com/architecture/blomsterkiosk. Noted 1 Dec 2020.
[443] Harry Charrington, 'We don't need to be so dogmatic', in Charrington and Nava, *The Mark of the Hand*.
[444] Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement*, 216-217.
[445] Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement*, 200.

architectural terms, specifically for the ‘little man’ for whom Aalto always aimed to create a ‘paradise’.[446]

Seinäjoki Theatre seems to reflect the ability of the Alvar Aalto office to continue to create atmospheric architecture, where landscape endures as a formative motif. More broadly, this ability suggests that while a general connection to landscape appears to be embedded in Aalto’s ‘intuitive’ design methods, the idea of the ‘architectural landscape’ can endure as part of a greater ethic of unity and harmony, for architecture generally beyond Aalto’s immediate oeuvre.

[446] Aalto, ‘The Architect’s Conception for Paradise’.

3.2.4 Conclusion: White and Atmosphere

At stake here is a notion that atmosphere is central to architecture, and that in Aalto's work the sensing of atmosphere is facilitated and understood through its involvement with landscape. Both including and exceeding the rhyme between white walls and white landscape of winter, this section looks more closely at that architecture-landscape rhyme, and finds in an early Aalto painting of a winter landscape evidence of his appreciation of the differences between a marked, incised white surface and the shadows that play on that white surface.

A whiteness common to architecture and landscape is found in Aalto's work, from that early painting of ski tracks and the Cubist composition of the Villa Mairea to the white sculptural forms of Aalto Atelier and the minimal materials of the subtly figured white wall at Seinäjoki Theatre. Behind these phenomena lie winter experiences, birch forests, Aalto's childhood 'white table' and its large survey maps, a world of white expanses and objects that underwrite, guide and inform Aalto's choices and uses of white.

In 'Vaporous Circumambience' (2015), Tawa writes of architectural atmosphere in terms of surface tonality and the 'circumambient environment' of touch: the 'density, weave, texture or tincture of the milieu.'[447] In Aalto's white work, atmosphere can be seen as a matter of relationships, of 'webs of interrelated, circumstantial meanings.'[448] Yet landscape is omitted from Tawa's framework of atmosphere, where 'in the final analysis atmosphere can only be delivered by the extance of architecture'.[449] Against this exclusion of landscape, Aalto makes white paintings, creates completely white buildings, and finishes in fragile paint-thin whiteness an interior wall of a regional theatre. These painted surfaces, forms, or obscure walls respond to the 'tinge, tincture, tone, mood, attunement' of landscape conditions, particularly those of the Finnish winter.

[447] Tawa, 'Vaporous Circumambience': 13.
[448] Tawa, 'Vaporous Circumambience': 14.
[449] Tawa, 'Vaporous Circumambience': 21.

3.3 White and Embodiment

3.3.0 Introduction: White and Embodiment

In this section's three episodes, the phenomenological strand of Embodiment is used to consider surface, form and immateriality in aspects of White in Aalto's architecture.

In this section white material and landscape are considered to identify and articulate embodiment in three Aalto works: Seinäjoki Library, Jyväskylä University Festival Hall, and a photograph of Aalto Atelier in the *Collected Works*. Aspects of these selected works are investigated with reference to embodied cognition as it enables understanding of landscape in terms of surface, form, light, materiality, and art-critical concepts through architecture.

From the physicality of a white curved concrete ceiling over readers in a library, to the embodied reading of a minor transitional space in an auditorium, to an embodied sense of perception of white building and painting in an architectural photograph, these episodes represent different aspects of Aalto's architecture designed with the body, for the body and for experience associated with bodily involvement, reinforced through architecture's illuminating and material whiteness.

Summary

3.3.1 Embodiment at Seinäjoki Library: Surface, light, books, reader

Episode 3.3.1 invokes ideas of landscape metaphor to analyse subtle inside and outside relations with landscape at Seinäjoki Library. It proposes that inside, landscape-related changes in level, form and light are deployed to accommodate the individual requirements of library visitors, much as noted in Goldhagen's analysis of Aalto's Viipuri Library. The outer wall, seemingly rational, modern and Hellenistic in its conception, reveals on closer investigation, referring to Grosz's philosophical thinking on the architectural 'outside', a putative landscape strategy underpinning its embodied experience.

3.3.2* Materia *and white forms: Festival Hall

Episode 3.3.2 refers to Aalto's idea of *materia*, a 'working theory' connecting material work with thought, through which he could theorise architectural materiality through the creative relations of painting, sculpture and architecture. At Jyväskylä University Festival Hall the white forms of an indoor stair landing resemble landscape in appearance, feeling and memory, offering an instance to look closely at Aalto's *materia* concept. Goldhagen's thinking on architectural embodiment is used to suggest that the landing exemplifies Aalto's evocation of landscape in architecture, transforming materials to recall embodied encounters with the natural world.

3.3.3 Whiteout: Aalto Atelier's immaterial memory of sensation

In *Alvar Aalto Band I* a minimalist image of a street view of the Aalto Atelier compounds a sense of painting, architecture and landscape. This enigmatic image of the Atelier's street façade is the focus of episode 3.3.3, providing a prompt to consider the significance of embodied cognition in Aalto's white walls. To consider the elusive phenomenology of whiteness in walls and images, this episode refers to Krauss, 'The Grid, the / Cloud /, and the Detail' (1995),[450] where Linville's critique of Agnes Martin's 1960s white paintings dwells on the embodied nature of perception of painting, and, by inference, points to significant embodiment in an image of Aalto's white walls.

[450] Rosalind Krauss, 'The Grid, the /Cloud/, and the Detail', in Detlef Mertins, ed., *Presence of Mies* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 132-147.

3.3.1 Concrete curves: Surface, light and reader at Seinäjoki Library

> I would like to mention one further element: colour. Colours depend on materials, but to a certain extent they determine forms.[451]
>
> Aalto, 'The relationship between architecture, painting, and sculpture' (1970)

> The white table of my childhood was a big table. It has kept on growing. I have done my life's work on it.[452]
>
> Aalto, 'The White Table' (1970s)

> ... the concrete vault of the Seinäjoki Library reading room was specified to be smooth plastered, but the carpenters responsible for the timber formwork for the concrete, coming from a local tradition of boat building, not only built the formwork to the standard of fine joinery, but instinctively used narrower boards for the tighter central radii, and wider boards for the peripheral outer radii: "The formwork was so precise that Alvar decided not to cover the boardmarks up, he wanted it painted instead."[453]
>
> Charrington, 'Not a locked box' (2010)

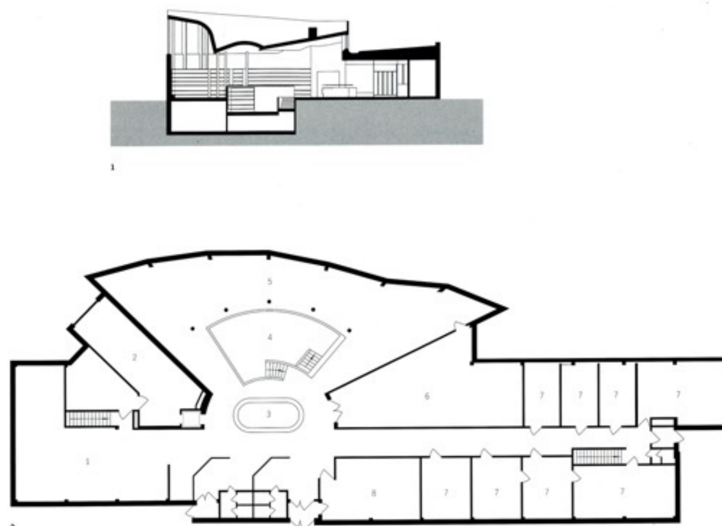

Figure 3.25 AALTO Seinäjoki Library, section and plan
Source: greatbuildings.com

Aalto's Seinäjoki Library (1960-65) was originally included in Aalto's competition-winning design for Seinäjoki Town Centre (1952). Sited in a flat, grassed park planted with birch trees, opposite the Seinäjoki Town Hall and between the Seinäjoki

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[451] Alvar Aalto, 'The Relationship between Architecture, Painting, and Sculpture' (interview with Karl Fleig, c.1970), in *Own Words*, 260.

[452] Aalto, 'The White Table', 12.

[453] Charrington, 'Not a locked box', 266.

Church and Theatre, it consists of two major parts, of different forms (Fig.3.25). In a long orthogonal form, offices, meeting rooms and storage are housed in a block whose white street façade is articulated with screened horizontal windows.

Figure 3.26 AALTO Seinäjoki Library
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

Out of this regular block a contrasting fan-shaped form bursts toward the light and the space of the park (Fig.3.26). Rising higher than the regular block, its volume contains book storage, with shelves radiating in an irregular curve. This fan-form is distinguished outside by its faceted curves, acute angled ends and high windows clad with metal sun-control louvres. Inside, lit up by streaks of light that pour in through the louvres, an extraordinary double-vaulted concrete ceiling resting on concrete columns reflects natural light across the book shelves, through the space and into a sunken reading room at the centre of the building. This white, vaulted, massive ceiling, floating in bands of light, forms the focus of this episode.

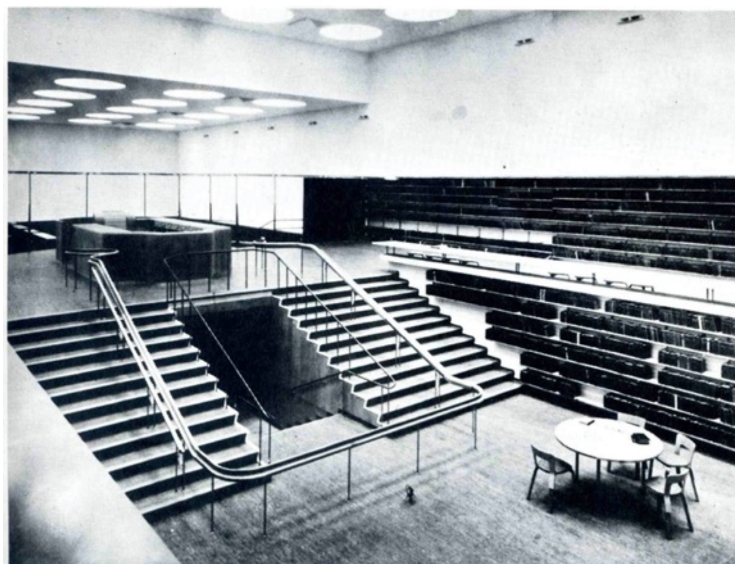

Figure 3.27 AALTO Viipuri Library, reading room
Source: *Alvar Aalto Band I*

As a predecessor to Seinäjoki, Aalto's Viipuri Library (1929-35) houses a reading room of two levels, illuminated from above (Fig.3.27). Goldhagen, in her phenomenological critique of Viipuri, looks beyond standard modernist tropes to identify interrelationships in the library, between people, activity and the building, noting Aalto's attention to light and the individual human body in space. Large conical skylights in the ceiling reduce shadows and bright light, to illuminate the space for the reader's comfort, making some of the building's many 'accommodations to the bodily basis of human cognitive experience', and reflecting detailed care for the 'bodily being' of library visitors.[454]

Philosopher Elizabeth Grosz introduces *Architecture from the Outside* (2001) by problematising differences between architecture's 'outside' and 'inside', emphasising not the inside-outside duality of architectural space, but rather the oddity or 'perversity' of outsideness itself:

> The outside is a peculiar place, both paradoxical and perverse. It is paradoxical insofar as it can only ever make sense, have a place, in reference to what it is not and can never be – an inside, a within, an interior. And it is perverse, for while it is placed always relative to an inside, it observes no faith to the consistency of this inside.[455]

It appears that the Seinäjoki Library replays and reinterprets, on a new site, and with a different approach to materials, light, and inside-outside relations, aspects of Aalto's earlier library at Viipuri, which, wrote Aalto, was 'completely destroyed' by Russia in World War II.[456] A contrast between the curved white forms of the interior and the subtle shifts in alignment of the street-facing outer wall seems enhanced as experience by the use of white in materials, forms and space.

Inside Seinäjoki Library Aalto uses the contrasts between formal and informal geometry to particular effect, for the benefit of different readers. On the Library's less-lit lower level, reached by curved stairs, the circle-based geometry of the sunken 'book-lined cave'[457] acts firmly to contain, to protectively enclose and calm the children's reading area, populated by child-scaled Aalto chairs and modular tables grouped to accommodate a cluster of junior readers, with a lamp at each small table.

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[454] Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet': 49.
[455] Grosz, Introduction, *Architecture from the* Outside, xiv.
[456] Alvar Aalto, Karl Fleig, eds, *Alvar Aalto: Band I / Volume I: 1922-1962* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1963), 99.
[457] Brit Andresen, 'Alvar Aalto and Jørn Utzon: An Architecture of Ancient Gathering Forms', *UME* 22 (2011): 47. Light and form in Aalto libraries is discussed in William C. Miller, 'From Viipuri to Mount Angel: the evolution of the library in the work of Alvar Aalto', *Architectural Association Quarterly* 10, no.3 (1978): 30-41.

Figure 3.28 AALTO Seinäjoki Library
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

By contrast, on the main floor level's reading room, the splayed 'biological' geometry of the perimeter wall opens like a wing, a hand or a fish's tailfin, acting to 'exclose', to liberatively expand outward and upward, grasping available light and providing extra space for books and people. This strategy epitomises St John Wilson's notion of Aalto's 'ideograph' of an 'argument' essential to his work, between contrasting building forms represented by two lines, 'one straight, the other serpentine':

> We can transform the lines into planes, and whether we view it as plan or section, it will recall to us the archetypal Aalto space, in which the juxtaposition of a strictly flat plane with a rhythmically wavelike surface seems to charge the air of the space like the beating of a giant wing.[458]

The visitor can be both overwhelmed and settled by the spatial and visual drama of this strategy, compounded by the changing play of light on the two concrete vaults, which curve memorably and remarkably, with different sections and plans, hovering over the two different reading areas (Fig.3.28).

Yet this dramatic modernism is also underpinned by a spatial division that suggests geological stratification, where the building's ground form and earthworks co-operate in section to create three levels, including a main level datum below which the 'cave' of the children's area is housed, on which books and general library functions are settled, and above which natural light is reached for and brought into the building. A landscape concept of terraces and suns is found in Aalto's sketch for Viipuri Library (see Fig.4.25), and seems recalled at Seinäjoki to establish a physical embodiment of three 'levels' of feeling: of inner security, of level calm and rational organisation,

[458] Colin St John Wilson, 'Alvar Aalto and the state of Modernism', in *Architectural Reflections: Studies in the philosophy and practice of architecture* (Oxford; Boston: Butterworth Architecture, 1992), 91.

and of expansive aspiration and illumination. Aalto had described this sketch and his design thinking at Viipuri Library in 1947: 'I pursued the solution with the help of primitive sketches from some kind of fantastic mountain landscapes with cliffs lit up by suns in different positions.'[459]

At Seinäjoki the thin Finnish sunlight plays on the white surfaces of the interior vaults, which allude to clouds' complex forms, though bringing in light rather than cloudy gloom. The vaults, despite their thickness, depth and obvious mass, balance on white columns and curl over the visitor. They resemble clouds, but also timber boat hulls and the white vaults of old Finnish timber church interiors, where this tactic of a deep ceiling acts on the viewer to give a bodily sense of shelter under something more floating, like a cumulus cloud.

This resemblance to clouds and sunny natural space allows the building to become a spatial and phenomenological basis for more subtle attunements to the individual human user's physiological needs. Goldhagen, analysing Viipuri Library, notes how its skylights in the deep ceiling reduce shadows, glare and bright light for the reader's comfort, exemplifying how the building accommodates 'the bodily basis of human cognitive experience', and reflects detailed care for the 'bodily being' of library visitors.[460] Much the same might be said for Aalto's accommodation of human cognition and of embodied experience in the Seinäjoki interior. It remains to look at the building's white exterior to see a complementary sense of earth's simple geological mass used to enhance the experience of approach and entry.

Figure 3.29 AALTO Seinäjoki Library
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

[459] Alvar Aalto, 'The Trout and the Stream' (1947), in *Own Words*.
[460] Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet': 49.

Following the relation of Aalto's Seinäjoki Town Centre to the classical Greek urban landscape of the *agora*, the orthogonal 'box' of the Library enacts the role of a long horizontal *stoa*. White in finish and banded with modernist strip windows protected by metal screens,[461] the façade is also unobtrusively fractured and seismically shifted in two places (Fig.3.29). The larger shift houses a single door opening, while the smaller shift – of less than 100 millimetres, less than the wall's thickness, and subtly obscure in plan drawings – frames a wider opening. The shifting of the wall recalls a geological fault, the splitting and settling of bedrock as an earth-making event. These fundamental shifts, expressed solely in plan, and with no change to the building's alignment, read as building-making events, which the senses notice and the body responds to, as if experiencing a natural landscape.

This experience happens sequentially, as the visitor approaches along the building, ascending low steps contained by a dark wall. Simultaneously, the eye notices a discontinuity in the building silhouette, aligning with a disjunction of shade, then a change of scale in the wall's perspective. The visitor, curiosity aroused, lands from the stairs at a new level, to be greeted by the shift in the building's basic geology, where a doorway opens, inviting the visitor into the Library interior.

Grosz, as noted above, problematises on a general scale the paradox of architecture's 'outside', emphasising its 'perversity':

> The outside is a peculiar place, both paradoxical and perverse. It is paradoxical insofar as it can only ever make sense, have a place, in reference to what it is not and can never be – an inside, a within, an interior. And it is perverse, for while it is placed always relative to an inside, it observes no faith to the consistency of this inside.[462]

At Seinäjoki the Library wall presents what appears to be a complete 'other' to the material and spatial drama of the interior's curves and modulated light. And indeed the wall seems to enact a civic, Hellenistic urban role, presenting a long, 'boring', coldly repetitive elevation to the surrounding urban design. It seems, following Grosz, to be inconsistent with its inside. Yet at Seinäjoki the 'peculiar' and 'perverse' outside, modern and white, appears, when seen more closely through the lens of landscape and at the scale of bodily experience, to indeed observe a 'faith to the consistency of [its] inside', in its own 'paradoxical' way being spatially separated but conceptually related to the interior. Between inside and outside a subtle and metaphorically geological threshold alerts the visitor bodily to the vertical shifts of ground level to come inside the building.

Grosz also notes the distinctive character of an architectural outside: 'The outside is the place one can never occupy fully or completely, for it is always other, different, at a distance from where one is.'[463] Between an urban 'outside' and a landscape-like yet wholly artificial 'inside', Aalto's wall at Seinäjoki Library claims a unique character in

[461] Seinäjoki Library details are discussed by Aalto office alumni, Finnish architects Leif Englund and Jaakko Suihkonen, in Charrington and Nava, *Mark of the Hand*, 243-246.
[462] Grosz, Introduction, xiv.
[463] Grosz, Introduction, xiv.

modern terms perhaps ‘perverse’ yet in human bodily terms welcoming and assuring in its likeness to landscape, and so confirming a detail of the heterodox nature of Aalto’s modernism.

3.3.2 *Materia*: Jyväskylä Festival Hall

> In the end, building means grappling with the very matter yielded to us by the earth's crust.[464]
>
> Aalto, 'Form as a Symbol of Artistic Creativity' (1956)

Figure 3.30 AALTO Jyväskylä Festival Hall, stair to landing and auditorium
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

Many of Aalto's architectural forms are made of or finished in white, to the extent that white itself seems to become a plastic architectural material used for creating forms, details and finishes, as in the physicality of a porcelain body, the frozen animation of a ceramic cladding, or the ephemeral skin of a whitewash coating. Aalto, speaking in 'The Relationship Between Architecture, Painting and Sculpture' (1970), reveals his concern for the role of materials in the making of architecture: 'Matter, the confrontation with materials, *materia*, is the substance that unites all three art forms. All art forms are based on matter; they have to confront materiality. The links in *materia* leave open every opportunity for harmonious synthesis.'[465]

Aalto's *materia* thesis seems exemplified in a stair landing at Jyväskylä University Festival Hall (1953) between the foyer and auditorium (Fig.3.30). This juncture, where a visitor is unusually closely involved with the architecture in moving between levels through a sequence of materials and spaces, aligns with and illuminates Goldhagen's description of this everyday example of Aalto's 'quiet, nuanced, phenomenologically dense architecture'.[466]

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[464] Alvar Aalto, 'Form as a Symbol of Artistic Creativity' (1956), in *Own Words*, 181. Cited in Ray, *Alvar Aalto*, viii.
[465] Aalto, 'Architecture, painting, and sculpture' (1970), in *Own Words*, 267.
[466] Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet': 50.

Figure 3.31 AALTO Jyväskylä Festival Hall, stair landing
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

When a visitor moves from the foyer up towards the auditorium entry, they ascend by marble stairs through a screen of timber poles, conducted by a dark leather-wrapped rail that leads the eye and hand upwards, before rail and hand shift and slice surprisingly through the white material of the balustrade. The visitor arrives at a white marble paved landing; the handrail then snakes up, to course along the top of the balustrade on thin metal supports. Under the visitor's feet the white marble floor of the landing bifurcates at a brick corner, where steps turn and rise to an auditorium door, as the main stair continues upwards (Fig.3.31).

Associating architecture with painting and sculpture, Aalto's self-styled theoretical formation of *materia* emerges as a revealing concept for considering landscape in Aalto's work, in reading embodiment in material relationships between architecture and landscape. A deeper connection emerges, paradoxically, in the white painted surface, when Aalto adds, 'I would like to mention one further element: colour. Colours depend on materials, but to a certain extent they determine forms.'[467] When Aalto places such emphasis on the viscosity of oil paint and its capacity to 'determine forms', he refers by implication to white, as he repeatedly uses white in his experimental oil paintings, and repeatedly uses white as a cladding and an implicit general material in his architecture.

The white materials and dark fittings of the Festival Hall stair and landing seem familiar and welcoming, as if considered in terms of close body contact, and also as reminiscent of natural landscape elements both near the building and in the visitor's memory. This familiarity and evocativeness suggest the validity of Goldhagen's proposition that architectural surfaces and materials 'profoundly affect our non-conscious and conscious cognitions about the built environment.'[468] Aalto's 'working theory' of *materia* opens a way to explain his diverse material uses of white. Combined with Goldhagen's thinking on embodiment, Aalto's *materia* idea frames Aalto's white materiality in the Festival Hall landing as a landscape-related phenomenological strategy.

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[467] Aalto, 'Architecture, painting, and sculpture' (1970), in *Own Words*, 260.
[468] Goldhagen, *Welcome to your World,* 123.

Aalto's concern for the role of materials appears in his theorization of *materia*, 'the confrontation with materials'; Aalto says, 'All art forms ... have to confront materiality.'[469] At stake here in a discussion of *materia* is the way that Aalto's white materials are sensed, comprehended, and manipulated by the body and hands, the eye and the senses.[470]

White elements in Aalto's buildings carry haptic, visual and body-related values, which have their effect by connecting with landscape – not through 'poetic' means of simile or metaphor but through an intuitive body-based logic, where hands, skin, feet and the senses together comprehend the environment, whether that may be stairs or rock strata, through memory and imagination. Aalto said, 'Materials must serve people emotionally; they mustn't be experienced as hostile. A building mustn't have a negative effect on the everyday life of its users.'[471] While this mandate can suggest the basic emotive role of materials from the viewpoint of a designer, the idea of *materia* also provides a means to look critically at the white materials in Aalto's buildings, as a means of understanding the experience of his work and its connection to landscape. The unity of materials in Aalto's theory reflects aspirations to a social and environmental harmony arising from the material unity in his work.

On this landing at Festival Hall in Jyväskylä, the white marble floor can seem destabilising in its smoothness and in the patterns of the paving and the markings in the marble itself, like cracks in ice. Nearby, the white balustrade seems cast and hand-smoothed from a pure white substance, and sculpted further to accommodate the moving hand on the rail. As a handmade custom component that feels taut and warm, especially by comparison with contemporary stainless steel rails, Aalto's handrail, allied with the white floor and balustrade, offers a gesture of empathic welcome to the eye and body, recalling materials that could be found in the nearby forest.

The stair and landing elements act like things of landscape: the timber screen flickers like a cluster of small trees, the marble floor shines and feels smooth like ice, the black rail extends like a dark and supple branch, the balustrade is carved into like snow, and the entire landing perches like a narrow ledge beside a wall. On this stair landing Aalto appears to transmute remembered landscape things – saplings, icy ground, a branch, a snowbank, a rocky path – into things of architectural experience. This stair landing is presented here as exemplifying a central strategy of Aalto's conceptual and creative method, where the significance of materials is at stake.

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[469] Aalto, 'Architecture, painting, and sculpture' (1970), in *Own Words*, 267.

[470] On visual perception of architectural surfaces, see John Roberts, 'Jørn Utzon's reverie of the eye: Surfaces of the Sydney Opera House', in Matthew Mindrup, ed. *The Material Imagination: Reveries on Architecture and Matter* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 123-126.

[471] Aalto, 'Architecture, painting, and sculpture' (1970), in *Own Words*, 267.

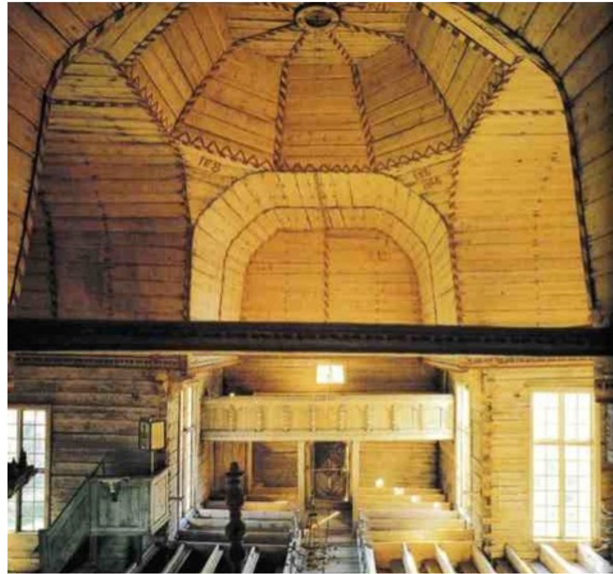

Figure 3.32 Petäjävesi Church, Finland
Source: Pallasmaa, 'The Sixth Sense'

Aalto theorises in 'The Relationship Between Architecture, Painting and Sculpture' on *materia*, of using wood, stone, metal, even colour, to indicate his grappling with materials to make emotionally meaningful architecture, in forms, details and single elements.[472] A theoretical dimension of Aalto's *materia* is created through Menin's association of *materia* with Plato's term *hyle*, wood, associating Aalto's material philosophy with timber and the forest, and also with the term matter, linked etymologically with *mater*, mother.[473] Menin refers to the interconnection of painting, sculpture and architecture implicit in Aalto's *materia* as part of a creative method where 'the purely material activity is connected with an intellectual process'.[474] Aalto, argues Menin, 'was undoubtedly aware of this etymology when he spoke of the importance of *materia*', through which he could connect 'the tangible and the mystical', or perhaps with historical material examples such as the Petäjävesi Church, Finland (1764) (Fig.3.32), with its curved, light-reflecting timber ceilings which seem to offer Aalto a precedent for highly modelled interior spaces.[475]

The potential for material alchemy in design and architecture is evident in Aalto's experimental transformations of forest matter into building materials which either transcend or sidestep the industrial rendering of growing trees into slabs and strips, instead being laminated and curved into forms that resemble natural timbers or aged vines. In the same way Aalto's material philosophy could inform the transformation from landscape of the white curves of clouds, banks of snow, or the indistinct edges of drifting walls of fog to form architecture, as in the ceiling and walls of the Seinäjoki Library book stack that creates an enhanced built space for finding and reading books.

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[472] Aalto, 'Architecture, painting, and sculpture' (1970), in *Own Words*, 267-269.

[473] Sarah Menin, 'A gateway to the "backwoods": Aalto and the matter of rooting modernity', *arq Architectural Research Quarterly* 9, no.2 (2005): 152.

[474] Aalto, 'Architecture, Painting, and Sculpture' (1970), in *Own Words*, 267.

[475] Sarah Menin, 'The profound *logos*: creative parallels in the lives and work of Aalto and Sibelius', *The Journal of Architecture* 8, no.1 (2003): 136-137.

Pérez-Gómez refers to the theoretical concept of *prima materia* in citing Plato's account in the *Timaeus* of the creation of the world by the *demiourgos*: 'Plato's demiurge was an architect, creating the world out of geometry in the space of a primordial gap and from a *prima materia* (a universal plastic matter) consubstantial with said space (*chasho / chaos / chora*).'[476] The idea of the original creator-architect, working with primal matter and space, aligns with Aalto's living creative world of the Finnish forest and his concept of *materia*, implying wood, mother, matter, and existence as interwoven.

Goldhagen's recent thinking in *Welcome to Your World* (2017) offers a key to understanding materiality in Aalto's architecture. Reflecting on the experience of Aalto's NPI building Goldhagen writes of 'harmonising a built environment with our human embodiment in the natural world', arguing that human responses to architectural elements have a deeper relation to similar landscape elements. Goldhagen also proposes that through 'design moves and material details', Aalto 'calls upon our embodied experience of nature', to experience architecture.[477] This common embodiment bridges between architecture and landscape, and combines Aalto's white materiality with that of brick, metal, timber and leather wrapping to create a momentary experience that refers to the world outside architecture to make an interior world of feeling and involvement.

At Jyväskylä Aalto transforms an encounter with a stair landing into an architectural experience, arguably corresponding with the bodily encounter with the whiteness of landscape, drawing upon embodied experiences of the natural world to create an architecture that is ultimately harmonious and non-consciously familiar. Through his heterodox method Aalto intertwines architecture and landscape to create a socially enriching architecture for the 'little person' in work that reassures with its apparent reality the individual's position in the everyday world.

[476] Alberto Pérez-Gómez, 'Hermeneutics as Discourse in Design', *Design Issues* 15, no.2 (1999): 73.
[477] Goldhagen, *Welcome to your World*, 175.

3.3.3 Whiteout: Aalto Atelier's memory of sensation

> What is a white table? A neutral plane in combination with man, so neutral a plane that it can receive anything, depending on man's imagination and skill. A white table is as white as white can be, it has no recipe, nothing obliges man to do this or that. In other words, it is a strange and unusual relationship.[478]
>
> Aalto, 'The white table' (1970s)

Figure 3.33 AALTO Aalto Atelier
Source: *Alvar Aalto Band I*

The Aalto Atelier, investigated above as a whole building (see 3.2.2), has further dimensions, which are exploited by Aalto in an image of the white building in winter snow. In *Alvar Aalto Band I* a provocatively mute photograph shows the street view of the Atelier (1955) at Tiilimäki 20 in the Helsinki seaside suburb of Munkkiniemi (Fig.3.33).[479] While on its garden side the Atelier curves and rises in strong form around a garden amphitheatre, its white street façade appears by contrast flat and featureless in this photograph, the key image for this episode.

The abstract street view of the Aalto Atelier, photographed in winter, reflects a particular experience of landscape space involving a building, and bristles with contrasts: dark and light; built and vegetative elements; straight and curved lines; flat and rounded forms. Yet the delicate, repetitive fan-formed twigs suggest close observation of nature, and the possibility that the photographer is located bodily at ground level, amongst the twigs in the suburban snow, to show the building in the cold natural world.

[478] Aalto, 'The White Table', 12.
[479] *Alvar Aalto: Band I*, 248.

Figure 3.34 AALTO *Untitled*, oil painting
Source: Ruusuvuori and Pallasmaa, *Alvar Aalto 1898-1976*

The *Band I* image provokes questions about the significance of landscape in Aalto's architecture, as a photograph that recalls (despite its background of dark trees) the phenomenon of 'whiteout', where topography, horizon, landform, vegetation and human presence are obscured in a dense blizzard, a snowfall, or by fog or mist, even rain or hail. Whiteout fills the air, disorienting perception, removing shadows and reducing depth of field. The all-white Aalto Atelier seems unified with the snowy foreground, recalling the all-white paintings of modernism, or Aalto's 1969 *Untitled* white painting (Fig.3.34).

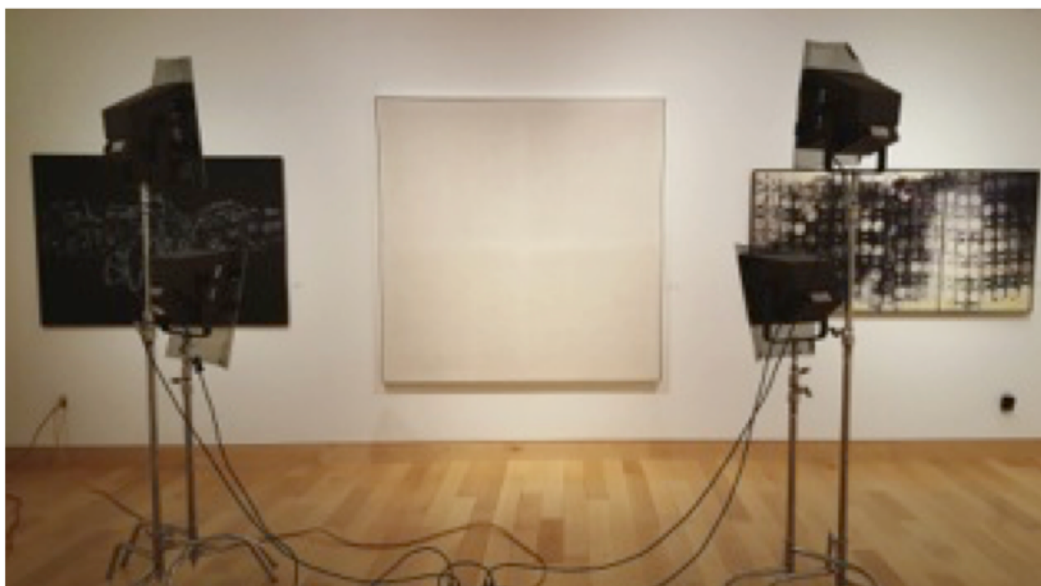

Figure 3.35 MARTIN *Tundra*, painting
Source: Harwood Museum

Art critic Rosalind Krauss, investigating Mies van der Rohe's architectural Minimalism, writes of the 'resistance to the spectator's grasp' of his Barcelona Pavilion, identifying the *a priori* of the grid, evident in the 'strangely weightless and

buoyant cloud' of the gridded roof of his Berlin National Gallery (1967).[480] Krauss then invokes the gridded paintings of Minimalist artist Agnes Martin (1912-2004), noting a rare phenomenology in critic Kasha Linville's reading of Martin's canvases. Linville describes Martin's *Tundra* (1967) (Fig.3.35) and its visual, bodily and natural associations: '*Tundra* is a simple, almost inexplicable canvas. Its surface is divided by three lines into six tall rectangles. The pattern reminds you of a window, but the surface is closed. It suggests the heavy, white jade blankness of a snow sky.'[481]

Linville's rare method involves viewing the painting at close range, then moving back, then moving to 'middle distance', where other visual phenomena occur between the painting and the viewer's seeing of its surface: 'Because the horizontally brushed, grayish wash on the surface stops near but not against the lines, they seem to have halos around them. These halos actually swallow the lines at middle distance, leaving only their white ghosts.' Eventually, when seen from further away, the experience loses its embodied significance: 'the ghosts disappear eventually.'[482] This reading of a painting titled after a cold, bare landscape suggests the textures and the 'snow sky' of the Atelier photograph, and gives a name to the 'white ghosts' of the curved snowy figures in the foreground.

Linville writes in exacting terms of the sensations of viewing pictures on walls, in describing the embodied experience of Martin's work. A selection illustrates Linville's approach:

> You can drop through her paintings into the memory of sensation. Hers is a non-illusionistic window onto the art experiences we have almost subliminally in our lives, far away from art objects.
> ...
> Her works carry you beyond themselves as vehicles for tactile, sensory memories on a very private level, a level closer than the shapes of things.
> ...
> She isn't interested in the way objects look but in their feel. She doesn't exploit nature as subject matter; she evokes it intimately for each viewer.
> ...
> Others suggest spaciousness or vast space, again without using illusionistic devices or the egotistical implication of infinitely extendible surface. *Tundra*, 1967, has both this sense of vastness and of specific light. It incarnates the cold bleakness of the place it names.[483]

Linville's language produces a careful analysis of the experience of Martin's paintings. She adopts a lexicon of embodiment involving the viewer in using their own experiences of the world – nature, light, cold, sensation, form – to relate to painting: through daily non-art experiences, personal sensory memory, the individual's sense of nature, or the painting's incarnation of the feeling, light, and bleak cold of, say, a tundra landscape. Most significant in the present context may be

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480 Krauss, 'The Grid', 112.
481 Kasha Linville, 'Agnes Martin: An Appreciation', *Artforum* 9 (1971): 73.
482 Linville, 'Agnes Martin', 73.
483 Linville, 'Agnes Martin', 73.

Linville's phrase 'the memory of sensation', describing the workings of embodied consciousness in terms as light-seeming but deep-seated in perception as a white Martin painting.

The white Aalto Atelier image can also be read as combining abstract natural and architectural elements in an experimental photographic composition. Historian Eve Blau argues that László Moholy-Nagy was interested in the potential of the photographic image 'as an instrument for educating the eye in abstract seeing.'[484] Art historians see Moholy-Nagy as exploring inversions of positive / negative visuality, thus challenging 'customary perceptions of projection, recession, and density in pictorial space.'[485] While this opens the topic of Aalto's thinking on abstraction, nature and harmony, it also links to questions of white and embodiment in the Atelier.

The abstract snowy winter image of the Aalto Atelier, while creating a harmony between contrasting wave-forms and linear geometry, also suggests a certain indeterminacy through its incomplete white elements, a dissolution of singular wholeness. Malpas refers to indeterminacy in language translation and interpretation, recognised by philosopher Donald Davidson, as a 'failure of uniqueness', which also reflects a 'holistic character of meaning and belief'.[486] Till in 'The Negotiation of Hope' (2005) writes of the hope for change in identifying, in architectural conversations with everyday people, the 'real possibilities present in those fleeting, extraordinary, non-professional moments of indeterminacy, undecidability and ambivalence'.[487]

Indeterminacy leaves open possibilities of existence and of meaningful action. It can persist at the scale of a building or a landscape; Norberg-Schulz observes the indeterminacy of shifting Scandinavian light, creating a characteristic landscape mood:

> For it is precisely light that defines the Nordic world and infuses all things with mood ... light manifests that space which things and life inhabit, and Nordic light thus creates a space of moods. In the North we occupy a world of moods, of shifting nuances, of never-resting forces, even when the light is withdrawn and filtered through an overcast sky.[488]

Norberg-Schulz defines the unstable, imprecise Northern 'mood' against the perceptually more stable Mediterranean South which is not a world of changing 'moods' but is 'marked by the single mood that becomes manifest when sunlight permeates space and encompasses all things.'[489] This ambient atmosphere of light both surrounds the outer body and infiltrates the inner spaces of buildings. Aalto lived in the North, sustaining a dream of re-creating Tuscan and Classical ambiences in

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[484] Eve Blau, 'Transparency and the Irreconcilable Contradictions of Modernity', *PRAXIS* 9 (2007): 52.

[485] Julie Barten, Sylvie Pénichon, and Carol Stringari, 'The Materialization of Light', in Matthew S. Witkovsky, Carol S. Eliel, and Karole P.B. Vail, eds, *Moholy-Nagy: Future Present* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2016), 188.

[486] Indeterminacy is discussed in Jeff Malpas, 'Donald Davidson', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* https://stanford.library.sydney.edu.au/entries/davidson/ Noted 1 Oct 2018.

[487] Jeremy Till, 'The Negotiation of Hope', in Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu, Jeremy Till, eds, *Architecture and Participation* (London: Spon, 2005), 37.

[488] Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands*, 2.

[489] Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands*, 2.

Finland; the Atelier image seems to capture his own studio in a landscape-related mood of vagueness, immeasurability and indeterminacy of form and identity.

Returning to Krauss's commentary, which relates Linville's critique in terms of semantics, as dealing with atmosphere,[490] Linville seems to deal with embodiment rather than atmosphere, using her own perceiving eyes and moving body to grasp an Agnes Martin painting, in two ways. First the Martin painting is seen from different ranges, as an artwork dealing with tactility, senses, memory and feeling of place as embodied subject matter, rather than atmosphere. Second, the painting is encountered as an object in space, like a particular natural place, or like the crafted wall of an Aalto building, to be read with the moving eye and the perceiving body, at full scale in the landscape.

An outcome of this method is, as Krauss notes, 'to make the optical a function of the tactile (kinesthetic) field of its viewer, that is to say, the succession of those viewing distances the observer might assume.'[491] This mode of criticism from the 1990s, citing work from the 1960s and 1970s, may seem dated; Krauss says as much in 1996: 'To say all this is, of course, impossibly outmoded, formalist, determinist, empty.'[492] Yet Krauss's promotion of Linville's phenomenological, embodied appreciation of Agnes Martin's white paintings prompts a phenomenological approach to an image of Aalto's architecture that might otherwise remain obscure to contemporary understanding. Similarly, without the *Band I* image of the Aalto Atelier wall, this facet of whiteness in Aalto's work would remain unnoticed, since it is invisible, perceptible only through the camera's embodied eye. This framing of the Atelier's white wall in a suburban landscape creates an image of Aalto's local and embodied alternative to the universal whiteness of orthodox modernism.

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[490] Krauss, 'The Grid', 112.
[491] Krauss, 'The Grid', 118-119.
[492] Krauss, 'The Grid', 119.

3.3.4 Conclusion: White and Embodiment

White as a surface at Seinäjoki Library, reflecting light and made legible as form by shadows of its making, contends with the weights and temperatures of white matter, cut and moulded into form for feeling and memory. A white landing becomes a passage of landscape to be experienced in an everyday act of entering a building at Jyväskylä Festival Hall.

White is also caught in a 'whiteout' photograph as both landscape and built surface, intimating a depth revealed as the viewer moves, but which, as a confected glimpse of the Aalto Atelier from low on a street view, finds an angle of view that reduces depth and glides the building between foreground and background. Like a Martin painting, the photograph 'dwells on the embodied nature of perception', where definition of built form is briefly lost, natural forms are reduced to blobs, and indeterminacy overtakes perception and understanding.

Goldhagen's relation of human dwelling to landscape connects architecture to landscape through the sensing human organism, 'we thinking, breathing, sentient creatures'.[493] Inhabiting niches and spaces of natural landscapes, humans build both with and against nature, closely involved with essential landscape conditions, so that now, 'our experience of ourselves is embodied – situated in our bodies ... also situated in the foundational environment of the natural world.'[494] For Goldhagen, natural conditions of landscape, natural space, and climate 'radically shape human cognitive experience in myriad ways', influencing human emotions and cognitions.[495]

In Aalto's architecture, in white library light reflecting off a curved ceiling, from white materials under foot and beside the hand, and in the airy, indistinct legibility of a 'white' photograph of a white building in suburban snow, the body locates and senses itself in white-dominated space between landscape and architecture. The 'memory of sensation' in white paintings, buildings and remembered or depicted landscape, reorients the unstable individual, restoring balance and harmony.

[493] Goldhagen, *Welcome to your World,* 136.
[494] Goldhagen, *Welcome to your World*, 136.
[495] Goldhagen, *Welcome to your World,* 136-137.

Chapter 3 White: Conclusion

Findings and conclusions: White, Aalto, landscape

The long sequence of white buildings in Aalto's oeuvre extends from Muurame Church, Paimio Sanatorium and Viipuri Library, all around 1930, to Muuratsalo and Aalto Atelier in the 1950s, and to Finlandia and the Aalto Museum in the 1970s. In the earlier white-painted buildings, white unifies the neoclassical surface articulation at Muurame and also unifies diverse elements of tower, porch, front and body of the building in its forested town hilltop site. White also connected Aalto to architecture's ancient, historical and modern past: to ancient Greek and Roman architecture; to the historical work of Palladio; and also reflected his role and prominence in the 1920s foundational modernism of Le Corbusier, Gropius and Mies van der Rohe.

The white works of the 1950s, seen in the context of postwar Finnish recovery, reflect Aalto's preference for building in Finland, and show a deployment of white by an international and national leader, where the infra-local relation of white to site and circumstance in smaller, more personal works provided a laboratory for Aalto's architectural experimentation in locating people in harmony with nature and landscape. In Aalto's late works of the 1970s, at Finlandia and the Alvar Aalto Museum, white evolved to become an architectural material in itself, in large works that could be experienced internally as landscapes, where light, space and movement within the building achieved a fluidity of embodied purpose, continuing outside in inflections of walls and silhouettes to landscape and place, from trees to rocks to water and pathways.

Through its reaction to light, its polymorphic materiality and its 'blank slate' surficial universality, at once delicate, timeless, and eternally enduring, Aalto's architectural white seems able to endure time and trauma, to forgive and embrace mistakes and work with other colours and materials, and to echo in its own way, unlike the pure whites of other practitioners, the infinitely polymorphous white material surfaces of natural landscape white. Sand, marble, chalk and porcelain all derive from the natural world, but it is arguably the landscape of white snow that emerges as the definitive natural source of an architecturally inspiring white. Perhaps the most diverse white wall of Aalto's work can be found at Alajärvi Town Hall, where white ties a new work to an old precedent, to landscape space and to the change of seasons, embracing town and country, different eras, and building and landscape, in a work close in locality and feeling to Aalto's own family and life.

Aalto's general reticence towards discussing white is broken by his references late in life to the large white work table in his father's surveyor's office, 'possibly the biggest table in the world', whose most memorable attribute is its depth: 'a top three inches thick', but to a small child a depth and thickness of snow.[496] The white table taught Aalto of the essential ethical framing of architecture, 'that we must be tactful with nature, that we must foster life.'[497] In the chronology of his works, the landscape sustains as Aalto's teacher and guide, offering the abiding source of a blank page on which ideas could be drawn, and an essential reality from which inspiration could

[496] Aalto, 'The White Table', 11.
[497] Aalto, Interview for Finnish television, 274.

always be drawn to make a modern heterodox architecture working through versions of harmony made between the 'little person' and the landscape.

From the surfaces, forms and immaterial dimensions of Aalto's white architecture emerge unique senses of place, particular atmospheres of painting and landscape, and embodied senses of materials and spaces. Other dimensions of Aalto's phenomenological architecture appear in the forms of waves in the natural world, and in the temporal dimensions and resonances of ruins in the landscape, created through his architecture, and as considered in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4. WAVES

4.0 Introduction

4.0.1 Landscape ontology of Waves

> The fabric of the Finnish landscape is subtle; red granite bedrock smoothly sculpted into undulating waves by the movement of past glaciers, interwoven with endless blue-black lakes [which] melt indistinguishably into the Baltic Sea itself. At the point of interchange, the swells of granite become islands forming a vast archipelago, a paradise of minutely scaled human habitation. Upon the rock grow myriad layers of delicately coloured lichens, moss, ferns, mushrooms – a veritable miniature world of incredible textural and chromatic richness.[498]
>
> Trencher, *Alvar Aalto Guide* (1996)

Aalto's architecture is populated with waves, and animated by waves in different forms, from Muurame Church (1926-29) to Aalto Museum, Jyväskylä (1973). Undulating wave-forms are found in some of Aalto's most renowned works: the undulating ceiling of Viipuri Library (1934), the curved wall of the Finland Pavilion at New York World's Fair (1939), the wave-plan dormitory of Baker House (1949), the grassed stairs of Säynätsalo Town Hall (1952). In Aalto's architecture, waves manifest at different scales, from the ripples of the ceramic tile claddings inside Finlandia Hall (1971) and outside Seinäjoki Town Hall (1960) to the wave plan form of Kultuuritalo (1958) and the red-brick wedge-shaped wave of the Otaniemi Auditorium (1964). These curved forms mark Aalto as a designer who could re-create the vivacious undulations of the natural world and fix their visual and spatial energy into his architecture, to animate surfaces, interior spaces, external forms, even entire campuses.

The lines of waves are to be found throughout Aalto's drawings, flowing in multiple rhythms in his travel sketches, marking site levels, silhouettes and seats in the dancing lines of his design sketches, and seemingly ubiquitous in the contours of his site plan drawings. Aalto's contour lines, a kind of writing of the site, capture at once the precise measure of the land, its physiognomy and character as ground, and the shimmering vitality of a particular, unique-in-all-the-world site. They also become a legible shorthand for landscape and architectural experience, with broad areas of white indicating level land and easy movement, while close-spaced lines inscribe a visible narrative of steep or complex terrain.

Aalto's contour lines, in site plans and other drawings, portraying his buildings in landscape settings, become both measured, accurate, dry, documentary portrayals of landscapes, and also voluptuously undulant transcriptions of the landscape's rhythmic regularity or loose irregularity, as they dance and waver across the white spaces of Aalto's drawings.

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[498] Trencher, *Alvar Aalto Guide*, 24.

Wave-forms appear to partly characterise the Finnish topography; Trencher uses wave metaphors in observing the Finnish landscape: the 'undulating waves' of bedrock, the melting 'blue-black' lakes and sea, the 'swells of granite', topped with a living froth of mosses and fungi, a compendium of different-sized natural and metaphoric waves.[499] From the waters and landforms to the changes of season and light, a world of repeating and rhyming patterns emerges in Finnish landscape, including the 'thick, vertical rhythms' of pine and birch trees, where the 'bright white wrappings' of birch bark are 'broken by the gnarled and blackened wounds of branches.' It is in this setting, where buildings 'act ... in controlled counterpoint to the dense notation of the textured landscape', that Aalto worked with spaces and materials generally familiar to his fellow Finns, where 'seasonal changes, the extreme modulations of light and moisture, of ice and snow, play upon this Finnish landscape, creating an extraordinary world of aesthetic and poetic richness.'[500] The waves, rocks, forest, snow, and seasonal light of Finland constitute a positively involving setting for Aalto's architecture, animated by energies reflected in the active landscape within which his buildings were designed, and where they continue to be experienced.

4.0.2 Waves and phenomenology: Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment

This chapter, investigating the theme of Waves in Aalto's architecture, is organised into three sections based on key concepts of architectural phenomenology: Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment. In a general comment on the landscape of Finland, Norberg-Schulz, in *Genius Loci*, notes the presence of water as an animating presence amidst a combination of vegetation and surface relief, creating an 'eminently Nordic' character and forming 'very particular landscapes'. In these landscapes water is found as rivers or cascades, lakes and ponds, and even swamp landscapes, where the ground shows a 'maximum indeterminacy' compared to the definition of stream banks and lake edges. Thus Norberg-Schulz notes a 'phenomenology of natural place' formed largely by the surface forms of ground relief and waters.[501] This landscape setting forms part of the background for understanding the presence of waves, curves and other undulating forms in Aalto's architecture.

In terms of **Place,** Waves can be conceived through Malpas, 'Place and the Problem of Landscape' (2011),[502] and Malpas, 'What Is Architecture For? (2017).[503] In 'Place and the Problem of Landscape' (2011), Malpas relates place and landscape, arguing that landscape is more than a visual representation of a view (which can separate viewer and viewed); landscape, argues Malpas, is a representation of place, hence 'the re-presentation of a relatedness to place, a re-presentation of a mode of

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[499] Trencher, *Alvar Aalto Guide*, 24.

[500] Trencher, *Alvar Aalto Guide*, 24-25.

[501] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 35-37.

[502] Jeff Malpas, 'Place and the Problem of Landscape', in Jeff Malpas, ed., *The Place of Landscape: Concepts, Contexts, Studies* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2011).

[503] Jeff Malpas, 'What Is Architecture For?' *Cloud-Cuckoo-Land: International Journal of Architectural Theory* 22, no.36 (2017): 119-126.

"emplacement."'[504] Malpas stresses the idea of the 'involvement' of the viewer with the landscape, and points to painter John Glover, whose paintings of Tasmania from 1832 were 'not the product of a passing and detached "view" of the landscape, but of a sustained interaction with it ... based in his own living and working in that landscape.'[505] In Aalto's architecture this involvement with landscape becomes decisive, where his experience of life and work in the Finnish landscape can be seen to culminate in his heightened ability to design not only with landscape in mind, but in ways (such as with wave-forms) that use architecture as a medium to establish and refine relationships between visitor and landscape. Malpas refers to the case of Cézanne, who wrote of Provence, 'of these horizons, of these landscapes, of these unbelievable lines which leave in us so many deep impressions', where the landscape painted by Cézanne 'is not a terrain standing apart from him'; rather, in painting Provence, Cézanne 'undertakes an exploration of his own experience, his own memories, his own self.'[506] This non-conscious, emotional involvement with landscape seems essential for the re-presentation of place that Aalto undertakes in his landscape-related architecture.

In terms of **Atmosphere,** Waves may be conceived through Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture' (2002).[507] Böhme argues for atmosphere in architecture, in that the 'feeling' of architecture offers a truer mode of perceiving than seeing alone, and that perspective can depict things in space, but not space or spatiality.[508] Böhme's idea of architectural sensibility, of 'the design of space', suggests that space is experienced through physical presence within it. Movement through space, changing perspectives and focal points, creates 'mood', which 'contributes to sensing where we are. By feeling our own presence we feel the space in which we are present.'[509] This idea of atmosphere as mood or feeling connects with landscape in the sense of 'infinite space', seen as a city square, or as a mountaintop or the open sky. The relative void of this opened space can be articulated through orientation, motion, or markings, perceived by people: Böhme notes a 'space of bodily feeling', a 'feeling that reaches out into indeterminate expanses – which acquires shape through articulation of this kind.'[510] Architecture is fundamental in making spaces for people, involving them in a 'non-classical' sense, either with music, which can make a space 'oppressive, exciting, or fragmented', or with light, which can make a room 'serene, exhilarating, gloomy, festive, or eerie.'[511] These moods are based in atmosphere.

In terms of **Embodiment**, Waves may be understood through Johnson, 'The embodied meaning of architecture' (2015).[512] Philosopher Mark Johnson sees humans as evolved creatures with needs for survival and culture, both provided by

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[504] Malpas, 'Place and the Problem of Landscape', 6.
[505] Malpas, 'Place and the Problem of Landscape', 6, 12.
[506] Malpas, 'Place and the Problem of Landscape', 6, 13.
[507] Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture'.
[508] Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture', 399-400.
[509] Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture', 402.
[510] Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture', 405.
[511] Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture', 405.
[512] Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture', 33-50.

architecture, which offers both functional shelter and cultural meaning.[513] Meaning, Johnson argues, should be seen not as verbally based, 'entirely conceptual, propositional, and linguistic', but rather as enactive and qualitative, situated in the body, creating 'an embodied view of mind and meaning to appreciate the significance of architecture.'[514] Johnson's sense of a meaningful architecture extends spatially beyond architecture to the outer world: the discomfort of confinement in a small interior space, 'how bad it can feel to be "boxed in"', is countered by the experience of being outside, with views of open plains or elevated distance, from the cell to the landscape; humans want both 'to be in and of the world when that suits our purposes', and to have 'shelter and privacy at other times.'[515] Johnson also notes an 'ecological logic' at the centre of architectural experience, making meaning from bodily experience of qualities such as shelter, containment, open space, verticality, balance, physical force, and motion (including speed, rhythm, rushing, stumbling, floating). These experiences seem common to both natural landscape and architecture, a landscape-based feeling found in historical architecture where 'a series of connected Romanesque arches carry our perception along in a smooth, recurring pattern of curving visual motion.'[516]

4.0.3 Preface: Waves topics: Large, Medium, Small

The three subsections or episodes of this Waves chapter are organised through three repeated topics related to the wave-forms observable both in the natural world and in Aalto's architecture, assuming his familiarity with such forms through everyday experience from childhood onwards. The repeated Waves topics can be summarised as the *large* wave, the single large peaking wave, or mountain; the *medium* wave, as in body-sized, rhythmic and undulating waves; and the *small* wave, in the form of ripples, radiant waves or shimmering surface phenomena.

The scales of wave-forms reflect both natural scales at which waves are seen, known or encountered at full scale in the world, and also the different scales of wave-forms that appear in Aalto's architecture. Large single waves are seen in large individual built forms contrasting with level buildings, in undulating suspended walls aligned to create motion and dramatic effect; and large artificial mountains in the form of heavy, balustraded indoor stairs. Medium undulating waves appear in Aalto's stairs, ceilings and foyers, oscillating in significance between history, modernity, landscape and dependent on human presence and movement for their effect. Multiple, tiny, even infinitely radiating waves, manifest in drawn contour lines, in myth-related ponds, and in very fine building details, are seen and felt by the body in and through Aalto's architecture, made close by and in close conceptual relation to landscape.

By investigating these various waves, the study reveals the pulsing, dynamic qualities of parts of Aalto's architecture and suggests its interplay with the experiences of the still or moving, perceiving human subject.

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[513] Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture', 33.
[514] Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture', 35, 40.
[515] Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture', 42.
[516] Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture', 45.

4.1 Waves and Place

4.1.0 Introduction: Waves and Place

> It is a language in which the human body, your body, once had to be the sole metaphor you had for dealing with every emotion: frustration or fantasy, fear or joy, and which owes its emotional charge to its reconciliation of contradictory material. And it is one of the most marked characteristics of Aalto's work that it so dangerously engages with contradictory elements which it yet manages to control.[517]
>
> St John Wilson, 'Alvar Aalto and the state of Modernism' (1992)

In this section the phenomenological concept of Place is used to consider the significance of landscape in the large, medium and small versions of waves that are found in Aalto's architecture. In terms of Place, the *large* wave-form becomes notable for relating a building amongst large buildings in a city setting, as at Säkhötalo ('Electricity House'), Helsinki (1965-73), where tiered forms fuse old and new buildings at the skyline; amongst campus buildings and landscape, as at Otaniemi; or as a response to existing landform and urban context, as at Kultuuritalo, or in Finlandia Hall facing Töölö Bay. At a smaller scale, that of the body, the *medium* wave-form can relate to place through stairs, as in the steps on the grassy embanked slope at Seinäjoki Town Hall, or the 'hard and 'soft' stairs joining courtyard and ground levels at Säynatsälo Town Hall. At a small scale of place, where eyes and fingertips read the building, the small wave-form can manifest architecturally in the parallel lines of timber screens and ceilings, in the rippled water surfaces of ponds and pools, or in the play of contour lines in site plan drawings, all working with light and shade in materials to create unique sensed settings.

Aalto's particular insight was that the pleasure of the embodied experience and viewing of curves or waves is almost invariably countered by the technical difficulty of their architectural realisation. Wave-forms present considerable challenges: in their integration into conceptually orthogonal contexts; in the technical challenges of their construction; and in the difficulty of their finishing, especially in the visual and haptic completion of details and surfaces. Waves offer a portal to regard and consider the phenomenology of Aalto's architecture, as it involves the natural archetype of the wave.

Summary

4.1.1 A great wave: Otaniemi Auditorium

Episode 4.1.1 investigates Aalto's Otaniemi Auditorium (1955), with reference to Aalto's idea of 'surprise' and to Hokusai's famous print *The Great Wave*. It argues that the wave-form of the building in its campus location is instrumental in mediating between people and landscape, creating a phenomenological connection with a particular place.

[517] St John Wilson, 'Alvar Aalto and the state of Modernism', 90.

4.1.2 Medium waves: Enclosure and place at Säynatsälo

Aalto's Säynatsälo Town Hall has been seen as a *hortus conclusus*, an 'enclosed garden', set in the Finnish lake landscape. Reading the design and experience of Säynatsälo Town Hall in terms of enclosure and motion, and thinking of experience of interiority and place through Malpas's article 'Place and Singularity' (2015), episode 4.1.2 cites body-sized stairs, walkways, rooms and other elements as human-scale 'wave' elements that connect people with the courtyard and the surrounding landscape. This body-related sense of scale is argued as constitutive of place, and depends on real, anticipated or symbolised movement of people through the different 'waves' of the stairs that conduct the visitor through the building to arrive and settle in rooms and on levels.

4.1.3 Small waves: Contours, landscape and harmony at Essen Opera

Episode 4.1.3 investigates the contour line drawings at Essen Opera as an exceptional example of Aalto's use of the contour drawing to delineate a site, where site plan, floor plans, interior forms and decoration in different ways all exploit aspects of wave-forms to create a building adapted to its site. In Aalto's drafted site plan the architectural concept can be read clearly, perhaps definitively. Contour lines in drawings for Essen are considered with reference to Hewitt's discussion of Aalto's contour sketches in 'The Imaginary Mountain' (1989).

4.1.1 A great wave: Otaniemi Auditorium

> ... any encounter with an architectural structure begins with the overall sense of place (of being in a particular world), followed almost immediately by a growing grasp of the numerous meanings afforded by its various parts, light patterns, structural relations, contrasts, flow, rhythms, and other significant elements of meaning within the work.[518]
>
> Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture' (2015)

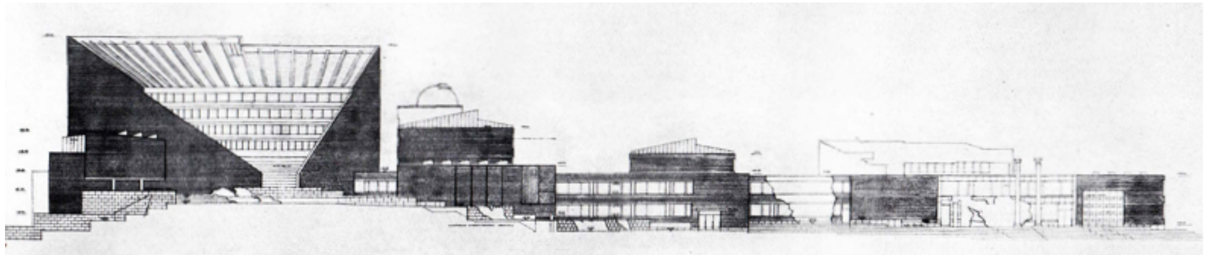

Figure 4.1 AALTO Otaniemi Campus and Auditorium, elevation
Source: *Alvar Aalto Band I*

Aalto was said to exclaim in his office a Finnish-Swedish street saying from his Jyväskylä childhood: 'Lyödaan heppnädilla!'; 'Let's take them by surprise!'[519] Aalto's architectural competition entries possess large measures of artistic invention, profound and playful insight into human consciousness, and many dimensions of surprise. As an example, the peaked silhouette of Aalto's Otaniemi University Auditorium (Fig.4.1), now known as the Undergraduate Centre,[520] appears as a surprising 'great wave' at the centre of a park-like campus whose 'various departments ... are fitted to the landscape.'[521] The campus is set on an island surrounded by water, now connected by roads, where, on a high point, Aalto positions an externally sculptural building whose vertical peak and circle-based curved form surprise the visitor by appearing unexpectedly in vistas and over rooftops, dominating in scale and by singular contrast the more regular orthogonal buildings on the campus. The campus design concentrates landscape, regular buildings and a unique, privileged wave-form auditorium to create, in philosopher Mark Johnson's words, an 'overall sense of place (of being in a particular world)'.[522]

The landscape metaphor of the 'great wave' alludes to very large, peaked, triangular, curved or undulating forms found in the natural world: the tsunami, the Hawaiian surfing wave, the storm wave breaking on rocks, the iceberg, the single mountain, the snowy mountaintop, the volcanic cone, the great hill; or less solidly, though possibly larger: the singular cumulus cloud, the rainbow, the bending river, the curving beach, the aurora. The 'great wave' in these forms becomes a fluid

[518] Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture', 40.
[519] Schildt, *Early Years*, 47-48.
[520] Now titled the Undergraduate Centre at Aalto University, Espoo; https://www.aalto.fi/en/news/architectural-gems-of-otaniemi Noted 1 Dec 2019.
[521] Alvar Aalto, Karl Fleig, 'Finnish Technical Institute at Otaniemi', in *Alvar Aalto Band I*, 204.
[522] Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture', 40.

metaphoric or onomatopoeic archetype found often, rarely or seasonally in the natural landscape, which can be evoked as an architectural landscape trope: a peaked hollow cone, a skillion roof, an undulating plan, a curved or layered ceiling, a grand staircase, a glass-roofed atrium.

The ‘great wave’ can thus be imagined as a resonant source for Aalto’s wave or mountain forms, either in itself as natural form or as represented in art. Aalto developed a particular interest in Japanese architecture, aesthetics and culture in the mid-1930s;[523] Pallasmaa notes that Aalto wore a ‘reddish brown kimono’ to the office around that time.[524] In Stockholm in 1935 the Japanese Tea House, *Zui Ki Tei* was built; Pallasmaa notes that it became a ‘mecca’ for Scandinavian architects, and suggests it was visited by Aalto ‘on one of his monthly visits to Stockholm'.[525]

Figure 4.2 HOKUSAI *Under the Wave off Kanagawa*, woodblock print
Source: Open source

While no direct causal link between Aalto’s work and Japanese art is implied, ideas of place may be generated in comparing dynamic architectural wave-forms to landscape wave-forms found in art, such as Hokusai’s woodblock print *The Great Wave* (Fig.4.2). The wave-form in Aalto’s built work, in the low glaciated Finnish landscape, in or near the forest, on lake edges, imports the extraneous energies of the single great wave, as a concept of landscape, from painted examples into built forms. Such a harnessing of the energy of natural forms, transposed into built form, carries new significance for architecture in terms of place.

[523] Chen-Yu Chiu, Aino Niskanen and Ke Song, ‘Humanizing Modern Architecture: The Role of *Das Japanische Wohnhaus* in Alvar Aalto’s design for his own house and studio in Riihitie,’ *Journal of Asian Architecture and Building Engineering* 16, no.1 (2017): 1-8. In this connection, see also Hyon-Sob Kim, ‘Tetsuro Yoshida (1894-1956) and architectural interchange between East and West’, *arq Architectural Research Quarterly* 12, no.1 (2008): 43-57.

[524] Pallasmaa, ‘Rationality and Domesticity’, 75.

[525] Pallasmaa, ‘Image and Meaning’, 98.

Aalto's competition-winning design for a learning institution at Otaniemi – a 'labor sacrum', a sacred work, and a 'once in a millennium' opportunity, to build 'the new Technical University of my own country'[526] – is set on an island in an inlet to the west of Helsinki. McCarter notes Aalto's 'sensitivity to the landscape' in working with existing artificial landscape structures, retaining large old trees and stepped grass terraces retained from the earlier estate on the site. The composition of the main group of buildings comprises a 'city-in-miniature', integrating 'geological' terraces with a '"city-crown" building form' – a reference to Bruno Taut's *Stadtkrone*, the Expressionist idea of the single building crowning an elevated constructed city centre.[527]

Figure 4.3 AALTO Otaniemi Auditorium, sequence of views
Photographs by John Roberts, 2011

Merging landform with built form, the Otaniemi Auditorium, in McCarter's terms, 'a steep curving Greek theatre form crowning the hilltop and comprising the focus – what Aalto pointedly called an "acropolis"', becomes a point of social focus and a pivotal central element of architectural organisation, with its conceptual roots in the ancient Greek merging of landscape and culture of the Acropolis (Fig.4.3).[528]

Figure 4.4 AALTO Otaniemi Auditorium, landscape with students
Photograph by John Roberts, 2011

An apparent preoccupation at Otaniemi, and an element of 'surprise' in Aalto's hands, is the enhanced relation between buildings, landscape and people, seen in the interwoven experience of campus and buildings, both by students in matriculation caps, and by the first-time visitor seeking orientation. New students trail easily

[526] Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, 188.
[527] McCarter, *Aalto*, 150.
[528] McCarter, *Aalto*, 150.

through the campus topography, as if drawn by instinct around and between buildings towards the Auditorium, oriented by intermittent glimpses of the Auditorium's peak above rectilinear buildings (Fig.4.4). Not only is the Auditorium a prominent destination, whether envisioned as a wave, mountain or acropolis, but it also involves students as they approach through the surrounding landscape, with its paths, steps and terraces built and shuffled together on gentle slopes and grassed levels.

The Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) depicted many images of Japanese landscapes, including views of Mt Fuji and images of waves, through his long career.[529] In his iconic image *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* (1830-33), often referred to as *The Great Wave*, Hokusai depicts a very large single wave, its toppling profile looming with fingers of foam over the figures in boats below, and above the cone of Mt Fuji on the distant horizon (Fig.4.2). The singular profiles of the wave and the mountain distinguish them from the wavelets, ripples, foam and undulating forms in the foreground. Art historian Christine M.E. Guth observes that Hokusai's image draws part of its power from the low water-level point of view, where the viewer is 'seeing the wave from within its vortex', making 'viewership essential to the effect of this image.'[530] From this low viewpoint the viewer empathises with 'the uncertain fate of the boatmen struggling against the overwhelming force of this natural phenomenon,' and participating in the natural drama where 'the curling wave in the foreground swallowing up the boats draws the viewer into its orbit, creating an extraordinary immediacy of experience.'[531]

This 'immediacy of experience' of a wave posed perilously in space echoes Johnson's remark on the experience of seemingly unstable large forms: 'Massive tilting objects tend to frighten us, because we have learned that forces of nature and gravity tend to topple such tilting objects, unless they are very strong and firmly rooted.'[532] Johnson also notes the dual needs of human beings for environments that are not only physically practical but also psychologically sustaining: 'we also order our environments to enhance meaning in our lives and to open up possibilities for deepened and enriched experience ... although we are animals evolved for fitness, we are just as much animals with a deep desire for meaning as part of our attempts to grow and flourish.'[533]

This flourishing of the individual beyond basic functional necessity, so central to culture, is central also to Aalto's socio-ethical agenda of making architecture for the 'little person', to 'build an earthly paradise for people.'[534] The bonus of a sense of 'surprise' in height, form and prominence of the great wave-form at Otaniemi flows through from its conception and design to its daily or occasional experience, enhanced, completed and located by its interweaving with landscape.

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[529] Christine M.E. Guth, 'Hokusai's Great Waves in Nineteenth-Century Japanese Visual Culture', *Art Bulletin* 93, no.4 (2011): 468-485.
[530] Guth, 'Hokusai's Great Waves', 472.
[531] Guth, 'Hokusai's Great Waves', 472-473.
[532] Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture', 44.
[533] Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture', 33.
[534] Aalto, 'The Architect's Conception for Paradise', 158.

The scale of waves becomes emotively involving for the viewer. Guth describes Hokusai as a ‘master showman’ who in *The Great Wave* ‘seduces the viewer by theatricalizing the wave ... transforming the viewer into a participant in this watery drama’, where the wave ‘sets in motion a creative process that the viewer completes.’ [535] Something of this potential for engaging showmanship emerges in Aalto’s drawing of Otaniemi Auditorium (Fig.4.1) where the singularised wave breaks into the air out of the terraced earth, above the rank and file of surrounding buildings. While other buildings might house labs, meeting rooms and offices, the wave-form auditorium’s form and scale tell of its central communicative purpose of welcome, of being a building for speaking, listening, ceremony and orientation. In the face of its large scaled presence, Aalto’s visitor, like Hokusai’s viewer, becomes entwined in a creative process, begun by the architect, which they are invited to complete.

In terms of place, as can be seen in Hokusai’s and Aalto’s waves, the great single wave-form is unique and particular both in itself and in its location, through to the location of the observer to perceive the wave in silhouette, for maximum visual and emotional effect. These images of dominating, changing works of nature and architecture, with peaks silhouetted in the sky, combine nature and artifice, visuality and experience, and exceptional, surprising art to make significant works involving landscape.

Aalto’s Auditorium seems placed to locate or orient people in comforting social and spatial relationships with each other and the campus, and to locate or emplace the university from its formal and emblematic centre on the island site. The idea of ‘place’ at Otaniemi, through the energy of the wave forms of the Auditorium, shifts to become a verb, an act of placing human feelings, expectations and experiences meaningfully onto the earth through architectural means. Those means, in the form of built waves and curves that reflect and redirect light and sound, also locate and identify the great wave building like a connecting socket in the angle where buildings converge from across the site, fixing and crowning the junction.

This version of architecture is conceived in response to human relations with landscape and place, without which the building can be little more than a large sculptural object in space. Aalto’s architecture at Otaniemi requires landscape for its activity, for its being: through this existential necessity, landscape becomes ontological, basic and essential for the conceptual existence of Aalto’s architecture. Thus, in Finland, where ponds, lakes and the sea can be frozen solid for months, wave and landscape correlate to form a harmonious place for people.

[535] Guth, ‘Hokusai’s Great Waves’: 474.

4.1.2 Medium waves: Enclosure and movement at Säynatsälo Town Hall

> We must create enclosure: enclosure for shelter, shelter for both spirit and heart. The larger the world becomes, and the further men travel, the greater the need becomes for enclosure, and part of our work is to give the widest significance to these two extremes by reconciling them to one another.[536]
>
> Hertzberger, 'The Permeable Surface of the City' (1964)

> Shelter requires a relative strength, stability, and at least some measure of impenetrability ... we respond in certain ways emotionally to structures that we feel to be strong, solid, and well-grounded. Typically, we also desire to be enclosed in spaces that are not claustrophobic and oppressive.[537]
>
> Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture' (2015)

> Even though most of the time we are not consciously aware of our bodily movements, we continually experience the qualities of different types of movement. We feel the rhythms of various movements – short, jerky hop-and-skip motions versus smooth, continuous flowing motions. We contrast, within our bodies, the felt difference of gradual accelerations and decelerations versus jolting starts and finishes. Felt rhythms provide basic types of contours for our experience. Events speed up and slow down, creep along, rush past, dance, stumble, drag by, and float. By complex perceptual and cognitive processes, we learn to experience what we might call perceptual motion in physically fixed or static visual arrangements.[538]
>
> Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture' (2015)

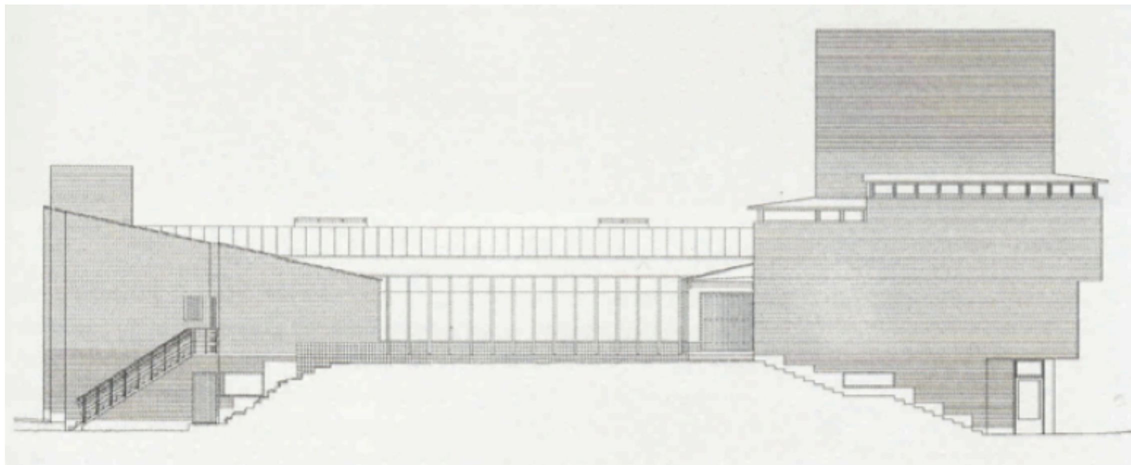

Figure 4.5 AALTO Säynatsälo Town Hall, section, showing stairs
Source: McCarter, *Aalto*

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[536] Herman Hertzberger, 'The Permeable Surface of the City' (1964), in *Lessons for Students in Architecture*, 250.
[537] Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture', 42.
[538] Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture', 45.

Designed originally as part of a larger civic complex, Aalto's Säynätsalo Town Hall (1949-52) remains a singular building, resembling a brick castle on a forested slope, a self-contained entity, with strong walls, a terraced courtyard, and the dominant figure of the council chamber (Fig.4.5). In formal terms, Aalto's Town Hall on its sloping 'forest town' site, with its tall outer walls, and its elevated, level, artificial courtyard surrounded by a low corridor, is dominated by the tall mass of the council chamber, which is regarded below as a wave-form, where the reverse gable roof accentuates the silhouette a pair of small and large pitched forms. A visitor's experience of the architecture involves infiltrating the building's red brick enclosure by different stairs, each animating its location in the building complex. Seen as rhythmic human-scale waves, these stairs carry people, connecting landscape and building to develop a unique version of place at Säynätsalo.

Säynätsalo Town Hall arguably confirms a sense of place through a body-based phenomenology, in ways that critique and affirm the legitimacy of place, emphasised through a repeatedly stated interrelationship of building with landscape. The passageways and indoor and outdoor stairs, connecting and relating to the inner courtyard, manifest a range of experiences for the visitor, compounding a lived *sense* of place in forms and materials, connecting with landscape and registered by eyes and senses.

Säynätsalo Town Hall is a reflection on place, claims Weston: 'both a building of monumental presence and a marvelously successful everyday place', relaxed and intimate, yet offering a visceral lived experience.[539] The Town Hall remains the only building realised from Aalto's competition-winning 1949 design for a 'forest town' at Säynätsalo in Central Finland. Its almost defensive isolation is intensified by the closed physicality of the vertically stacked masses of the chamber building; noting its sense of enclosure, Trencher refers to Säynätsalo metaphorically as a 'small, walled city'.[540] While the idea of the 'forest town' was a constant ideal in Aalto's imagination, it remained unbuilt, despite the successful completion of a new urban plan at Seinäjoki Civic Centre (1959).

However, Trencher's idea of the 'small, walled city' opens two key opportunities in relating architecture to landscape: first, it supports the idea of the 'urban fragment' put forward by Quantrill; and second, it suggests qualities of singularity, inwardness and enclosure instrumental in creating place, as argued by Malpas in 'Place and Singularity'. Yet in terms of landscape, both concepts remain relatively mute until the relationship between the rooms of the building and the surrounding landscape can be framed as an *inter*relationship, one of 'conceptual interdependence' between the privileged 'poetic' room, as Andresen describes it, and the greater landscape.[541]

At Säynätsalo this interdependence is enacted in an especially animated, visceral way by the stairs and passageways that connect to the courtyard – up and down, to and from the outer world; horizontally between the mundane council rooms; and up again to the 'poetic' council chamber – as drawn clearly on the building section

[539] Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, 145.
[540] Trencher, *Alvar Aalto Guide*, 156.
[541] Andresen, 'Ancient Gathering Forms', 52.

(Fig.4.5). But the interrelationship with landscape has to be seen in that interrelationship of stairs, courtyard and other literal levels, other metaphorical worlds. This engages the body in making and feeling place, between the different levels of inside and outside 'worlds'.

Figure 4.6 AALTO Säynatsälo Town Hall, council chamber
Photograph by John Roberts, 2011

A sense of the wave-form of the chamber – which Aalto relates in importance and dimensions to Siena's Palazzo Pubblico – defying gravity and lifting itself above the hard and soft waves of granite and grass, is seen in Trencher's description of looking up from the bottom of this grassed stair, where the ascending roof of the chamber 'energizes rather than stabilizes ... making the building seem to leap off the ground.'[542] Photographs show the sloping roofline with its wave-like profile pitching up into the sky and trees behind, defying the heavy mass of grass and brick, and suggesting its leavening by the civic ideals that it both represents and houses (Fig.4.6).

Quantrill describes the Säynätsalo courtyard as 'a landscape element that spans between the formality of the entry stairs and the surrounding forest ... offering a bridge between architecture and nature.'[543] For Quantrill the courtyard idea lodges in Aalto's imagination or 'environmental memory': 'the idea of the small Italian piazza ... was firmly established in his mind and work before he was thirty; and it was to remain an important image in his environmental memory for the next four decades.'[544] To encapsulate Aalto's strategy of condensing town and city constructs into a singularity, Quantrill offers the idea of the 'urban fragment': 'Recognizing Aalto's buildings of the

[542] Trencher, *Alvar Aalto Guide*, 156.

[543] Malcolm Quantrill, *Finnish Architecture and the Modernist Tradition* (London: Spon, 1995), 109.

[544] Malcolm Quantrill, 'Aalto's use of memory: The urban fragments', in *The Environmental Memory: Man and Architecture in the Landscape of Ideas* (New York: Schocken Books, 1987), 163-164.

1950s as urban fragments rather than isolated architectural monuments is essential if we are to understand his true contribution to modern architecture.'[545]

The concept of a walled enclosure as the civic heart of a modern forest community suggests a potentially problematic insularity. Malpas notes the 'inward-turning character of place' as potentially forming its 'singularity', yet also possibly supporting a reactionary provincialism:

> In the manner in which it draws us inward, in the character of its singularity, as itself tied to its interiority, place can sometimes appear as thereby bringing with it such a sense of enclosedness, even of introversion, as to appear stifling and oppressive, as giving rise to a problematic narrowing of mind and of action. Place is thus taken to imply "provincialism", "parochialism", "insularity" – or else as underlying forms of nationalist bigotry and political conservatism.[546]

Aalto, however, seems to anticipate both the enclosed, introverted centripetal force of the enclosed place, and the ill effects of a politics of provincialism in a rural community. He counters through his architecture with harmony-inducing urban contrasts common to his own work and historical European cities, with the council chamber emerging as a singular 'large wave', perhaps from Aalto's sense of precedent, perhaps as a distinguishing formal motif, from the low roofs of the central court.

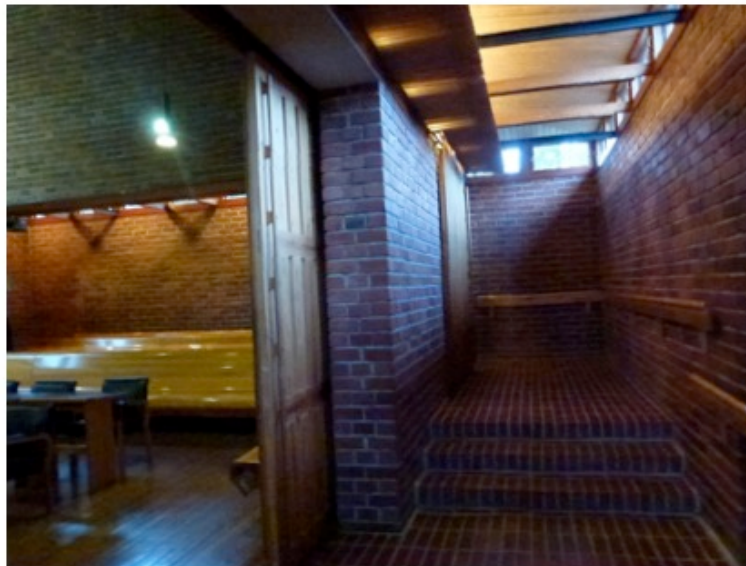

Figure 4.7 AALTO Säynatsälo Town Hall, council chamber
Photograph by John Roberts, 2011

Inside the building, its static exterior wave-form is experienced by the visitor as a flight of rhythmically slow-paced stairs, rising and turning to make an enclosing inward-moving passage that enwraps and then reveals the council chamber (Fig.4.7). The visitor ascends a fluid route of waxed and polished brick steps, as light enters

[545] Quantrill, 'The urban fragments', 167.
[546] Malpas, 'Place and the Problem of Landscape', 82.

through slits above head-height, percolating through fine timber screens. Trencher notes that 'the narrow passage seems to be built into the thickness of an ancient fortification, the climb leading toward an inner sanctum.'[547] The layers of timber panelling, rhythmic brick courses and shimmering timber screens embrace and welcome the body of the visitor in waves of light and layered material contrasts. These waves of haptically attuned materials translate the large-scale built place to human scale, in the form of body-thick walls, limb-sized steps and landings, hand-scale rails and handles, and finger-scale screens.

Figure 4.8 AALTO Säynatsälo Town Hall
Photographs by John Roberts, 2011, 2008

Trencher proposes that the metaphorical 'walled city' of Säynätsalo Town Hall opens to the world through two gates, 'one natural, intimate and sensuous; the other rational, heroic, and overpowering.'[548] Hence the stairs become important as 'gates' between the enclosed inner square and the formless outer world, particularly through their contrasts in form, materiality and feeling (Fig.4.8). Describing the 'monumental' granite eastern stair, a finely crafted formal element of ascendance and arrival, Trencher notes its mood, 'enhanced by high clerestory windows and by the stepped cantilever of its massing', contrasted by the western stairs, 'a series of layered terraces flowing down'.[549] The stairs, views and physical gravity of this interconnected architectural experience all seem to relate to memory and experience of landscape archetypes (cliffs, tracks, geological strata, cascading streams, grassy slopes) to create a riveting feeling of enclosure and insideness, a sense of containment inside a level courtyard that is paradoxically confirmed and enriched by the large stairs freely offering both access and escape.

In the Säynätsalo Town Hall, older architectural and urban patterns resonate in the flowing stairs penetrating thick walls, in the single peaked wave-form above a floating courtyard, and in the relation of cascades, peaks and platforms to a more indeterminate landscape beyond. Scully and Norberg-Schulz have pointed out that the relation of urban forms to landscape is not accidental; rather, it echoes a now-fading reverence once shown by ancient societies to the earth, forming. as Norberg-Schulz notes, 'a visualisation of potentially present foci.'[550] Scully cites Florence,

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[547] Trencher, *Alvar Aalto Guide*, 157.
[548] Trencher, *Alvar Aalto Guide*, 156.
[549] Trencher, *Alvar Aalto Guide*, 156.
[550] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 175.

where the cathedral dome is seen as ‘a swelling and maternal goddess-mother and a sacred mountain all at once ... lodged in the centre of the town’.[551] A paradox of Nordic architecture is noted by Norberg-Schulz, where ‘the house has to give man physical protection by being enclosed [while at] the same time he wants it to be *symbolically open* to bring nature near.’[552]

Figure 4.9 MICHELANGELO Laurentian Library
Source: McCarter and Pallasmaa, *Understanding Architecture*

Aalto’s western grassed stairs, a landscape design of convex waves of artificially formed terrain, appear to have an architectural precedent in the convex stair that occupies and dominates the tall, confining vestibule of Michelangelo’s Laurentian Library, Florence (1519-59), according to McCarter, ‘one of the most beautiful and intensely moving spaces ever built’.[553] In Michelangelo’s staircase (Fig.4.9), the tapering square-edged steps to the sides imply upward movement, while the curved central steps spill like flows of dark lava, bulging out to challenge the visitor’s entry, and embodying downward and outward motion. McCarter notes in Michelangelo’s staircase ‘small curling waves’ at the edges of the rounded treads, whose convex curves and shining finish ‘make the stairs seem to flow towards us like a cascade of water, threatening to push us back down.’[554] The forceful sensation of Michelangelo’s stair seems re-created in the outward force of the waves of Aalto’s grassed stairs, a component of landscape modernism, which intuitively contrasts order and disorder, rule and misrule, transposing architectural history to merge the defined and enclosed terrace with the indeterminate Finnish forest just beyond the base of the similarly indeterminate, sprawling grassed stair.

With a downward and outward force recalling the effect of flowing molten stone in Michelangelo’s expansive stairs, Aalto’s grassed stair, part landscape design, part

[551] Vincent Scully, *Architecture: The Natural and the Manmade* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1991), 184.
[552] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 182.
[553] Robert McCarter and Juhani Pallasmaa, *Understanding Architecture: A Primer on Architecture as Experience* (London: Phaidon, 2012), 251.
[554] McCarter and Pallasmaa, *Understanding Architecture*, 251.

urban structure, part historical resonance, accommodates the visitor with a disarming and contrary spatial encounter, one that intensifies place by constructing harmony from discordant and different elements.

This historical association of stairs and waves extends to imply the elision of landscape into architecture, in wave-forms, associated with motion, an overlooked but recurrent element of urban design and architecture found in Mannerist and Baroque Rome. In Rome, Michelangelo's Piazza del Campidoglio (designed 1536-46) (see Fig.5.10), features a centralised radiating ovoid pavement – which 'says that the human act creates the environment', notes Scully[555] – linked to the city by a course of stairs, the *cordonata*. The Spanish Steps (1725) appear like a waterfall of masonry made for public promenading and sitting; while Borromini's undulating front at San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane (1646), suggests a plasticity of form aligned with nature or landform. Stairs in Rome, proposes Norberg-Schulz, 'represent an articulation of the ground itself. The great Roman stairs bring us close to the earth and increase our sense of belonging to the place.'[556]

Leach notes that Borromini's work expresses 'a crisis of faith' in the values of abstract classicism, 'making space for a positive knowledge of the natural world, and of antiquity through his embrace of the ruin'.[557] The earth's underlying natural energies seem to rise through the topography and the architecture, creating a uniquely Roman *genius loci* whose conceptual basis Norberg-Schulz locates in the landscape of the Roman *campagna*, a humanisation of the natural landscape that gives 'the feeling of rootedness in a "known" natural environment.'[558]

Regarded more closely as experience, Säynätsalo shows a marked contrast of mood, material and gravity in its outdoor stairs. On the east side, smooth and sharply defined granite steps usher visitors in, to ascend from a defined car park to arrive at the courtyard near the Town Hall entry doors, suggesting decorum, propriety and Apollonian order. By contrast, the west side's wavering stairs, built of timber risers paved in damp earth and soft grass, break out of the geometry of the courtyard, appearing to usher people out and down like water, or down and out in the manner of Dionysian abjects, more than upwards and inwards like the ideal and sober formal visitants at the east side.

The notion of wavering further suggests, beyond wave-forms, the flickering of light, the faltering or trembling of a voice, or the vacillation and fluctuation of a state of mind or thought; the architectural idea of wavering stairs suggests a physical equivocation, either a fluctuation between a whole or decaying solid state, or between a solid and a fluid state. In either case, the firm built ground of the Säynätsalo terrace, supported and affirmed by the grey eastern stairs, seems countered, undermined and abandoned by the downward and outward flow implicit in

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[555] Scully, *The Natural and the Manmade*, 200.
[556] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 164.
[557] Andrew Leach, 'Francesco Borromini and the Crisis of the Humanist Universe, or Manfredo Tafuri on the baroque origins of modern architecture', *The Journal of Architecture* 15, no.3 (2010): 308.
[558] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 142.

the irregular plan, the uneven treads, and the unstable materiality of the green western stairs.

Aalto's grassed stairs, a little like the overgrowing verdure of the vines in the Säynätsalo courtyard, work to transgress and ruin modernism's clean ideals and clear forms, requiring constant maintenance as a semi-living architectural entity. Indeed the timber and earthy materials of the western stairs entail repeated self-destruction and frequent reconstruction; the measured looseness of Aalto's design is intermittently replaced with misreadings of his original plan and section. The weighty force of Aalto's waves of stairs, a component of landscape modernism which seems arrived at through an intuitive sense of contrast between order and disorder, rule and misrule, merge with an echo of architectural history to connect the visitor enclosed on the terrace with the surrounding and indeterminate Finnish forest.

Seen overall, the pair of stairs seem to imply that place and community can thrive through inclusion of opposites, making harmonious whole structures from diverse human and environmental elements, as Aalto often noted. At Säynätsalo Town Hall, the Apollonian and Dionysian steps seem to acknowledge that all citizens, from the upstanding community elders to the most abject or intoxicated 'little person', are to be represented and included in the democracy of civic affairs.

4.1.3 Contours, landscape and harmony at Essen Opera

> The objective is not just that the buildings should meet one or two aesthetic norms, but that they should be placed in the landscape in a natural way, in harmony with its general contours.[559]
>
> Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland' (1925)

> But, unlike me, Aalto could decipher drawings and plans. Yes, he was brilliant at it and could immediately see the spatial implications. Plans and sections fell like ripe fruit from Aalto's hand.[560]
>
> Utzon 'Conversations' (2004)

> The organic form of the [Essen] opera house does not emanate solely from the sequence of spaces, but first and foremost from its position in an urban park, as Aalto explained: "In a park, you can't put anything hard, abrupt. It has to be fluid, organic. I carried this sweeping composition over to the interior."[561]
>
> Kuhlmann, 'Magus of the North' (2014)

Figure 4.10 AALTO Essen Opera
Source: Tuxyso [562]

Aalto's Essen Opera House (1959-64-88), now Aalto Theater, in Essen, Germany, won a design competition in 1959, and was completed decades later, after Aalto's death in 1988, under the guidance of Elissa Aalto. The building in its Stadtgarten site, near the older Philharmonie Essen (1902, rebuilt 1954), appears as a squarish organic form with its back turned to an urban intersection and its low front flowing out towards the park (Fig.4.10). The site plan shows the building footprint amidst roads, parking, paths and trees, with a flux of drawn contour lines showing topographic

[559] Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland', 21-22.

[560] Jørn Utzon and Henrik Sten Møller, 'Conversations', in Henrik Sten Møller & Vibe Udsen, *Jørn Utzon Houses* (Copenhagen: Living Architecture Publishing, 2004), 13.

[561] Dörte Kuhlmann, 'Alvar Aalto – The Magus of the North in Germany', in Kries and Eisenbrand, *Alvar Aalto: Second Nature*, 348.

[562] Tuxyso / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA-3.0 Noted 26 Jan 2021.

relief, coursing through the building, fading in a unifying manner into pathways and built terraces (Fig.4.11).

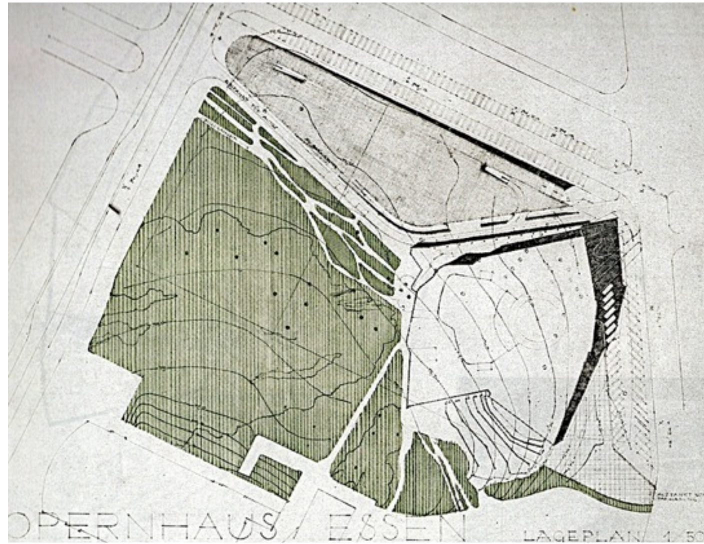

Figure 4.11 AALTO Essen Opera, site plan
Source: *Alvar Aalto Band III*

The building, notes Weston, addresses the city at its back ‘with a succession of cranked walls’, and faces the park with ‘a vast undulating surface’,[563] while at the entry a curving canopy extends to greet the visitor and continues along the building’s flank. The smooth pale finishes of the building’s metal cladding wrap its irregular form into a single undulating skin, soft contours against the angled edges of the city and the building’s corners.

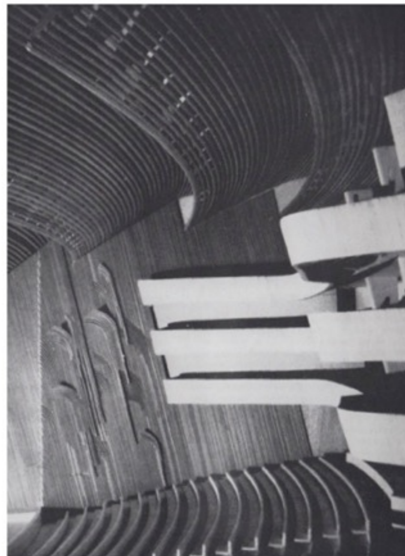

Figure 4.12 AALTO Essen Opera, interior model
Source: *Alvar Aalto Band III*

The Essen Opera interior (Fig.4.12) continues the outside rhythms, with undulating forms in the ceilings, walls, balconies, and tiered stalls, an arrangement of

563 Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, 217.

‘geological’ wave-forms, conveying the appearance, Weston notes, of being ‘relatively full even when half empty.’[564]

Aalto’s site plan drawing of Essen Opera, with its repeating wavering rhythms, rendered skiagraphically with shadows, shows the building layered geologically over the flowing contour patterns, depicting an indeterminate area that becomes anchored, grounded and oriented by the location of a building (Fig.4.11). Beyond Essen Opera, in projects tracing back to Paimio in the 1920s, in works built and unbuilt, Aalto’s site plans are recurrent, even if only for publication. They reflect a methodological importance attached to the site plan, to indicate the contours of the land as inseparable from the design, as an obligatory element, imperative for consideration in the conceptual and built design, and in experience of the building. Contour lines thus contribute to the argument of the present study that landscape is ontological in Aalto’s method.

The fluid lines of waves are to be found throughout Aalto’s drawings. They flow in multiple rhythms in his travel sketches, marking levels and silhouettes in the lines of his design sketches, and are ubiquitous in the contours of his plan and site plan drawings, capturing at once the precise measure of the land, its physiognomy and character as ground, and its shimmering vitality as a unique site. Aalto explains that the form of the Essen Opera is derived principally from its location in the city park: ‘In a park, you can’t put anything hard, abrupt. It has to be fluid, organic. I carried this sweeping composition over to the interior.’[565]

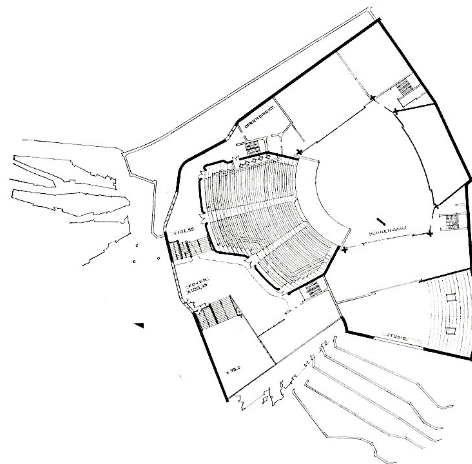

Figure 4.13 AALTO Essen Opera, main floor plan
Source: *Alvar Aalto Band III*

Through these wave drawings, exterior landscape forms and qualities can be transposed into the spaces of the interior, with the result that the outer world of landscape and an inner built world can coexist, yet also surprise through the transformation of the inner world into a space whose unique conception and experience are related to landscape, especially in the forms of repeated, wave-like contours (Fig.4.13). Elissa Aalto writes in 1989 of the surprising effects intended in

[564] Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, 217.
[565] Kuhlmann, ‘Magus of the North’, 348.

Aalto's auditorium designs: 'In his theatre and concert houses, Aalto leads audiences through various spatial experiences to the central action, the performance itself. He strives to lift the viewer out of the everyday and create an atmosphere of anticipation.'[566]

Similarly, Ray writes of the 'lines and scorings' of Aalto's drawings, where building and landscape are unified in the drawing, and by human movement:

> But what is emphasised in these drawings is not necessarily the fabric of the building. Equally prominent are lines and scorings that anticipate the way that light or sound will behave, and even more frequently indications of human movement. The organisation of many of his buildings takes account of the flow of movement along corridors, down staircases, through foyers and out towards the landscape, and the fabric seems to have been arranged so as to accommodate this.[567]

At Essen the outside world of the public park coexists with the interior of the foyer, a strategy bridging landscape and architecture which appears intended in the drawing of the site plan, where the Opera building's outline is barely distinguishable from the maze of curved and rectilinear lines representing contours, paths, roads and planting (Fig.4.11). From the park, this family of rhythmic, flowing lines continues to the auditorium interior, from the seats to the decorative wall linings and ceiling. The wave-forms of the upper balconies re-state the looming overhanging interior walls of the pre-World War II New York Finland Pavilion: wave forms elevate the mood further 'out of the everyday', hovering between fluid states of air, clouds, landforms, water and plant growth.

While accurate site section drawings are unusual in architectural publications, in Aalto's *Collected Works*, throughout *Band I, II* and *III*, site plans become common underpinning instruments for establishing the particular notion of the building in its place in each work.[568] Contour lines stir and excite the drawing paper's white surface, much like the earthy rolling hills and slopes that counter flat land, in curved irregular lines delineating topography, indicating vegetation and water, and graphing the weaving paths of human movement. The swirling lines on Aalto's site plans, which become essential and basic to his work, reflect the interweave of rationality and intuition found in his conceptions, drawings and buildings, as they establish narrative patterns for all subsequent design moves and imply future patterns of perception and experience.

Mark A. Hewitt, studying Aalto's contour drawings in 'The Imaginary Mountain' (1989), records the importance of contour for Aalto's generation: 'Painters and architects trained in the classical tradition recognise the role of contour in defining form. They are taught to understand figural relationships first through line and then through skiagraphy or shade and shadow.'[569] Line and land are thus interlocked in

[566] Elissa Aalto, "Alvar Aalto und seine Theaterbauten," in *Aalto – Theater Essen: Dokumentation* (Essen, 1989), cited in Kuhlmann, 'Magus of the North', 348.
[567] Ray, *Alvar Aalto*, 162.
[568] See *Alvar Aalto Band I, Alvar Aalto Band II, Alvar Aalto Band III*.
[569] Mark A. Hewitt, 'The Imaginary Mountain: The Significance of Contour in Alvar Aalto's Sketches',

creative conception through drawing and sketching of contours and shadows. Hewitt defines the contour outline in Aalto's sketches as 'the controlling force in both his buildings and his drawing technique', and observes in the cartographic precision of Aalto's site plans (not his sketches) a 'counterpoint between topographic contour lines and the plan', which 'achieves a poetry that is at the heart of Aalto's attitude toward building and landscape.'[570] While this fundamental connection of architecture and landscape is only basically noted, Hewitt also sees the translation of cartography into landform reality:

> It is striking when looking at Aalto's sketches how much the mapmaker's contour line asserts itself, and how the architect seems to build up forms as if he were marking the stepping contours of a mountain or hillside at conventional vertical intervals. At times he seems to cut away the building form as if moving earth, or to build up organic masses out of rock-like planes.[571]

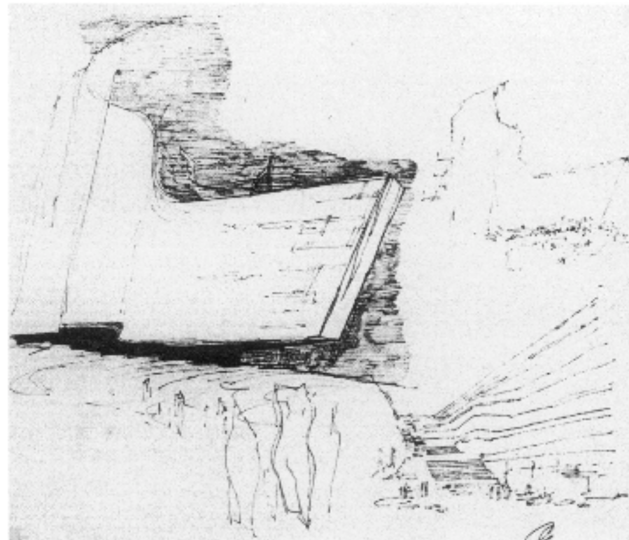

Figure 4.14 AALTO Essen Opera, interior sketch
Source: *Alvar Aalto Band III*

The apotheosis of the site plan drawings is found in the interiors of Essen Opera: in the vast riverbed-like foyer with its cascades of stairs and its floating wave-form balconies, and in the auditorium interiors with undulating ceilings, tiered seats, wavering white balconies, and wave sculptures ornamenting the indigo walls (Fig.4.14).

As Malpas argues, 'Landscape is a representation of place, and as such, it is the re-presentation of a relatedness to place ...'[572] From the fine lines of the site plan to the undulating interiors at Essen, an idea endures, based in Aalto's seeing of landscape under and through the building, tying the building to its park setting and to the city beyond, unifying moving and sitting people with the flowing land and the encasing building. In drawings of site and interiors, the wave-like continuity of landscape is

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Perspecta 25 (1989): 170.
570 Hewitt, 'The Imaginary Mountain': 171.
571 Hewitt, 'The Imaginary Mountain': 171.
572 Malpas, 'Place and the Problem of Landscape', 7.

represented, as something to build in and to live in, more than to be viewed, relating people through architecture to place at Essen.

4.1.4 Conclusion: Waves and Place

The great wave of a building in a sea of university buildings; the human-scale waves of stairs; and the small pencil-drawn waves of contour lines: these wave-forms reflect a diversity of types, points of reference and applications in Aalto's architecture in its relation to landscape.

Malpas notes that Cézanne, in painting Provence, 'undertakes an exploration of his own experience, his own memories, his own self.'[573] The familiar landscapes of Finland, whether dominated by a mountainous wave-form, populated and related by stairs, or drafted in lines like the prints of one's own fingertips, seem to come to life and acquire immediacy through thinking of waves. Like Cézanne, Aalto explores his experiences, memories, even self through the ruins of built, viewed, walked, drawn and remembered waves. These waves, found in landscape, direct the visitor to see, think and experience landscape in Aalto's work and drawings. Landscape, argues Malpas, is a representation of place, hence 'the re-presentation of a relatedness to place, a re-presentation of a mode of "emplacement."'[574]

At Otaniemi, at Säynätsalo, and at Essen, the wave-forms reverberate in the imagination between waters, artworks, landforms, the paths of people in parks, the rise and fall of stairs between everyday and built spaces, and the waving walls of foyers. The concepts of place noted by Malpas, of 'relatedness to place', and of remembered and corporeal 'emplacement', become the tropes of place of Aalto's architecture. The divisions between drawing, building, surfaces and materials become sufficiently fine and close to be conflated as landscape. Landscape thinking can both create and comprehend the flowing edges of contour lines, the haptic materials of stairs, and the changing vistas of the peak of the Otaniemi Auditorium, poised like a watchtower above the shifting walls and rooftops of other buildings.

[573] Malpas, 'Place and the Problem of Landscape', 13.

[574] Malpas, 'Place and the Problem of Landscape', 6.

4.2 Waves and Atmosphere

4.2.0 Introduction: Waves and Atmosphere

In this section the phenomenological strand of Atmosphere is used to consider large, medium, and small versions of Waves in Aalto's architecture. The three episodes consider aspects of atmosphere in Aalto's work: the experience of atmospheric effects in the large wave-form of New York Finland Pavilion; the design and location of body-sized curved and undulating 'wave ceilings' in Aalto's Summa House and other works; and at the concept of myth, associated with water, and informing Aalto's method, arguably evident in Aalto's Helsinki House and Seinäjoki Town Hall.

SUMMARY

4.2.1 Aurora: Beyond atmosphere: New York Finland Pavilion

Episode 4.2.1 investigates Aalto's early use of the large wave at the New York Finland Pavilion, using Edensor's thinking on the 'unearthliness' of the Northern Lights to question assumptions of the metaphoric qualities of the aurora. It asks how architecture can create and sustain an atmosphere that merges the literally unearthly light and stratospheric mystery of the Northern Lights with the images and earthly objects of modernised industrial 1930s Finland.

4.2.2 Wave ceilings: Ceiling, window and perception at Summa House

Episode 4.2.2 considers the significance of landscape in the combination of window and wave-form ceiling of Aalto's Enso-Gutzeit House C (1964), known as Summa House. The room's undulant timber ceiling, allied with the relationship created between inside and outside by the unique window, arguably becomes decisive in relating interior spaces to surrounding landscape; a comparison with Le Corbusier's idea of viewing through a window sets the argument in context.

4.2.3 Mythic Atmospheres: Aalto House, Seinäjoki Town Hall

Episode 4.2.3 deals with ideas of myth in Aalto's work, related to waves in the landscape and in architecture. In 'The Trout and the Stream' (1947) Aalto likens the design process to the life-cycle of a trout in a mountain stream – implying an atavistic element of myth and regeneration in his architecture, dependent on the moving rhythms and waves of water for its continuance. A focus on Aalto House and Seinäjoki Town Hall, triggered partly by Pallasmaa's idea of a building as a 'creature', aligned with Duany's formal analysis of a head-and-tail compositional pattern, reveals a recurrent motif of water in his work, creating a sense of myth through watery waves or the curved wave-forms of pools or ponds. This prevalence of myth linked with landscape embeds Aalto's work in deeper strains of culture, while also expanding his work beyond the dictates of modernism, and integrating the fluid nature of water in experience of waves and curves given material form in his architecture.

4.2.1 Aurora: Beyond atmosphere: New York Finland Pavilion

> A true image of a country cannot be conveyed with individual objects alone; it can be done convincingly only by the atmosphere such objects create together, that is, only by the overall effect perceived by the senses.[575]
> Aalto, 'New York Finland Pavilion' (1939)

> The mighty "Northern Lights" wall with its tilted, undulating inner screen had an obvious practical function in that the photographs and exhibition objects on it met the gaze of the visitor with optimum directness. But it also marked off an unusually suggestive space in which the dialogue between the exhibits and the visitor conveyed a vision both of universal Nature and of the specific environment, Finland, that the pavilion was intended to present. From this design on, practical, versatile functionality and sculpturesque, humanistically oriented monumentality were the hallmarks of Aalto's architecture.[576]
> Schildt, *The Architectural Drawings of Alvar Aalto* (1994)

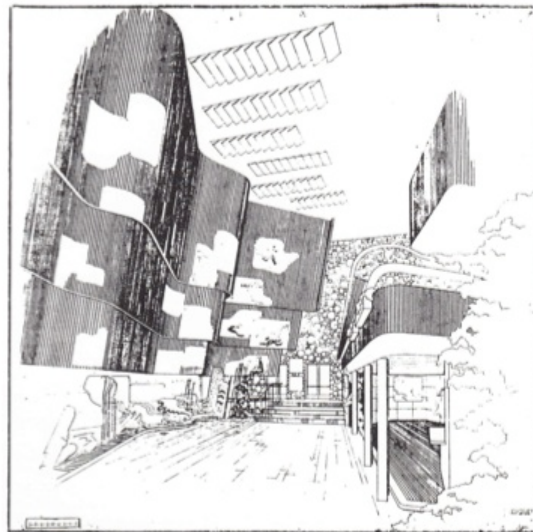

Figure 4.15 AALTO New York Finland Pavilion
Source: Schildt, *Architectural Drawings*

In considering architectural atmosphere, it can be valuable to include the atmosphere of landscape, to consider relations between architecture and landscape. Thus atmospheres both emanate from the perceived object and need completion by a perceiving subject, viewer or visitor. In the case of Aalto's Finland Pavilion for the 1939 New York World's Fair (Fig.4.15), the real Northern Lights, the Aurora borealis, lacking a basis in direct bodily sense experience, assigned instead to the realms of

[575] Alvar Aalto, 'World Exhibitions: New York World's Fair, The Golden Gate Exhibition' (1939), in Schildt, *Decisive Years*, 121. Cited in Pelkonen, *Architecture, Modernity, and Geopolitics*, 173.
[576] Göran Schildt, Introduction, *The Architectural Drawings of Alvar Aalto 1917-1939: Volume 10: Tailinn Art Museum, Kauttua Terrace House, Finnish Pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair in New York, and other buildings and projects, 1937-1939,* ed. Göran Schildt, with Elina Standertskjöld and Kristiina Paatero (New York: Garland Publishing, in collaboration with the Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1994), xiii.

‘the sublime’, might well be consigned to failure as an affective phenomenological figure, having only the status of an immense, distanced ‘aesthetic object’. Yet Aalto’s great New York Pavilion wave remains a material and spatial thing of timber, occupying real space, and remaining close to the viewer as it hangs and curves over people’s heads. While the New York Pavilion may be similar to the sublime aurora, it presents instead the built image of the aurora’s great wave, creating a thrilling atmosphere without being either fleshlessly remote in the sky or menacingly precarious.

Aalto stated of his Pavilion design, ‘A true image of a country cannot be conveyed with individual objects alone; it can be done convincingly only by the atmosphere such objects create together; that is, only by the overall effect perceived by the senses.’[577] The resulting interior, notes Treib, constitutes ‘Aalto’s most brilliant use of architectural means for spatial effect.’[578] McCarter notes its dizzying effect on a visitor crossing diagonally through the volume, where the undulating wall ‘induced a torsion or twisting tension in the occupant as they moved through it – the wavy wall loomed inwards in a way that was later called “disquieting” by [critic] Reyner Banham’.[579]

In Aalto’s Pavilion, a vast and undulating ‘multimedia wall’ of vertical timber slats, suspended in an existing building, tilts over the visitor in a wavy form resembling that of the Aurora borealis, the Northern Lights. The undulating timber screen, obliquely approached and viewed by ambulatory visitors looking up from floor level, and by seated visitors in the facing cafeteria, supports a montage of photographs of Finnish people, culture and landscapes, above floor level exhibits of industrial products. The pavilion transposes into built form a natural element from the distant north of Finland, to be reflected inside, to sustain an atmosphere that merges the literally unearthly light and stratospheric mystery of the Northern Lights with the earthly images and objects of modern industrial Finland.[580]

[577] McCarter, *Aalto*, 94; the source of Aalto’s comment is not noted.

[578] Treib, ‘Aalto’s Nature’, 53.

[579] McCarter, *Aalto*, 94.

[580] This section’s reference to geopolitical aspects of Finland Pavilion derives from Pelkonen, ‘Geopolitics of Fame’, in *Architecture, Modernity, and Geopolitics*, 170-177.

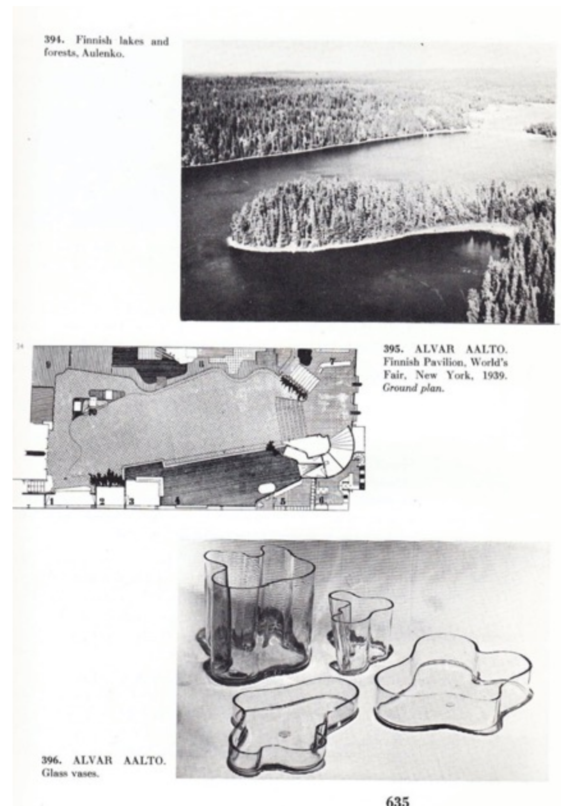

Figure 4.16 GIEDION Finland and Aalto
Source: Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*

Aalto's early and dramatic wave-form of the Finland Pavilion presents an architectural transposition primarily of the non-earthly Aurora borealis, but also possibly of curving Finnish lake forms, and Alvar and Aino Aalto's 1930s glass vases (Fig.4.16).[581] Despite being demolished and surviving only in words, photographs and drawings, Aalto's Finland Pavilion leaves a legacy. Aalto's transposition of nature into architecture is both clear and ambiguous, suggesting the distant dancing undulations of the Northern lights, or the edges of lakes, or the curves of Aalto vases. The Pavilion was made to communicate through experience a Finnish quality rooted in nature and landscape but ultimately associated with 'made in Finland' goods for trade. Yet this idea of transposing nature or landscape into built form remains prescriptive, binary and by turns restrictive and even proscriptive as a legacy, and hence perhaps less crucial than another, more subtle, form of legacy.

Geographer Tim Edensor notes that landscape could be viewed as fixed, with the earth as a solid material entity of 'concrete earthiness', 'furnished' by immaterial clouds, fog, light, and wind.[582] Yet Edensor refutes such a view, contending that landscape should be better conceived as 'a fluid and becoming entity', where clouds, sky and stars, as anthropologist Tim Ingold notes, instead of fixed objects, form 'an incoherent, vaporous tumescence', and clouds form part of an ever-changing 'sky-in-

[581] Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, 635.
[582] Tim Edensor, 'Aurora Landscapes: Affective Atmospheres of Light and Dark', in Karl Benediktsson and Katrín Anna Lund, eds, *Conversations with Landscape* (Farnham, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 230.

formation' within a unstable larger landscape whole.[583] Thus the landscape can be understood more completely and accurately as being in a process of continuous formation, and as 'a heterogeneous medium of sensual, affective and emotional experience', where light, weather and the earth constitute a fluid state where a perceiver and landscape conditions are 'inextricably entangled'.[584]

Out of this dynamic and entangled state, as Ingold notes, to inhabit this 'open world' is therefore 'to be immersed in the fluxes of the medium: in sunshine, rain, and wind. This immersion, in turn, underwrites our capacities respectively – to see, hear, and touch.'[585] Overall, and as a consequence for architecture, the building and its users and perceivers should be seen as immersively participating in a vivacious setting of landscape created by the earth's surface and its surroundings, involved with weather, temperature, wind, the sounds of waters, moisture and the effects of light such as rainbows and auroras.

Aalto's grasp of the aurora as an atmospheric model may be seen as Promethean in its scale and ambition, stealing the forms of electric fire from Arctic skies and exceeding the scale of the body. In a night sky natural aurora lights glow beyond the realms of earthly scale and sensing, beyond the everyday atmospheres and moods associated with earthly materials, air and water, sunlight and tree canopies. As Edensor points out, with the aurora 'there are no recognizable forms of matter into which the body might imaginatively insert itself.' Unlike earthly water or weather, he concludes, the aurora suggests 'no wind, heat or cold, wetness or dryness. Its ever-changing configurations are the embodiment only of distant light, lacking any phenomenological grasp.'[586]

Geographer Ben Anderson, referring to phenomenologist Mikel Dufrenne, points out that the atmosphere of a perceived object 'completes' it for the viewer or participant, allowing the object to be apprehended through emotions or feelings. In this sense, Anderson notes, atmospheres are viewed as unfinished, 'because of their constitutive openness to being taken up in experience'; he also argues that atmospheres are 'indeterminate. They are resources that become elements within sense experience.'[587]

[583] Tim Ingold, 'Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) 13 (2007): S29, cited in Edensor, 'Aurora Landscapes', 230.
[584] Edensor, 'Aurora Landscapes', 230.
[585] Ingold, 'Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather', in Edensor, 'Aurora Landscapes', 231.
[586] Edensor, 'Aurora Landscapes', 238.
[587] Ben Anderson, 'Affective Atmospheres', *Emotion, Space and Society* 2 (2009): 79.

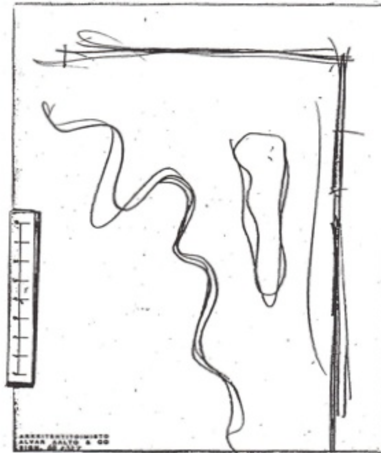

Figure 4.17 AALTO New York Finland Pavilion, ‘box and wave’ concept sketch
Source: Schildt, *Architectural Drawings*

Amongst the drawings for the New York Pavilion, Aalto’s concept sketch for the composition entry carries a special significance for its authoritative openness to application (Fig.4.17).[588] Aalto’s sketch communicates the New York Pavilion in different ways: as concept diagram, as plan or section diagram, as detail sketch; and in later projects, as site plan, concept diagram, conceptual section. The sketch both concentrates the idea and captures the feeling of a curving natural or organic thing (foliage, water, rock, fog) juxtaposed with an artificial rectilinear frame, base or bar to create a harmonious unity of different things.

Aalto’s linking of the wave-form to atmosphere indicates his awareness of the potential, both atmospheric and emotional, in wave-forms. Aalto designed a large wave-form ceiling for the Seinäjoki Library (see 3.3.1), and also for Otaniemi University Library (1969); in both cases the experience of an interior space capped by an unexpected curved ceiling can generate for the visitor a sense of being inside an illuminated wave, lit from high above by sunlight reflected across a ceiling, almost like an oversized version of an Aalto lamp. In a later work, in the exhibition hall at Alvar Aalto Museum, Jyväskylä (1971-74), Aalto creates a wavering, dematerialised wall at the rear of the interior, an echo and an enduring reminder of the dramatic atmospheric potential of the aurora wave-form.[589]

Aalto at New York in 1937 creates an atmospheric, even hyper-atmospheric experience in the Pavilion, a definitive wave-form and a seminal ‘great wave’ that precedes his later large architectural ‘waves’ at Otaniemi and Jyväskylä (noted in this chapter) and confirms the possibilities for architectural experience in translations from landscape in both its earthly and aerial manifestations.

[588] See also Sarah Menin, ‘Embracing Independence: The Finland Pavilion, New York, 1939’, in Anderson et al, *Aalto and America*, 157-159.
[589] Trencher, *Alvar Aalto Guide*, 142-143.

4.2.2 Wave ceilings: Ceiling, window and perception at Summa House

> This rock near Rio de Janeiro is famous ... Wild mountains rise up around it, the sea foams over it ... Palms and banana trees, the glamour of the tropics brightens the landscape, you place your armchair in position ... Bang! A frame appears. Bang! The four slanting lines of the perspective. Here you have an unimpeded view from your window. The landscape comes right into your room.[590]
>
> Le Corbusier, *The Home of Man* (1948)

Figure 4.18 AALTO Summa House
Source: Yoshida, *Alvar Aalto Houses* [591]

A group of three Aalto houses (1958-1964) built for the Enso-Gutzeit timber company's mill managers, stands at Summa, 20km from the industrial port of Kotka, in Kymenlaakso province, south-east Finland. Trencher describes the site as 'an extraordinarily beautiful granite outcropping, the counterpoint to this small development', where the three buildings are unified by variation on a formal and material theme, where the roof forms 'an undulating eccentric wave' above walls of whitewashed brick and dark timber batten siding (Fig.4.18).[592] In two houses the plan form, continues Trencher, 'explores the fan motif, with the public spaces splaying outward', while the house entries actively involve the visitor with the immediate landscape, by bringing 'the visitor to view the adjacent spaces as simultaneously rotating and pushing outward, especially in the site manager's house [House C]'. The

[590] Le Corbusier and François de Pierrefeu, *The Home of Man* (London: Architectural Press, 1948); quoted in Steen Eiler Rasmussen, *Towns and Buildings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1951), 195.
[591] Nobuyuki Yoshida, ed., *Alvar Aalto Houses: Timeless Expressions* (Tokyo: A+U Publishing, 1998).
[592] Trencher, *Alvar Aalto Guide*, 176.

spaces seem designed with kinetic experience in mind, with circulation patterns moving ‘across the splayed walls of the fan form.’[593]

Figure 4.19 AALTO Summa House
Source: Yoshida, *Alvar Aalto Houses*

In the living room of Aalto’s Enso-Gutzeit House C, the site manager’s house, known here as Summa House, a deep-set asymmetrical window steps along, up and down to give views of the adjacent forest, while the wooden wave of a dark stepped timber ceiling hovers over the space of the room, above and beside the window (Fig.4.19). For Trencher, the house’s outer façade contains a ‘complex interplay of the wave motif and the fan form’, while the interior seems to continue the radiating wave idea, ‘enhanced by a stepped, wood ceiling that radiates from the dark inner hallway toward the sunlit forest.’[594]

Together the window, ceiling and furniture welcome and accommodate the visitor beside a view of Finnish woods, an appropriate vista for the main room of a timber industry manager’s house. While the ceiling shuttles up and down in steps to provide an emblematic canopy, the window frames oblique views, so that a seated viewer might feel sheltered while enjoying angled, layered views of forest space, different to the unframed rectilinear pictorial view through a floor-to-ceiling window or the framed view of a modernist strip window, in a room of flat or sloping ceilings.

At Aalto’s window the viewers sit beside solid, possibly heated, wall sections, involved visually and bodily with the outer world through the architectural tactic of the stepped window under a wave-shaped ceiling. The wall, the window and the ceiling together create a self-contained sitting space within the house, animated by the oblique view that makes the sensed connection with the layered forms and shadows of the forest. Between inside and outside Aalto seems to achieve what Charrington terms ‘an oblique framing’ of building and setting, where ‘buildings are placed at an angle to the line of people’s movement, and are thus engaged together with their surroundings’, so forming a ‘natural image’,[595] a feat of design where walking,

[593] Trencher, *Alvar Aalto Guide*, 176.
[594] Trencher, *Alvar Aalto Guide*, 177.
[595] Charrington, ‘Alvar Aalto at play’, 319-320.

standing and sitting in a room resolves the perceptions and feelings of architecture and landscape into a singular moment where life, reading and conversation can continue in close relations with the living world outside.

The character of this room can be attributed partly to the wave-like ceiling, which, rather than an architectural caprice, presents a landscape archetype for both creating and experiencing architecture. The scale of the wave ceiling suits the moving, standing, or sitting body of the individual human, for whose sensibilities and emotions Aalto designed his architecture. The wave ceiling also appears to represent a modern version of the undulating Brunelleschian arches persuasively depicted in Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* (Fig.2.2), used by Aalto to illustrate his 1926 'Doorstep' article,[596] and which were recast at full scale in Aalto's Muurame Church (1926-29) where the chapel wing is 'eroded at its base' by the arches of an arcade which, notes Trencher, 'was even designed to face a walled garden, recalling the early Renaissance painting.'[597] At Summa, the garden beyond the arches is found in the forest, and Brunelleschi's arches dissolve into the floating ceiling of the wooden cave.

This state is partly referred to by Aalto in citing the image of Fra Angelico's *Annunciation*, where the figures enact their drama in a setting of Renaissance arches, modelled on Brunelleschi's 'humanist' forms and proportions, and depicted in the mathematically accurate linear perspective method invented by Brunelleschi around 1420.[598] Schildt notes Aalto's urban and architectural exemplars of choice, derived perhaps from conversation more than from written sources: 'The anarchistically balanced Venetian townscape was an ideal which always inspired him, and Brunelleschi remained the greatest architect of all.'[599]

Yet beyond the modest comforts of 1960s Finnish corporate accommodation the combined ceiling and window, as an element, carries broader principles and maintains and evolves Aalto's urge to experiment and to design to relate people to an immediate landscape setting. The apparent physical and psychological comfort of this designed setting masks the critical and creative intensity, and the originality of imagination embodied in this late, largely private Aalto work. Yet this example should serve as a reminder that at stake in an Aalto window – perhaps every Aalto window? – is the opportunity for realising an ideal of harmony by making and affirming a relationship between the everyday 'little person' and the natural world. Pallasmaa writes of atmosphere as 'an exchange between material or existent properties of the place and the immaterial realm of human perception and imagination.'[600] In Aalto's window settings the architectural atmosphere seems to arise or be generated by placement of the sitting body almost within reach of the living outdoors, and beneath

[596] Aalto, 'Doorstep', 50-51.

[597] Trencher, *Alvar Aalto Guide*, 150-151.

[598] See Giulio Carlo Argan, trans. Nesca A. Robb, 'The Architecture of Brunelleschi and the Origins of Perspective Theory in the Fifteenth Century', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 9 (1946): 96-121.

[599] Schildt, *Early Years*, 256.

[600] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Space, Place and Atmosphere: Emotion and peripheral perception in architectural experience', *Lebenswelt: Aesthetics and philosophy of experience* 4, no.1 (2014): 232.

a ceiling compartmentalised into human-scale sub-spaces by a rhythmic curved ceiling.

These wave-forms of window and ceiling embrace at once the moving and sitting of the visitor, the view and light of the wall opening, and the spatiality and materiality of the wave ceiling. This combined experience would seem to balance opposing factors in the visitor's experience: inside and outside; light and view; motion and stasis; the level floor and the undulating ceiling; and the smooth, light, flat surfaces of massive walls against the dark, rippling irregularly rhythmic timber ceiling elements. Ultimately, the organisation of the contrary parts in these designs prompts curiosity as to both the motivation and effect of such architecture. Aalto's non-modern approach in both works is non-linear, through an architecture rendered not in regular modern boxes with rectilinear plans, flat ceilings and large glass windows opening to a 'view', but with complex plans, irregular curved ceilings and deliberately framed window openings set in solid walls. Such designs could not be termed irrational, as each element has its own arguable rationale, of design for experience. This rationale seems to be an accommodation of the individual human and its bodily / physiological, and emotional / psychological needs, at that part of the experience of the building. Given the proximity of these architectural instances to a forest landscape or direct sunlight, it seems likely that a sensed relationship with landscape or nature serves both as model and outcome for Aalto's architecture.

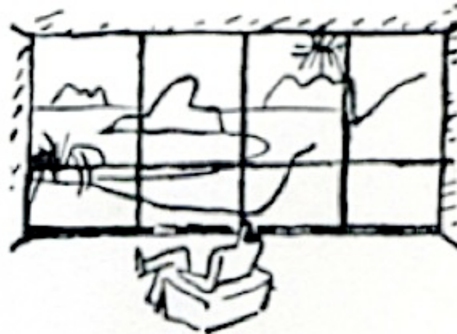

Figure 4.20 LE CORBUSIER Viewer and landscape, sketch
Source: Le Corbusier and de Pierrefeu, *The Home of Man*

By contrast with Aalto's angled view at Summa House, the square viewpoint of the singular perspective view is commended by Le Corbusier (1948), who illustrates his ideal view in words and sketches, where a man in a lounge chair regards an exotic landscape through a window-wall: 'Bang! A frame appears. Bang! The four slanting lines of the perspective. Here you have an unimpeded view from your window. The landscape comes right into your room' (Fig.4.20).[601] Yet Le Corbusier's frameless window, with little angle or scale, seems to keep the landscape forever distant in the room's single perspectival vanishing point. Aalto's oblique perspective, animated by the viewer's variable position and eye level, aligns viewer, window and landscape, creating a shifting, harmonious human relationship with architecture and landscape.

Seen as similar to a natural landscape model, expansive space and shifting light combine to form conditions for atmosphere, resembling the everyday outdoor

[601] Le Corbusier and de Pierrefeu, *The Home of Man*, in Rasmussen, *Towns and Buildings*, 195.

experience of moving from a shaded space of bush or forest into open grassland, or reaching an open hilltop under clouds and sun. In being both similar in form and in close proximity to forest and light, the architecture seems to both resemble outdoor spatial experience and to re-create it indoors, thus creating a similar mood or atmosphere. At Summa, the individual pauses and sits, to glance obliquely through the stepped window and into or through the forest, rather than staring squarely and frontally at the forest 'view' as one might through a simple plate glass window. Consequently the relationship with the forest becomes one of participation through the mass of the wall with the space of the forest.

Aalto's created space experience presents the opportunity to begin to understand what Pallasmaa describes as an 'exchange' between the visitor and the architectural setting: 'As we enter a space, the space enters us, and the experience is essentially an exchange and fusion of the object and the subject'.[602] The relation between human-sized wave-forms in Aalto's architecture and architectural creates what might be described as 'the oblique view'. Not only is the eye seeing, but the body is actively located in space, or else moving through space, to create an oblique viewing angle, looking both along and through the window, to catch an engaging, deeper, more animated angled view, rather than directly gazing at the window and through to the landscape. It is argued here that by referring to medium sized, body-scale waves, and with reference to the loggia type as painted by Fra Angelico, Aalto was able to create atmospheric and meaningful settings for human life.

[602] Pallasmaa, 'Space, Place and Atmosphere: Emotion and peripheral perception', 232.

4.2.3 Mythic atmospheres: The pool and the egg: Seinäjoki Town Hall, Aalto House

> All these buildings seem to symbolize this duality of architectural creation, wherein the enclosing L or U form of the main mass, the “fish” element, is contrasted with the independent form of the adjacent “egg” ... Such hierarchical differentiation is complemented by changes in material and structure.
>
> Frampton, *Modern Architecture* (2007)

> Unfortunately I never had the chance to introduce him to Joyce. They had the same feeling for myth. *Finnegans Wake* and Aalto’s stories were closely related. When we were in Finland in 1962, Aalto told me a lot about the *Kalevala*. That was the kind of thing we talked about, not modern art.[603]
>
> Giedion-Welcker (1989)

Figure 4.21 AALTO Seinäjoki Town Hall
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

As a reality and a setting for architecture, landscape can be interpreted as possessing multiple dimensions and identities.[604] Norberg-Schulz characterises Nordic landscapes as archetypally harmonious and ‘Romantic’, where a ‘mutable and rather incomprehensible world’ is made manifest.[605] The moods and character of this mutable landscape, as part of its inhabitation, are depicted through art and literature, and in myth, where Norberg-Schulz argues that one can encounter ‘gnomes, dwarfs and trolls’, carried in the psyche, as part of understanding the *genius loci* of a region. The appellation ‘Romantic’ for the Northern landscape implies an ‘empathic’ way of dwelling with the natural world which involves also a distant mythic past, to be ‘experienced emotionally rather than understood as allegory or history.’[606] This liminal reality merits attention in discussing mythic significances of water and small waves in Aalto’s work.

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[603] Carola Giedion-Welcker, quoted in Schildt, *Mature Years*, 200-201.

[604] See for example Delue, ‘Is landscape theory?’; also Vittoria da Palma, ‘Is landscape painting?’; John Dixon Hunt, ‘Is landscape history?’; David Leatherbarrow, ‘Is landscape architecture?’; all in Doherty and Waldheim, *Is Landscape ...?*

[605] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 42.

[606] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 42.

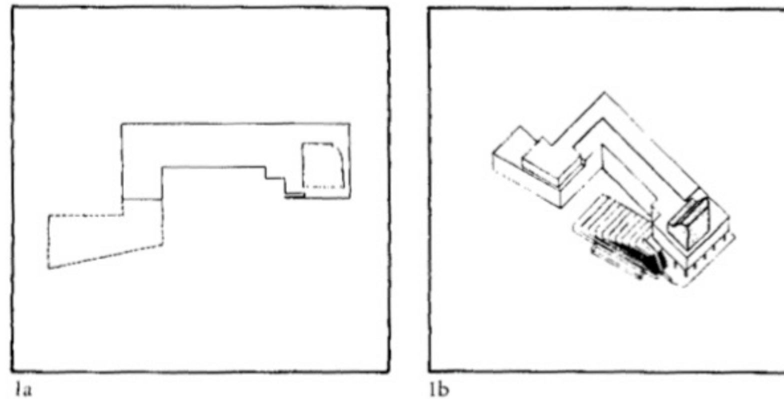

Figure 4.22 AALTO Seinäjoki Town Hall, 'head-and-tail' diagram
Source: Duany, 'Principles'

Architect Andres Duany diagnoses a recurrent 'head-and-tail' compositional pattern in Aalto's oeuvre, in both large and small buildings. At Seinäjoki Town Hall (Fig.4.21) (1960), Duany sees a formally elaborated 'head' element housing a unique civic function, while a long 'tail' accommodates 'a mundane program of bureaucratic activity within a neutral orthogonal geometry', with opportunity for expansion (Fig.4.22).[607] Duany sees Aalto's head-and-tail idea as a 'hybrid parti', a complementary duality with its historical background in the figure-ground relation of the classical Greek temenos and temple, implying certain atavistic roots of Aalto's work in myth-based ancient Greek culture, experienced by Aalto in the Mediterranean, but also with possible echoes in Northern mythology of Finnish forest and waters.[608] The mythic resonances that surface in the water and related small wave-forms in Aalto's work suggest a relationship as myth, beyond the rational bounds of modernism, shared between Aalto and the visitors, dwellers and users of his architecture.

Historians Curtis, Frampton, and Pallasmaa attach a certain mythic dimension to Aalto's work. Curtis directly addresses Aalto's 'mythic landscapes', dealing with ancient Greek landscapes as mythic entities informing Aalto's inclusion of levels, steps, paths and platforms in his work.[609] Frampton identifies an archetypal mythology of 'birth and regeneration' in Aalto's architecture, where 'the "fish" element, is contrasted with the independent form of the adjacent "egg."'[610] Pallasmaa in 'Surface, touch and time' (2001) makes an animistic mythification that frames Aalto's work as a form of 'architectural creature':

> The surfaces of Aalto's buildings wrap around their volumes like skins, enhancing an organic cohesion and animistic feeling; Aalto's postwar buildings are always some sort of architectural creatures instead of abstract compositions. This idea of an architectural creature provides an organizing and ordering device, which leads to entirely different imageries from those that result from the use of geometry as the organizing system. The geometric

[607] Duany, 'Principles', 105-106.
[608] Duany continues his head-and-tail interpretation of Aalto's 'elusive' formal syntax through an extensive range of buildings; see Duany, 'Principles', 105-110.
[609] William J.R. Curtis, 'Alvar Aalto: Mythic Landscapes', *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* 315 (1998): 4-19.
[610] Frampton, *Modern Architecture*, 201.

> “impurity” of these designs allows complex ways of spatial and formal organization, not usually acceptable in designs dominated by Euclidean geometry.[611]

These interpretations lead discussion of Aalto away from familiar discourses of history, form and meaning, and towards the ‘irrational’ area of mythology, suggesting further dimensions of landscape-related meaning in Aalto’s work.

In this episode, myth in Aalto’s architecture is explored by investigating the recurrent presence of a watery pond or pool element apparently specifically designed to fit with the ‘head-and-tail’ organisation of many Aalto buildings. This aspect of Aalto’s method can be read in light of Pallasmaa’s ‘architectural creature’ comments, and also in relation to Aalto’s article ‘The Trout and the Stream’, readable as a précis of his creative process. Out of this investigation, myth and landscape can be brought simultaneously into focus through the phenomenologically significant presence of ponds, pools and other water elements in Aalto’s architecture.

As atmosphere, myth surrounds the historical figure of Aalto. Curtis notes ‘a species of “myth”’ as a central figure of Aalto’s architecture. This myth, arising from perceived dualities of nature and technology, city and country, and ‘the basic sense of being human in the world’, argues Curtis, was ‘translated’ through Aalto’s architecture ‘into an idealized vision of society, an idea of space, a metaphorical landscape of a kind.’[612] While the present study is more interested in actual than metaphoric landscapes, a connection of myth to landscape in Aalto’s work remains a valuable marker of the broader significance of his architecture, in making deep-rooted cultural links involving landscape, architecture and culture.

In Aalto’s seminal 1947 article ‘The Trout and the Stream’, originally titled ‘Architecture and abstract art’,[613] he notes the lifecycle of the mountain trout, hatched in the ‘fell stream’ of a river’s rocky headwaters, as an analogy for the creative method, mythifying biological knowledge to underpin a design philosophy. The creative process begins like the trout egg, ‘a speck of fish-spawn’, laid in a tiny rivulet ‘between the fells’, formed by ‘the first drops of water from the melting ice’.[614] Aalto’s biological analogy connects his work conceptually to the living waters of the landscape; he suggests that ‘architecture and its details are in some way all part of biology’, that is, of the living world, different in its inherent nature, or complementary in its forms, to the gridded geometry and technology of modernism.[615]

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[611] Juhani Pallasmaa, ‘Surface, Touch and Time’, in Hanni Sippo, ed., *Alvar Aalto: The Brick* (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Museum / Alvar Aalto Foundation, 2001), 14.
[612] Curtis, ‘Mythic Landscapes’, 12.
[613] Aalto, ‘The Trout and the Stream’; originally ‘Architettura e artē concreta’ / ‘Architecture and Abstract art’, *Domus* (1947). The essay is also published in a different translation as ‘The Trout and the Mountain Stream’ (1947), in Aalto, *Sketches*.
[614] Aalto, ‘The Trout and the Stream’, 109.
[615] Aalto, ‘The Trout and the Stream’, 108.

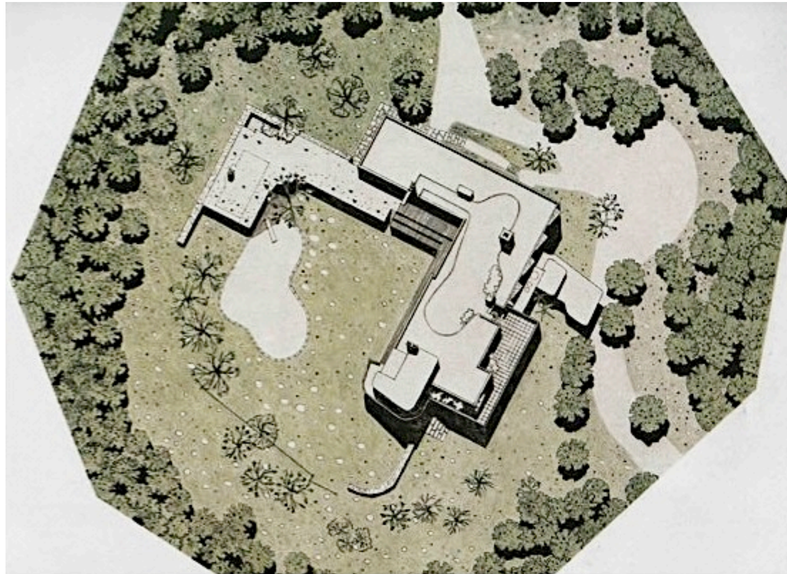

Figure 4.23 AALTO Villa Mairea, site plan
Source: *Alvar Aalto Band I*

Following Aalto's 'idiosyncratic' fish-and-egg account of architectural creativity, Frampton diagnoses the symbolic architectural duality involving the L or U shaped 'fish' form of a principal architectural mass, and an independent individual 'egg' element, where 'shifts in symbolic content occur'.[616] At Villa Mairea, he notes, 'the "egg" is the swimming pool – the agent of physical regeneration', invoking a symbolism whereby 'the space is enriched by the presence of water, hinting again at the process of birth and regeneration.'[617] Beyond tropes of life / death symbolism, Aalto's work also remains firmly grounded in scientific knowledge and biological principles, along with his knowledge and working familiarity with landscape.

A 'space of bodily feeling' is observed as an atmospheric element in both landscape and architecture by philosopher Gernot Böhme, who suggests that atmosphere as mood or feeling connects with landscape in the sense of 'infinite space', discernible in a city square, a mountaintop or the open sky.[618] Böhme notes a 'feeling that reaches out into indeterminate expanses – which acquires shape through articulation of this kind.'[619] The relative void of Böhme's opened-up space might also be articulated in a less vague form through the motion or surface markings of water in a pool or pond, where the 'infinite space' of reflected sky or contained water is bound in a tense relationship with its container. The 'bodily feeling' of open space as atmosphere can appear in the waters – the surfaces, ripples, sounds, reflections, sprays, splashes and mists – of the pools, ponds and fountains found integrated (and sensuously close to the visitor) in Aalto's works. Thus the watery 'egg' in Aalto's work, such as the shining and three-dimensionally curvaceous Villa Mairea pool, becomes a third and 'mythic' element, a soft germinal entity warranting the enwrapping folding of the architectural 'tail' of the extended building mass, along with

[616] Frampton, *Modern* Architecture, 201.
[617] Frampton, *Modern* Architecture, 201.
[618] Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture', 405.
[619] Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture', 405.

the protective overviewing of the unique ‘head’ element – at Villa Mairea the upper-level painting studio.

Figure 4.24 AALTO / BROTHERUS Maison Carré
Source: Brotherus, *Les Femmes de la Maison Carré* [620]

The outdoor pond, fountain or pool recurs frequently in Aalto’s work, invoking both biology and landscape, the living thing and its sustaining environment. In one example, the pool at Maison Carré (1956) is observed in two different conditions – empty and in disrepair in 2015, filled and restored in 2018 – by Finnish photographer Elina Brotherus (Fig.4.24). A mythic sense of water and rebirth adds a dimension of cultural resonance to Aalto’s analogy of the stream and the trout’s egg. In Finland’s *Kalevala* epic the solid earth, the heavens, stars, sun and clouds of the world are created from the eggs of a diving-duck, which are laid on the knees of the virgin of the air, as illustrated by Finnish artist Axeli Gallen-Kallela in the 1920s.[621] Aalto balances biological knowledge with Finnish mythology, with his experience of the

[620] Elina Brotherus, *Les Femmes de la Maison Carré,* 2015-2018. Artist’s images: www.elina.brotherus.com/les-femmes-de-la-maison-carre. Noted 16 Aug 2020.
[621] *The Kalevala or Poems of the Kaleva District*, compiled by Elias Lönnrot, trans. Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1963), 5-6. See also Tuija Wahlroos, ‘Devoted to Kalevala: Perspectives on Akseli Gallen-Kallela’s Kalevala Art’, *Journal of Finnish Studies* 13, no.2 (2009): 28-37.

lands and waters of Finland, and with Scandinavian and European architectural history, within his thinking and practice.

Figure 4.25 AALTO Viipuri Library, concept sketch
Source: Weston, *Alvar Aalto*

Curtis notes that myth, intermixed with landscape experience, was operative in Aalto's mind and facilitated his creative activity: 'An artist's family of forms stands between inner and outer worlds; it functions as a sort of mental map for charting exterior realities, and for guiding an interior search; through a species of abstraction it permits the metamorphosis of experience into art.'[622] As evidence Curtis points to Aalto's conceptual sketch for Viipuri, showing a wave-like mountain and the light of multiple suns, as an emblem of his method, embracing at once myth, landscape and atmosphere (Fig.4.25).

Figure 4.26 AALTO Aalto House, Aino Marsio-Aalto with crane by pond, 1930s
Source: Pallasmaa, *Aalto House 1936*

Buildings where architectural forms that seem to represent the quasi-mythic 'egg' can be found extend through Aalto's works, from domestic to large civic and urban projects. Aalto's Helsinki House includes the 'egg' of a garden pond (Fig.4.26) while at Seinäjoki Town Hall, below the gleaming tiled 'head' of the Town Hall, a 'tail' of orthogonal office buildings wraps around the artificial hill, beside which the 'egg' of a pool with a fountain sits at the edge of the town square (Fig.4.21).

[622] Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', 18.

In other examples, a bright pond with a sculpture is located on the elevated terrace at Säynätsalo Town Hall, surrounded by the 'tail' of corridors. At the Experimental House the central firepit can also be read as a vestigial pond, a chthonic inversion of the watery egg concept, transformed into a central warming fire. In central Helsinki Aalto's Rautatolo Office Building (1952-55) includes greenery and a protected pond in its three-storey indoor atrium, monitored by a bright faceted skylight 'head'.[623] In the forecourt of Kultuuritalo a small pool contains a bronze sculpted hand with a model of the building in its open palm, like a hatchling in a watery nest, its protection confirmed by the canopy structure that helps enclose the narrow courtyard space.

These pools inherit an idea put clearly in Villa Mairea, where the swimming pool, rounded like an Aalto vase, sits protectively guarded by the tail of buildings that wraps from Maire's studio to the sauna. The pool complements solid materials with the shimmering light and the rippling surfaces of water and the sound and the smell of water in space, countering the rational facticity of building with the non-rational dimension of myth and creation stories.

Pallasmaa writes in 'The Sixth Sense: The Meaning of Atmosphere and Mood' (2016) of the modernist emphasis on form and space that lacks attunement with the earth or the cosmos. Turning away from modernist abstract rationality, Pallasmaa advocates for architecture to consider its roots and its obligations, and its ancient basis involving harmony:

> Resonance with the cosmos and a distinct proportional tuning were essential qualities of architecture from antiquity until the instrumentalised and aestheticised construction of the industrial era. The fundamental task of architecture was to create a correspondence between the microcosm of the human realm and the macrocosm of the universe.[624]

Such a 'correspondence' between human and universal scales could be achieved by the passing-on of stories, including myths and legends such as the Finnish *Kalevala*. As if to protect, enact and propitiate his own architectural creative mythology, and as if echoing older creation stories, Aalto locates his germinal pools, providing a wave-like watery element as a counter to earthier floors and drier walls of his architecture, to re-engage people with landscape through their senses, and to offer a central emblem for harmonious everyday life, connecting humankind with elements of the natural world.

This discussion of the wave as a form in Aalto's architecture acts as a reminder that atmospheric architectural experience, particularly related to landscape, tends not to be most memorable when the encounter is dually static, where both visitor and building are transfixed and still, as if staring at a picture. Instead, atmosphere generated by waves involves the visitor as a participant in the built or natural world; here, either the waves (or clouds, or rhythmic shadows, tree branches, or water surfaces) move relative to the stationary visitor, or the visitor moves to animate and

[623] On Rautatolo, see McCarter, *Aalto*, 126-127.

[624] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'The Sixth Sense: The Meaning of Atmosphere and Mood', *Architectural Design* 86, no.6 (2016): 127-129.

take part in the atmosphere, rendering it alive by changes in perspective, scale, light, shape or shadow. The relative motion that attaches to waves, enacted, perceived or sensed in motion, animates architecture as a landscape concept emulated, re-created and experienced as atmosphere in the wave-forms and curves of Aalto's architecture.

4.2.4 Conclusion: Waves and Atmosphere

The three episodes consider aspects of atmosphere in Aalto's work: the experience of atmospheric effects in the large wave-form of New York Finland Pavilion; the design and location of body-sized curved and undulating 'wave ceilings' in Aalto's Summa House and other works; and at the concept of myth, associated with water, and informing Aalto's method, arguably evident in Aalto's Helsinki House and Seinäjoki Town Hall.

The atmosphere of the large wave of Aalto's timber aurora wall at the New York Pavilion survives only in images; yet the aurora itself, a pattern of shimmering particles of electric waves in earth's atmosphere, is at once vast in scale and immaterial. Thus when Böhme notes a 'space of bodily feeling', a 'feeling that reaches out into indeterminate expanses – which acquires shape through articulation of this kind',[625] it becomes clear that the distance of the aurora from earth is less a metaphor than a visual sensation, a drifting, floating wave phenomenon important in its animated form, its rarity, and its connection with the natural landscape space of Finland.

Architecture, argues Böhme, is fundamental for architecture, in making spaces for people, involving them with sound and music, or with light, which can make a room 'serene, exhilarating, gloomy, festive, or eerie.'[626] Waves can also create a balance of intimacy and outlook, as at Summa house, where the visitor's motion through space crosses with a seated angled view through windows into forest to create an experience that oscillates not only between protection and exposure but also between domestic and forest scales. The use of surficial wave-forms, and the conscription of the vivacity of contained water to evoke myths, set within the enfolding 'head' and 'tail' of composed plans, demonstrates a use of waves, hidden in plain sight, that places the visitor in Aalto's landscape without warning or grand announcement.

[625] Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture', 405.
[626] Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture', 405.

4.3 Waves and Embodiment

4.3.0 Introduction: Waves and Embodiment

In this section's three episodes, the phenomenological strand of Embodiment is used to consider large, medium, and small versions of Waves in Aalto's architecture. Episodes investigate the experience of ascending an interior hill of built stairs, and a hill landscape in Aalto's Jyväskylä Main Building; the sense of natural landscape, paths and destination in Aalto's foyers; and the haptic finesse, recalling delicate landscape details, of elements in the Villa Mairea.

SUMMARY

4.3.1 Ascension: Climbing the hill inside the Main Building

Episode 4.3.1 investigates relations between ascending an interior 'hill' or large wave of built stairs, and a hill landscape in Aalto's Jyväskylä Main Building. It uses the architectural thinking of Pallasmaa and Frampton, interdisciplinary thinking on the phenomenology of landscape by Wylie, and on embodiment and landscape by Tilley and others, to reflect on the embodied significance of hills and of the action of bodily ascension in architecture.

4.3.2 Aalto's foyers: Jyväskylä Festival Hall and Finlandia Hall

Episode 4.3.2 investigates Aalto's foyers, arguing that elements of natural landscape can be transposed into architecture, to accompany and enhance people's movement through foyer spaces, where the architecture seems to embody senses and qualities of natural landscape spaces. Foyers are investigated for their landscape likeness, using Yve-Alain Bois's thinking on perception of movement related to the spaces and objects of sculpture, architecture and landscape.

4.3.3 Fine waves, eyes, fingertips: Villa Mairea

Episode 4.3.3 considers Aalto's use of landscape to relate architecture to human presence at a fine scale, referring to Goldhagen's idea of 'embodied rationalism' to look at very small wave-forms at Aalto's Villa Mairea.[627] Aalto's idea that architecture must demonstrate 'a delicate sense of form' suggests his awareness of the fine scale of architectural matter and landscape needed to endow building with a finesse appropriate to both the human senses and the surrounding forest landscape at Villa Mairea.[628] This episode considers how very small wave-forms in Aalto's Villa Mairea arguably involve landscape in contributing to Aalto's creation of 'a quiet, nuanced, phenomenologically dense architecture that remains unsurpassed in the history of Modernism.'[629]

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627 Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet': 38-52.

628 Aalto, 'Eliel Saarinen', 246.

629 Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet': 50.

4.3.1 Ascension and elevation: Climbing the hill inside the Main Building

> Another thing which we don't teach students any more is a sense of form and rhythm ... Aalto has a very innate sense of both. Without that his works would disintegrate in their complexity. It is the sense of form and rhythm, in regard to the topography and landscape elements, which gives his buildings their authority.[630]
>
> Frampton, 'In Conversation' (2014)

> At a very deep level, we learn the contours of our world and the possible ways we can interact with it via movement. As Maxine Sheets-Johnstone has argued, "In the beginning, we are simply infused with movement – not merely with a propensity to move, but with the real thing. This primal animateness, this original kinetic spontaneity that infuses our being and defines our aliveness, is our point of departure for living in the world and making sense of it."[631]
>
> Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture' (2015)

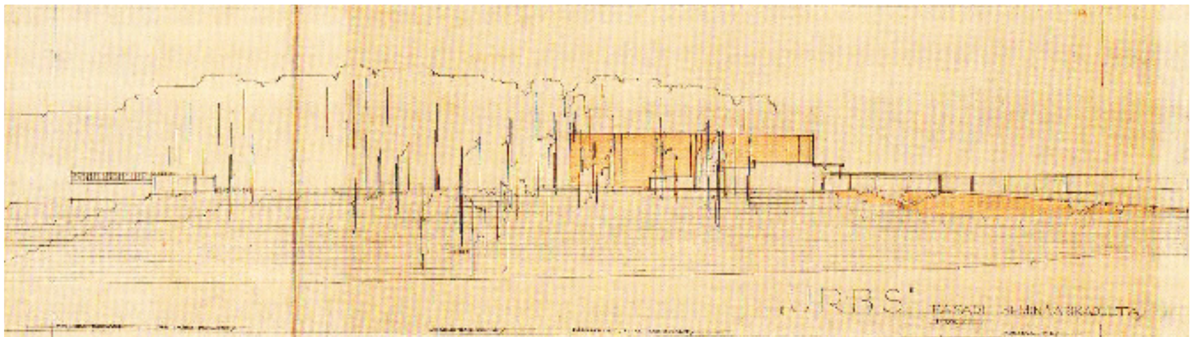

Figure 4.27 AALTO Jyväskylä University Main Building, competition entry, elevation
Source: AAM

Aalto's 1949 competition entry for the Jyväskylä University plan locates the campus entry at a crossing in the natural landscape, at the summit of a hill on a path from the city, and near the end of a ridgeline, locating the institution's portal at a natural crossing point where landforms taper and intersect, and a remnant forest on a hillside falls towards the lake (Fig.4.27). Here, in Aalto's plan and in the existing Main Building, incoming students and visitors walk up from the city to the University, pass through a narrow gap between building masses, then disperse downhill or cross-slope to continue through the campus. Thus through the presence and form of the hallway in the Main Building, the human body, naturally and artificially, ascends and descends the topographic body of the hill to enter the grounds of the University. Inside the Main Building a massive balustrade staircase sits like a smaller manmade

[630] Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, 'In Conversation with Kenneth Frampton', in Kries and Eisenbrand, *Alvar Aalto: Second Nature*, 207.

[631] Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture', 44-45. Cites Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement* (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1999), 136.

hill in the tall, top-lit indoor space, and rises in waves of stairs past four floors of classrooms (Fig.4.28).

Figure 4.28 AALTO Jyväskylä University Main Building
Photograph by John Roberts, 2011

Geographer John Wylie, writing on the embodied experience of climbing the wave-like British hill of Glastonbury Tor, argues, 'following Merleau-Ponty,' that 'ascension and elevation are amenable to description as enlacements of self and landscape, as intertwinings of vision and the visible.'[632] As an institutional building related to a hill, Jyväskylä University Main Building crowns a natural ridge dividing city from campus, creating an everyday entry. Because the city walking route connects with the circulation route of the building, the architecture can have the effect of continuing the landscape and its experience through the body of the building in a stair that can be imagined and drawn as a singular element, a climbable architectural microcosm of the greater hill, capturing and miniaturizing its form, and concentrating the landscape experience of skyward ascension. This episode considers how the Main Building is defined and given identity by its uniquely prominent internal stair. It is proposed that Aalto's stair, interwoven with natural and artificial wave-forms, demonstrates an embodied sense of landscape, extending and reaffirming the physical character of a site within the work of architecture.

[632] John Wylie, 'An essay on ascending Glastonbury Tor', *Geoforum* 33, no.4 (2002): 441.

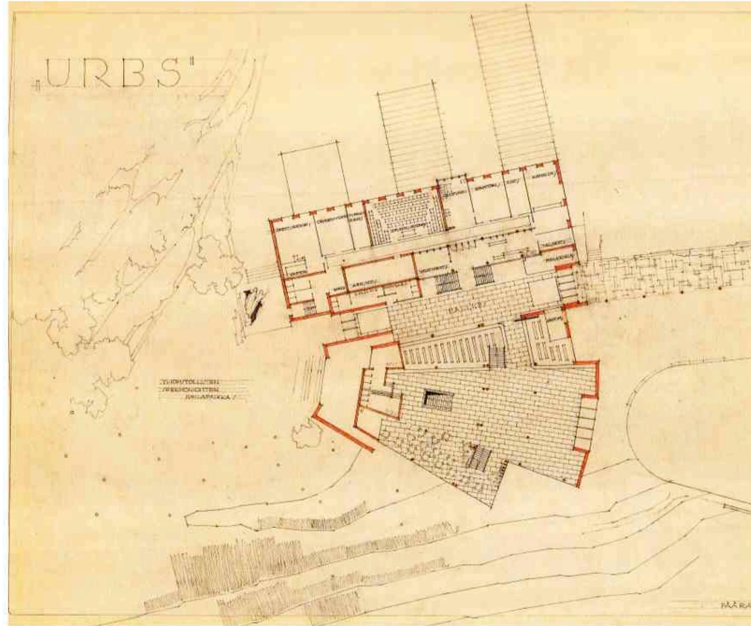

Figure 4.29 AALTO Jyväskylä University, Main Building / Festival Hall, plan
Source: AAM

Aalto's competition drawings of Jyväskylä University Main Building (1959), directly adjacent to the Festival Hall and fused to it in plan and materials, show buildings sited on the natural hill topography, culminating and continuing the geological slope inside the building with an architectural 'hill' of stairs that sits in the corridor space like a geological intrusion, a rising wave of masonry (Figs 4.27, 4.29). This design points to a kind of entanglement of landscape, buildings, and people, where buildings not only carry out their functional role, but also create relationships between landform, campus and town, while inside the building access for people is enabled by stairs which create a human scale and walking rhythm that continues and completes the ascent of the hill rising from the town below. In Aalto's Main Building stair element, human presence in the landscape, on the hill's great wave, becomes decisively embodied in his architecture.

Architecture, embodiment and hills can bring body and world together, to be understood in terms of embodied consciousness and its discourses. Beyond architecture, body and world are brought together in an account of research work at a Bronze Age site on Leskernick Hill, Bodmin Moor, Cornwall. British archaeologists and anthropologists Christopher Tilley, Sue Hamilton and Barbara Bender, in 'Art and the Re-Presentation of the Past' (2000) describe their research artworks on Leskernick Hill as a means of encounter ensuring 'somatic engagement' from their project's corporeal immersion in the hill, framing this action as a means of perceiving where and how Bronze Age people may have lived on the hill in past millennia. The phenomenological method of these anthropologists emphasises the pivotal importance of bodily engagement with the stony matter of the hill:

> We perceive Leskernick Hill from within, not from looking at it as if in a painting. The meanings are a product of our encounter, and participation and personal involvement creates perceptual intensity. The body is a constant in relation to a continuum of shapes and sizes and forms on the hill. An

> awareness and interpretation of the significance of different stones on the hill is ultimately a relationship between the body and the object. Our wrapped stones mark a place, they also mark a situation, an orientation, a relationship. Perception is not just a visual act but a somatic engagement.[633]

This approach, from the non-architecture fields of archaeology and anthropology, to committing the body, in investigating a 'symbolic geography of place', which includes a dialectical involvement of person and place, enacted through bodily engagement with a site to give 'perceptual intensity'; relations between bodies and objects, with a somatic perception of things and places; and entanglement of people and things, including city, hill, buildings, stairs, floor levels – would seem to offer a framework for considering in architecture a site, a building, a room, an element or detail. The special presence of a wave-like hill increases bodily awareness, whether through the sloping ground, through a terrace or level, or through the surveillance available at the ascended hilltop peak, gained by the body and perceived by the eyes.

This partial lexicon of embodiment suggests that whether as analysis, synthesis or critique, these elements might constitute a radically engaging framework, based on bodily, somatic involvement, for creating a different kind of knowledge for architecture. Such a method offers alternative fundamentals to a visual or abstract viewpoint, as a consequence of engagement with the body-scale energies of the natural world, enabling advanced or alternative understanding of the interwoven relations between the individual, the building and the landscape. Different to atmosphere or place, embodiment puts at stake a body-based intuitive way of making knowledge, guided by a method based in understanding relations of people with landscape.

In the absence of a natural 'acropolis' as at Athens or other Greek cities, Aalto designed buildings as wave-like hills with paths and fountains – as at Seinäjoki Town Hall and Finlandia Hall – or as hills with buildings of symbolic importance, as at Säynätsalo Town Hall, and at Jyväskylä Main Building.[634] The act of ascending, however, is laced with metaphor and simile – the steep climb, the way up, rising, conquering; the incline, the ramp – and is related to embodiments of light and the physical exertion of overcoming gravity that plays through the body of the ascending walker or climber, whether user or visitor. At an essential level, the act of walking up the hill towards the building *outside* in the landscape, like that of the surfer paddling over a very large wave, can be replayed in walking up another kind of stepped or terraced construction *inside* the artificial landscape of the building to reach particular rooms of assembly or meeting – not unlike the experience of surfing inside or under a great ocean wave, with light above, and the end of a tunnel or barrel glimpsed beyond.

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[633] Christopher Tilley, Sue Hamilton and Barbara Bender, 'Art and the Re-Presentation of the Past', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6, no.1 (2000): 60. See also Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 7-34. Note also The Leskernick Project, UCL: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/leskernick/home.htm. Noted 26 Jan 2021.

[634] For brief building descriptions, see Trencher, *Alvar Aalto Guide*.

Here the internal form of the building, with its viscera of circulation, ascension and arrival, is aligned with the external experience of arriving via pedestrian paths up real hills. The system of vertical movement through the building is more like the walk up to the Acropolis of Athens or Rhodes, or the path through Delphi, than the mediocre 'rational' pathways of the modern city or the 'circulation' of the modern building. Aalto invokes and re-applies landscape patterns to establish fundamental architectural patterns of ascension, levels, staged arrival, continuation and final arrival at a summit. Thus the human body, senses, memory and physiology are presented with a landscape experience in moving through Aalto's building.

In terms of landscape the key strategy of the approach from the city centre to the Festival Hall and Main Building appears to be that the massive brick balustrade stair retains the scale and materiality of the street that leads up the hill toward the building, in replicating the brick wall to the adjacent forest. Thus when the visitor enters the hollow mountain of the building through the unelaborated Main Building entry, they either continue through to the campus, or climb the heavy stair sitting within the massive balustrade to lecture rooms on higher levels largely uninterrupted in the long journey from the city to the classroom.

The mountain would appear to be an iconic figure of landscape in most cultural settings. Porphyrios argues that iconographic urban types familiar to Aalto – including 'the Miesian curtain wall, the Greek theatre ... the Villa Savoye' – founded not on nature but on convention and habit, can possess 'the power to trigger associations'.[635] Yet by a similar process of association, landscape types such as the wave and the mountain, as well as the ripple, the rising path, the hillside – clearly more deeply rooted in human experience and individual memory than the modernist curtain wall – may trigger a range of deeper emotional responses. In this way particular spatial settings, rooted in the natural world, related to and felt by the body, can become meaningful in their modernist context, and hold their meaning and emotional impact through to the present day.

[635] Porphyrios, *Sources*, 31.

4.3.2 Aalto's foyers: Finlandia Hall, Jyväskylä Festival Hall

> Aalto leads audiences through various spatial experiences to the central action, the performance itself. He strives to lift the viewer out of the everyday and create an atmosphere of anticipation.[636]
>
> Kuhlmann, 'Magus of the North' (2014)

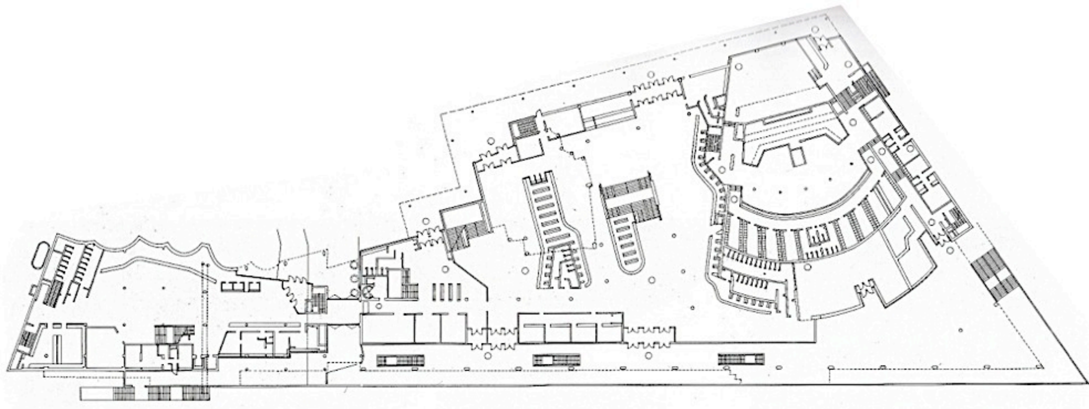

Figure 4.30 AALTO Finlandia Hall, ground floor plan
Source: *Alvar Aalto Band I*

Figure 4.31a, 4.31b AALTO Finlandia Hall
Photographs by John Roberts, 2011

Aalto's Finlandia Hall (1962-71) recalls a landscape populated by waves, both outside and inside. Outside, at the scale of the city, a great white wave-form rises from its broad roof toward the sky, and fans out toward the surfaces of Helsinki's Töölö Bay (Fig.4.31a), while smaller undulating niches relate to trees on the western side (Fig.4.31b), as the Congress Hall steps up and crests over sloping bedrock (4.32).

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[636] Kuhlmann, 'Magus of the North', 348.

Figure 4.32 AALTO Finlandia Hall
Photograph by John Roberts, 2011

Inside, the capacious Finlandia Hall foyer resembles the landform of a wandering cavern through the irregular undulations of its walls, benches, balconies, stairs, and levels, above, ahead, and beside the visitor like stream banks, clouds or hillside pathways. In Aalto's Jyväskylä University Festival Hall (1953), the forest appears to continue from the hillside just outside the building, invading the foyer to share its space with gathering visitors. Both are noted below.[637]

Aalto's foyers have become critically esteemed spaces. Weston regards the foyer and auditorium space of Finlandia Hall as 'one of the great spatial sequences in modern architecture, in which, for all its grandeur, the individual never for a moment feels overwhelmed.'[638] Ray sees human embodiment in Aalto's drawings, as they reflect 'human movement ... through foyers and out towards the landscape'.[639] In McCarter's judgement, 'Aalto's lasting success is the space within', where the ceiling 'rises in a series of overlapping wavelike curving panels', and the white balcony wall 'folds in and out', until the main foyer, 'arguably Aalto's greatest "forest space"', opens out toward the bay.[640]

The corridor or foyer is one of the few spaces designed ambiguously for both walking or for gathering, where people can move through gently or at speed, or stand informally, alone or in clusters, 'warming' in the foyer, between the outside and the inside. Rather than offering simply efficient circulation or 'milling' space, a foyer's informal open space instead acts like a half-enclosed indoor lawn or courtyard, spatially and temporally spreading out to precede the serried order of auditorium seating. The foyer fills with waves and pulses of people to become a place of heightened social and aesthetic anticipation, a freely flowing indeterminate meadow for mingling, meeting, chatting, and for chance encounters, a place of costume and

[637] Aalto's foyers were discussed in John Roberts, 'Aalto's Foyers: Landscape Presences', *Interstices* Under Construction Symposium 2018: *Presence*, Auckland, NZ: University of Auckland, 2018.
[638] Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, 224.
[639] Ray, *Alvar Aalto*, 162.
[640] McCarter, *Aalto*, 231-232.

perfume, glances and laughter. In Finland the foyer will also include a substantial coat checking area, offering the opportunity for an undulating counter, cranked and flowing like the meandering creekbank at the meadow's edge.

This episode considers Aalto's foyers, where elements of natural landscape appear transposed by Aalto to guide visitors through his foyers, embodying experiences of natural landscapes. Foyers are conceptualised with reference to art critic Yve-Alain Bois's writing on perception of movement involving sculptural objects, architecture and landscape spaces, in 'A Picturesque Stroll around Clara-Clara' (1984), where he notes with regret that 'just as Le Corbusier's kinetic intelligence was something exceptional, so the understanding of that intelligence among architects today remains the thing least shared in the world.'[641] However, this 'kinetic intelligence' appears fully developed in Aalto's work, in the wave-form plans, the flowing or rising floors, the undulating ceilings, the curving counters and rails of his foyer spaces, visually and bodily sensed, as they welcome and prepare visitor's senses to enter a theatre or auditorium. The multiple rhythms and folds of the Aalto foyer infuse his modern architecture with the sense of an encounter with the natural world, in landscape-like spaces as varied and animated as a hillside or a forest clearing.

Aalto in 'Doorstep' reveals his interest in the domestic entryway and the 'long-despised corridor' of the everyday house: 'As part of the entrance to a house, it offers undreamed-of aesthetic potential, as it is a natural coordinator of the inner rooms, and permits the use of a bold, linear scale, even in small buildings.'[642] Just as Aalto recognises the chronically overlooked corridor as a 'natural coordinator' of interior spaces, so he also re-reads the potential of the typologically neglected theatre foyer. In instrumental commercial terms, the foyer or lobby is viewed as 'unassigned' space or 'primary circulation', classified amongst the low-budget 'unassigned areas' of building programming: 'Lobbies, corridors, and vertical circulation between elevators, public toilets, building entrances and exits required to satisfy the building code.'[643]

However, a higher status for the foyer is found in its etymology, where *foyer* is French for hearth or home, from Latin *focus*, domestic hearth, and a metaphor for a fixed central point of human attention or activity. Aalto developed foyers in his public auditorium buildings, versions of the corridor but at a bolder scale, comparable to the outdoor landscape encountered by the visitor before entering the building.

Positioned in a building, the Aalto foyer can be a fortuitously enclosed and accessed 'leftover' space buffering between entry and theatre access, beside or below an auditorium, as at Finlandia and Jyväskylä respectively. In terms of human activity, the foyer has associated human pleasures, enjoying an undefined fluid informality of form, and entailing subtle fluxes of human contact and subtle, subliminally observed bodily interaction, embodying the freedom that Aalto found through his remembered

[641] Yve-Alain Bois, trans. John Shepley, 'A Picturesque Stroll around *Clara-Clara*', *October* 29 (1984): 58.
[642] Aalto, 'Doorstep', 52.
[643] William M. Peña and Steven A. Parshall, *Problem Seeking: An architectural programming primer* (New York: Wiley, 2001), 111.

white table: ‘it has no recipe, nothing obliges man to do this or that.’[644] However, while this creative liberty may suggest nature itself, for Aalto ‘freedom’s symbol’,[645] such freedom, formlessness and programmatic indeterminacy places the onus of artistic responsibility onto the architect. Challenged to transcend in his foyer designs the ‘leftover space’ of 1950s modernist architecture planning, Aalto turns to landscape for deep inspiration at Jyväskylä Festival Hall and Finlandia Hall. Recalling his early years, Aalto remarked, ‘As for the Finnish landscape, it was there all around me, all the time’.[646] That idea of landscape is present in different concepts and forms, and it connotes a bodily closeness to nature that Aalto retained and used as a basic tenet of his architectural philosophy.

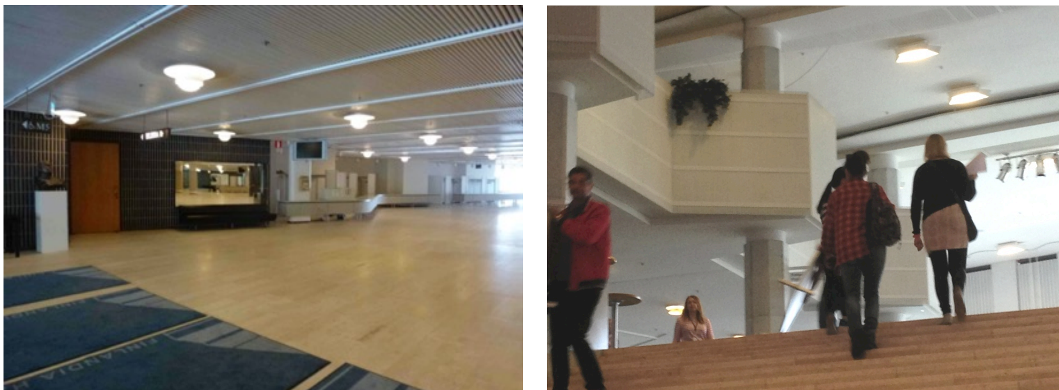

Figure 4.33a, 4.33b AALTO Finlandia Hall
Photographs by John Roberts, 2011

In a first example, Aalto’s Finlandia Hall foyer can be seen as landscape-like through the setting of its balconies, stairs, levels, and curved volumes in open space, as it guides and immerses visitors in its curving, ‘unpredictable’ space, with its artificial contours, spaces and masses looming and sheltering above, hovering ahead, and shifting beside people like clouds and hillsides to guide as they move through (Fig. 4.33a). The experience of moving through the non-orthogonal Aalto foyer, walking past walls and close by human-sized columns, puts the senses central to the visitor’s pathway through the broad, low-ceilinged entry space. This experience involves a full-scale body reading of things of an interior landscape: dark and light mass, low curving walls, warm-coloured low-sheen floors, columns clad in white ceramic baton tiles, fine vertical timber screens, and stairs that lead the visitor not only upwards but also gently sideways, enjoying what Bois terms a ‘picturesque stroll’ as they find their way toward bars, lobbies, theatre doors and auditoriums (Fig.4.33b).[647]

The Aalto foyer can be conceptualised through Rasmussen’s phenomenological view in *Experiencing Architecture* (1959), where he recommends architectural knowledge be made through perception and bodily experience, and that architecture should be understood through experience of the ‘things that surround us’.[648] Citing Rome’s Spanish Steps (1720s) (Fig.4.x), as the ‘petrification of the dancing rhythm’ of its

644 Aalto, ‘The White Table’, 12.
645 Aalto, ‘National Planning and Cultural Goals’ (1949), in *Sketches*, 102.
646 Aalto, ‘Interview for Finnish television’, 274.
647 Bois, ‘A Picturesque Stroll’, 32-62.
648 Rasmussen, *Experiencing Architecture*, 6.

historical era, Rasmussen suggests that the design of rooms and their relationships should reflect human experience, 'the way we live in them and move through them.'[649] Further, and more particularly, Rasmussen sees Aalto's buildings as modern examples of a 'union between architecture and life', through being 'formed round the life to be lived in them'.[650] Aalto's Finlandia foyer, seemingly sculpted around human life, exemplifies an embodied, phenomenological architecture, conceptually and literally situated between landscape and architecture.

Figure 4.34 AALTO Jyväskylä Festival Hall
Photograph by John Roberts, 2011

In Aalto's Jyväskylä University Festival Hall (1953), directly joined to the Main Building, the hillside forest that bounds the site and fills the full-height windows seems to flow into the foyer, continuing the forest rhythms in the baton-tile-clad columns, and the lapped wave-forms of the ceiling (Fig.4.34). The visitor effectively continues their 'walk in the woods' in entering the foyer, before arriving like the radiant angel in Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* (see Fig.2.5), whose sumptuously clad body is forever frozen, stepping from outside to inside through columns, arriving energised by the outside world. Aalto's version of Bois's 'kinetic intelligence' manifests in the wave-form plans and sections, the wide flights of stairs leading from gentle dark to equally gentle light, and the undulating ceilings and floors of the foyer, forming a subtle sequence of spaces that engage bodily experience, welcoming visitors as they move through the 'unassigned' spaces of lobbies and foyers towards the formally assigned space of a theatre or hall. The arriving body senses a welcome and accommodation of its perceptions in the columns and ceiling, and in the sheen of brass rails and marble stairs at the edges of the foyer, a different set of experiences again (see 3.3.2 *Materia*).

Pallasmaa writes of the potential for participation and embodiment in ideal spatial sequences, arguing that 'it is this omnidirectional, multisensory, embodied and emotive encounter with space and place that makes us insiders and participants.'[651]

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[649] Rasmussen, *Experiencing Architecture*, 136.
[650] Rasmussen, *Experiencing Architecture*, 152.
[651] Pallasmaa, 'The Sixth Sense', 129.

Aalto’s foyer, like Fra Angelico’s painting before it, suggests in its forms a series of embodied encounters with consecutive spaces and sub-spaces, creating this ‘embodied and emotive encounter’ for the moving visitor, the ‘insider’ in the foyer. At Festival Hall, as at Finlandia Hall, the visitor becomes a modern figure in an imaginary architectural landscape. In Aalto’s foyers the wave-forms of walls and ceilings, and the flow of people between inner and outer realms, between built and actual landscapes, trees and columns, embody harmony and a deep-rooted meaning through the calm energy of an early Renaissance masterpiece, through the artist’s vision of the body in built space, and from the movement and perceptions of the body in the landscape.

4.3.3 Fine waves, eyes, fingertips: Villa Mairea

> The Villa Mairea resembles an abstraction of a forest clearing in post-Cubist terms. Multiple identities are maintained simultaneously, and the 'natural' is re-focused, precisely, by being seen through a 'frame' combining several degrees of abstracted nature.[652]
>
> Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes' (1998)

Figure 4.35 AALTO Villa Mairea
Source: *Alvar Aalto Band I*

This episode considers how the very fine rhythmic forms in Aalto's Villa Mairea (1939) involve landscape in contributing to Aalto's creation, as Goldhagen expresses it, of 'a quiet, nuanced, phenomenologically dense architecture that remains unsurpassed in the history of Modernism.'[653] This phenomenological density is revealed as essential to the relationship between people, building and landscape that frames Villa Mairea as an 'embodied act' of architecture, and which can also be seen as a performance of landscape, where people are involved in participation with landscape through this highly wrought work of architecture.

Two images preface this discussion of embodiment in the Villa Mairea, to give a sense, so to speak, of the heightened bodily, even literally, 'personal' degree of design in this building. First, in Aalto's description of Villa Mairea a large photograph is included, showing two female figures on the threshold of the house, between the main room and the courtyard (Fig.4.35). The two women are client Maire Gullichsen, standing against a column, and co-architect Aino Marsio-Aalto sitting on the sill. Aalto collaborated closely with the two women through the design and detailing of Villa Mairea, described in *Band I* as an '*opera con amore*', a work of love.[654]

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[652] Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', 14.
[653] Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet': 50.
[654] *Alvar Aalto Band I*, 139.

Figure 4.36 AALTO Villa Mairea, front door
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

The second image shows the Villa Mairea front door, where the visitor is greeted by a secure peephole of compound glass eyeholes, and a bronze door handle shaped like a stylized tree branch, with a brass covered keyhole, all set in a solid, finely panelled timber door (Fig.4.36). These images introduce the reader, like the visitor, to an inner world, an architectural ‘realm of the senses’ created by Aalto uniquely at Villa Mairea, a realm of supra-ordinary materiality which can be revealed and partly explained as a flux of matter and form intimately involving body and landscape in the architecture.

Figure 4.37 AALTO Villa Mairea, sauna
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

From its front door to its sauna (Fig.4.37), Villa Mairea is made intermittently of matter and details finished and aligned to the scale of millimetres with that of the human body, resolved to the fine bodily scale of fingers and eyes, as noted in the entry door. This material and visual finesse appears at points of contact between building and body through the house: in handles and rails, in layered and screened materials on ceilings and walls, and in the steps, stairs, slats and blinds that seem

less building components than shapings and attunements of matter to suit the weights, forms and materialities of the human body. This extreme level of completion of architectural details, in appearance and perceivable function, resonates not only with the body's extremes, its eyes, fingertips and skin surfaces, but also with the natural world in the natural landscape surrounding this large, expensive pre-war Aalto house.

The natural elements, most of which, as critics note, seem to be conceptually sourced from the nearby forest, are transformed into a material landscape created by the architecture. Beyond biology, beyond nature, beyond 'the forest', natural materials, accurately termed 'forest matter' by Sarah Menin are requisitioned to make a new landscape experience through the architecture itself, in and around the building.[655] As nature the materials have little spatial character; however, when applied to make architecture the materials become elements of an architectural landscape where the physical, sensing, intelligent, remembering human can feel acknowledged and secure within something made for people and their bodily senses.

Figure 4.38 Boulder with mosses, Villa Mairea
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

A visitor who ventures beyond the house and courtyard can find, in the immediate forest and in the wider landscape setting of the house, natural world details that resonate in the Villa. Not only do the trunks of the tall Scots pines echo through the columns and vertical poles that support and populate the house, but moss-covered boulders rhyme with the 'traditional' turf-covered roof. Rocks overgrown with lichens echo in the mound around the garden, while opposite the property entrance, clouds of blossom on the river's surface swirl freely, as if anticipating the form and surface of the swimming pool (Figs 4.38, 4.39).

[655] Sarah Menin, 'Fragments from the forest: Aalto's requisitioning of forest place and matter', *The Journal of Architecture* 6, no.3 (2001): 279-305.

Figure 4.39 Blossom on river near Villa Mairea
Photographs by John Roberts, 2008

Perceived and conceived as a habitable translation of the natural world, the Villa Mairea main room, noted elsewhere in this thesis in terms of whiteness, Cézanne's painting and Cubism (see episode 3.2.1), becomes an interior landscape, with changing views, levels, framings and glimpses of inside and outside worlds, as they slide across and through each other in the viewer's perception. The fineness of gradation in the slats, screens and layered surfaces of the Villa indicate Aalto's will to experiment with material fineness to both acknowledge and exploit the nonconscious perceptions of the inhabitant and visitor. The wavelike repetitive rhythms of these details of the building are as fine as the eyes need to perceive or as the fingertips need to touch, as fine and flowing as Aalto's pencil drawings, and as resolved as the fractally dissolving tips of tree branches, the drips of water from the rustic sauna gutter, the curls of mosses, or the radiating ripples of the pool's water in the wind.[656]

Aalto wrote, remembering Eliel Saarinen in 1950, 'Architecture must be deeply rooted in place and circumstance; it requires a delicate sense of form; it must support human emotions',[657] making his seriousness of purpose tersely but abundantly clear. Place, material form and human emotions were interlocked in architecture, forming an imperative and comprehensive framework for design for people, for the 'little person' as much as for the wealthy industrialist and art collector of the Villa Mairea. This was Aalto's 'paradise for people', realised from ideals learned from manmade sources such as Italian hill towns, paintings, and historical architecture. Villa Mairea demonstrates how Aalto could articulate and even build this new paradigm, his 'paradise for people' by tapping the resources of the natural world and the living landscape such as growing plants or pond ripples, to fix their details of mood, feeling and emotion in building to return people, through their emotional responses to architecture's spaces, forms and surfaces, to a kind of everyday paradise. Such a nearly unrealisable ambition can be glimpsed and sensed in the tiny waves of the Villa Mairea, made for the eyes and other senses.

Geographer John Wylie writing on 'landscape phenomenology', refers to 'embodied acts of landscaping', a set of practices, enabled and conceptualised through research thinking, which, he proposes, can turn landscape 'from a distant object or spectacle

[656] In this context, note James Elkins, 'How to look at a fingerprint', also 'How to look at grass', in *How to Use Your Eyes* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 154-169.
[657] Aalto, 'Eliel Saarinen', 246.

to be visually surveyed to an up-close, intimate and proximate material milieu of engagement and practice.'[658] As a consequence, landscape 'becomes the close-at-hand, that which is both touching and touched, an affective handling through which self and world emerge and entwine.[659] In juxtaposing and intertwining architectural and landscape sensations at Villa Mairea, Aalto creates a state illustrated in his photo of his female collaborators in the Villa design, where peepholes like water drops, handles like living branches, ceilings and details entwine selves and worlds in an intimate mutual engagement of touch, touching and being touched. Bodies, built and natural space, and architectural and landscape forms, together swirl and entwine like mosses in a forest or the surfaces of a stream, in Aalto's 'intimate and proximate material milieu' of the Villa Mairea.

These landscape perceptions, exceeding the limits of 'forest', use art to evince new ways for a building to be crafted and perceived, pushing beyond the finite framework of industrially standardised 'building products' and construction, yet remaining a modernist work. The result appears as a 'floating world' that Aalto invented for modernism at Villa Mairea. The brutality of the outer modern world, its machines, speed, intensity and material rawness is put behind the visitor when they enter the Villa Mairea through the timber front door, clad in fine but solid timber paneling. The house that overlooks the approach drive with multiple eye-like window boxes now seems to monitor the arriving individual at a smaller scale through a secure 'peephole' window made of multiple 'eyes' set in the body of the door like bubbles or water drops, while a bronze handle in the shape of a stylised branch extends in greeting towards the visitor's hand.

Aalto's creative struggle – for such 'victories' of the imagination over intransigent materials are rare – lies partly in how to transform the materials of the earth's surface into a work of architecture that can accommodate, as Goldhagen writes, 'the bodily basis of human experience' in rooms 'designed around the users' bodily being when they are engaged in different pursuits.'[660]

Kristian Gullichsen remarks that the Villa Mairea 'represents a radical break with the social conventions of the time and a departure from the prevailing ideology of the Modern Movement.'[661] Yet, as Gullichsen notes, the world that saw the creation of Villa Mairea vanished, along with something of Aalto's creative energy, soon after its completion in 1939:

> It marks the culmination in Aalto's early career that ended when the Soviet Union declared war on Finland a few months later, in November 1939. And when the guns were finally silenced five years later, the world had irrevocably changed. Alvar Aalto had also changed and he never returned to that wonderful pre-war architectural treasure trove. In his work, visions of the

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[658] Wylie, *Landscape*, 166-167.

[659] Wylie, *Landscape*, 166-167.

[660] Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet': 49.

[661] Kristian Gullichsen, 'In the Aura of Alvar Aalto', in Yukio Futagawa, ed., *Alvar Aalto, Villa Mairea, Noormarkku, Finland, 1937-39* (Tokyo: ADA EDITA, 2009), 7.

> future gave way to glimpses of the past; its contemporary spirit was replaced by archaic motifs and reflections of the Classical heritage.[662]

Thus the reader is reminded of how Aalto's alternative to modern architecture was altered and irrevocably derailed by the tragedy of World War II. Yet in its embodiments of landscape, Aalto's wave-related architecture retains its freshness and power, visible from the huge wave of Otaniemi to the atmospheres of auroras, waves and myths, to the wind-stirred waters of the Villa Mairea pool, and the waters of lakes and seas.

[662] Gullichsen, 'In the Aura of Alvar Aalto', 7.

4.3.4 Conclusion: Waves and Embodiment

Through this section, bodies in Aalto's architecture move through architecture as through landscape: ascending a manmade hill, on a hilltop site; walking through Aalto's foyers; seeing and sensing very fine architectural 'waves' in the Villa Mairea's materials and details. In terms of significances of landscape in Aalto's architecture, landscape emerges as a pre-existing condition, an exemplar of forms, of movement and of scaled presence. Movement, writes Johnson, reflects at 'a very deep level', how humans 'learn the contours of our world and the possible ways we can interact with it via movement', so that movement, beyond the '*promenade architecturale*' of Aalto's friend Le Corbusier, becomes part of a possibly broader and more profoundly affecting *promenade paysagiste*, a 'landscape promenade'. Such a promenade would work through vertical movement, up stairs, through movement in built space beside built elements, or even by the motion and oscillation, echoes and small-scale fluctuations of details and appearances of light, lines, rhythms and ripples in Aalto's fine details. This promenade, in resembling or recalling a walk up a hill, along a riverbank or resting in a sunny clearing, would place a visitor in the realm of the natural landscape by Aalto's installation of details and forms that look like the natural world and relate to memory and senses through those resemblances.

Through the phenomenological thinking of Pallasmaa, Bois, Goldhagen and others, the experience of Aalto's architecture and its reminiscence and feeling of passages of landscape can be viewed, as in Malpas's comment on John Glover's paintings of Tasmanian landscapes, as 'not the product of a passing and detached "view" of the landscape, but of a sustained interaction with it ... based in his own living and working in that landscape.'[663]

[663] Malpas, 'Place and the Problem of Landscape', 12.

Chapter 4 Waves: Conclusion

Findings and conclusions: Waves, Aalto, landscape

Through the long course of Aalto's productive career, both the forms of waves and the dynamic natural energy manifesting in waves were available to him, held close at hand in the storehouse of the natural landscape that Aalto knew all around him in Finland. Waves become the most evident figurations of Aalto's experimental energy, through which any building could become partly or entirely a 'koetalo', an 'experimental house', for finding out what could be made, what could be felt, what could be made to appear through architecture.

Waves appear before World War II at Viipuri Library Auditorium, at Villa Mairea and in the New York Finland Pavilion, as exotic forms or fittings in amongst white box forms, locations where the eye, the hand or the implied body is invited to partake of the building and the light or nearby landscape. After the war, waves became part of a wider language of architectural form and spatiality for Aalto through the 1950s at Säynätsalo, Kultuuritalo and Seinäjoki Town Hall, forms and elements that rose, swerved, flowed down, out and through, and shone, between landscape and building.

In Aalto's late public work, Finlandia Hall, the earth, the sky, the waters and the forest become bound in a symphonic 'great work'. Against the seismic, geological scale and ambition of Finlandia in Helsinki, Aalto also imagined and built the forest-cunning tapered-log sauna at Muuratsalo, the condensed 'great wave' at the Atelier, the timber wave-ceiling of the Summa House, and the double-curved concrete vault of Seinäjoki Library.

The uniqueness of these works of architecture and the astonishment of the visitor at the technical skill and understanding of material performance (and the sensed experience of materials) needed to bring the curves and waves of such works into existence, marks Aalto's work as an alternative architectural conception and experience to the doctrinaire modernism that surrounded Aalto through his working life, and which still surrounds the 'little person' who inhabits or visits the contemporary Western city.

The waves and curved forms in Aalto's architecture, transposing natural energies and landscape forms, complement the white surfaces of his architecture, and are themselves countered, complemented and extended through the informality and temporality of ruined forms in his drawings and buildings.

CHAPTER 5. RUINS

5.0 Introduction

5.0.1 Landscape ontology of Ruins

> But there has to be that interval of neglect, there has to be discontinuity; it is religiously and artistically essential. That is what I mean when I refer to the necessity for ruins: ruins provide the incentive for restoration, and for a return to origins. There has to be (in our new concept of history) an interim of death or rejection before there can be renewal or reform. The old order has to die before there can be a born-again landscape.[664]
>
> Jackson, 'The Necessity for Ruins' (1980)

In light of the present study's aim to conceptualise landscape in Aalto's architecture, this chapter considers the theme of Ruins in Aalto's architecture, that is, how metaphorical and material ruins become significant in Aalto's work, part of an argument that landscape constitutes the ontology, the essential reality, of Aalto's architecture.[665]

Ruins, laden with implications of history, time and mortality, would seem anathema to the international modernism emergent around 1930, which sought to free itself from the past and to locate itself in a timeless, universal, hygienically cleansed present. This modernist utopia is reflected in a functionalism described by Frampton as 'instrumental in the rationalization of both building types and methods, and where both the material finish and the plan form have been reduced to their lowest common denominator, in order to make production cheaper and to optimize use.'[666] Yet through history's tragic irony the Europe that conceived and built the utopian modern dream was itself engulfed in the catastrophe of World War II and lay in physical ruins amidst human ruination by war's end in 1945.

Ruins are observed as a thematic presence in Aalto's work by Baird and later by Pallasmaa, concerned with relations between Aalto's architecture and the significance of ruins and temporality, both implying the ancient past and implicating the catastrophic conflicts of the twentieth century in the framing of Aalto's heterodox version of modernism. Baird argues in 1971 that Aalto's buildings after Paimio Sanatorium (1929-33) appear 'aged in advance', as 'metaphors of ruins'.[667] Unlike Wright's organic architecture, Aalto's time-friendly buildings are not softened or complemented by plant materials, but are overrun by 'extraordinary outgrowths of planting', observes Baird.[668] Aalto's overgrowing greenery is read as challenging

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[664] J.B. Jackson, 'The Necessity for Ruins', in *The Necessity for Ruins, and other topics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 102.

[665] Ruins in Aalto's work were discussed in John Roberts, 'The ruins are wonderful so why worry? Ruins as historical "image-objects" for Aalto and Utzon', *Interstices* Under Construction Symposium: *Technics, Memory and the Architecture of History,* 25-27 November 2011, University of Tasmania, Launceston.

[666] Frampton, *Modern Architecture,* 9; also 123-166.

[667] Baird, *Alvar Aalto*, 12-13.

[668] Baird, *Alvar Aalto,* 12.

architecture's unifying ideal, as aggressively disharmonious, and bringing damage and ruination to buildings.[669]

Pallasmaa notes that Aalto uses images of ruins in his modern architecture, 'to evoke a melancholic experience of the past, and of the inevitability of erosion and decay.' Aalto's images of ruins extend from the explicit imagery of the amphitheatres of antiquity to 'eroded' corners of lattices and grids, and the occasional white patches of marble or plaster against dominant brick surfaces.[670] Pallasmaa observes 'wear and tear, weathering and patina' as 'positive' in Aalto's architecture, with his works acquiring 'added depth and intimacy with age, in contrast to most contemporary architecture, on which aging has the negative impact of decay.'[671]

Yet this 'depth and intimacy' of Aalto's work may lead to its being theoretically disregarded, interpreted as 'picturesque'. Historian John Macarthur observes that, 'Today the architecture of Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto and others, to whom the term picturesque might be applied, is somewhat out of fashion', while, elsewhere, he notes, 'a degree of formalism in the old sense of object form marks the most progressive practices.'[672] Yet both the idea of the picturesque and of pure 'object form' can prove to be limited and limiting as discourses, particularly when considering the involved landscape relations of Aalto's modernism.

Ancient Greek ruins of theatres, walls and columns at Delphi and Olympia appear in Aalto's 1920s and 1950s travel sketches, attesting to the nurturing value of history and of experience of its surviving fragments.[673] Ancient ruins mingle with avant-garde modernism in Aalto's informal manifesto 'From Doorstep to Living Room' (1926), where the Pompeiian house, 'deliberately presented as a ruin', with 'the sky as its ceiling', reflects fluid inside-outside polarities recast in Le Corbusier's Pavilion de L'Esprit Nouveau: 'Is it a hall ... or is it a garden built into the house, a garden room?' asks Aalto.[674] Through Aalto's ruins thinking the Classical past can merge with the modern European present in a co-existence of ancient, historical and modern architecture that acknowledges and includes landscape in its scope.[675]

Important also is Aalto's engagement through ruins with the outdoor physicality of site and landscape, where natural elements of sun, wind, rain, snow, ice, and vegetation pulse through his courtyards and around the margins of his doorsteps, living rooms and windows, suggesting a continuing, constantly vivacious re-balancing between architecture and landscape, made possible through the alternative order of the ruin. Here, in ruins, the modern architectural narrative can no longer remain autonomous, self-referential and geometrically intact, instead becoming contingent,

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[669] Baird, *Alvar Aalto,* 13.
[670] Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the image', 294.
[671] Pallasmaa, 'From tectonics to painterly architecture', 37-38.
[672] John Macarthur, *The Picturesque: Architecture, Disgust and Other Irregularities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 173.
[673] Aalto's travel sketches are collected and edited by Schildt, in Aalto, *Sketches*, and *Own Words*.
[674] Aalto, 'Doorstep', 52-54.
[675] Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', 4-19.

intertwined and geometrically impure, enabling a new, unsettling, even uncontrollable involvement of architecture and landscape.

5.0.2 Ruins and phenomenology: Place, Atmosphere, Embodiment

This chapter, investigating the theme of Ruins in Aalto's architecture, is organised into three sections based on key concepts of architectural phenomenology: Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment. Each section is focused in episodes around three repeated topics – *history*, *inside-outside* relations, and *temporality* – through which the phenomenology of Ruins in architecture or landscape may be problematised.

The topic of *history* includes architectural historical concepts of territory, ancient cities and buildings, and historical archetypes, as they overlap with landscape ideas to extend architectural thinking beyond the building to become involved in landscape contexts. The topic of *inside-outside* relations concern differences, similarities and connections between interior and exterior, between architecture and landscape spaces. The topic of *temporality* suggests material relations between permanence and mortality, in buildings, as in humans and other living things.

These three Ruins topics reflect a natural entropy or decay, which might be encountered at full scale in the world, as well as the weathering, erosion, decay, collapse and natural overgrowth that can be found or alluded to in Aalto's architecture. The relation between natural and built states of ruin can be effected through likeness or onomatopoeia between natural and built things, or less directly by allusion or metaphor, where a less-known thing can be described by reference to a known thing: a 'that' described through a 'this'.

In terms of **Place**, Ruins can be conceived through Casey's discussion of people, landscape and place, in particular chapters of *Getting Back into Place* (1993).[676] In his chapter 'Building Sites and Cultivating Places', Casey questions the framing of arguments about place in dyads, binaries and dichotomies, noting 'one factor in the experience of place that fiercely resists dichotomization of any kind' is 'the natural world, or "nature."'[677] Casey resorts to the human / nature dyad to discuss place, relative to bodies and buildings: 'Once our bodies are comfortably ensconced in buildings, we simply tend to close out the larger world of nature. Yet the natural world surrounds every body / and every building ... it *remains around us* as a mute presence tacitly waiting to be acknowledged.'[678]

Writing on place and 'displacement', Casey includes a term 'that does not fit easily into any neat spatial series: *landscape*', through which Casey questions the fundamental relationship of the standing body to the place where it stands or is viewing, by asking whether landscape and body are 'somehow covertly connected when it comes to matters of place?'[679] In response, discussing orientation and being

[676] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 146-153.
[677] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 147.
[678] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 147-148.
[679] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 24-25.

lost 'in space and time (or, more likely, being lost *to* them in the era of modernity)', Casey views body and landscape as 'coeval epicentres around which particular places pivot and radiate. They are, at the very least, the bounds of places.'[680] Casey locates place in relation to body and landscape: 'In my embodied being I am *just at* a place at its inner boundary; a surrounding landscape on the other hand, is *just beyond* that place at its outer boundary.' Between these boundaries, argues Casey, 'implacement occurs. Place is what takes place between body and landscape.'[681]

In terms of place, Casey also acknowledges the displacement of North American indigenous peoples, for whom 'to lose one's land is tantamount to losing one's existence',[682] and who endure a culture-wide symptom of displacement as a nostalgia, both 'a matter of regret for lost times', and 'a pining for *lost places*, for places we have once been in yet can no longer reenter.'[683] Senses of place and loss of place, and of nostalgic longings to return to lost places or times, can become decisive in relationships of body and landscape in terms of history, inside-outside, and temporality.

As **Atmosphere** the theme of Ruins can be considered by reference to both cultural geographer Jessica Dubow and philosopher Elizabeth Grosz. Dubow in 'Still-life, after-life, *nature morte*' (2011), observes a mood of melancholy in the pre-World War II writings of philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), corresponding with the postwar writings of novelist W.G. Sebald (1944-2007), infused with both melancholy and nostalgia at the fate of people, cultures, cities and countries in the twentieth century. Dubow also finds a twentieth century melancholy in Franz Kafka's *Amerika* (1927), as she writes: 'From accident to accident, orientation and destination elude the traveler, yet still drag him forward. Here, perpetual movement not only falls short of any kind of momentum but becomes an index of melancholia, or is the form that melancholia takes.'[684]

Grosz in 'The In-Between' (2001) regards the 'in-between' as a condition between the inner rooms and spaces of the building, and the outside, that is, the outer walls of the building, and the world defined as nature or as landscape beyond the building.[685] Nature, writes Grosz, in discourses of culture and architecture, may be conceived as a burden or as a haven: 'either as a passive, inert, ahistorical burden – in architecture, the burden of site specificity or the natural limit of materials – or else as a romanticized refuge or haven from the cultural, a cultural invention for its own recuperatively included "outside."'[686] Yet both strategies threaten nature with irrelevance; instead, Grosz argues,

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680 Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 29.
681 Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 29.
682 Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 37.
683 Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 37.
684 Jessica Dubow, 'Still-life, after-life, *nature morte*: W.G. Sebald and the demands of landscape', in Dydia DeLyser, Stephen Daniels and J. Nicholas Entrikin, eds, *Envisioning Landscapes, Making Worlds: Geography and the Humanities* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2011), 188.
685 Elizabeth Grosz, 'The In-Between: The Natural in Architecture and Culture', in *Architecture from the Outside*, 94.
686 Grosz, 'The In-Between', 97.

> Nature must be understood in the rich and productive openness attributed to it by Darwin and evolutionary theory, by Nietzsche, Deleuze, or Simondon, as force, as production, as a revelry in the random and the contingent, as a continuous opening up to the unexpected, as relations of dissonance, resonance, and consonance as much as relations of substance or identity.[687]

Aalto's sense of the need for experimentation for architectural progress is echoed in Grosz's idea that nature offers neither a ground nor 'a limit to human or cultural activity'; rather, 'nature is what inhabits cultural life to make it dynamic, to make it grow and be capable of reorienting itself despite the desire of forms of power to fix or freeze this movement toward the future.' Nature harbours and releases into culture the indeterminate, the unknown, the dynamic: 'The most dynamic elements of architecture, as well as those of the arts and social and political life, aspire to revel in the sheer thrill of the unknown'. Nature becomes the vital, animating force in culture: 'it is these dynamic – or perhaps we should say experimental (more in the artistic than scientific sense) – forces that enliven culture and all cultural production.'[688]

In terms of **Embodiment** Ruins may be understood initially through the writing of German sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel (1858-1918), who, in 'The Ruin' (1911) writes of the ruin in terms of dualities surrounding architecture, essentially a duel between the rising force of the human spirit and the gravitational mass of natural matter, where 'the great struggle between the will of the spirit and the necessity of nature issues into real peace', and where 'the soul in its upward striving and nature in its gravity are held in balance.'[689] Yet any loss of the balance between these upward and downward forces when a building 'crumbles' means that 'merely natural forces begin to become master over the work of man: the balance between nature and spirit, which the building manifested, shifts in favour of nature', effecting a 'cosmic tragedy' which 'makes every ruin an object infused with our nostalgia.'[690] And while the work of architecture is diminished or erased through ruination, still, 'where the work of art is dying, other forces and forms, those of nature, have grown,' so that, 'out of what of art still lives in the ruin and what of nature already lives in it', a new whole or unity may emerge.[691]

The ruin, Simmel notes, can be either empty of people or inhabited; the 'fascination of the ruin' is that a 'work of man' can appear 'entirely as a product of nature', whose dual 'cosmic tendencies' can either raise mountains by eruption or stratification, or destroy them by 'rain and snow, weathering and landslides, chemical dissolution and the effect of gradually intruding vegetation'.[692] Simmel also sees a form of embodiment in the dualistic ruin, related to human existence, in that we 'feel the vitality of those opposing tendencies ... instinctively sensing those antitheses in ourselves'.[693]

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[687] Grosz, 'The In-Between', 98.
[688] Grosz, 'The In-Between', 105.
[689] Georg Simmel, 'The Ruin' (1911), trans. David Kettler, *The Hudson Review* 11, no.3 (1958): 379.
[690] Simmel, 'The Ruin', 379.
[691] Simmel, 'The Ruin', 380.
[692] Simmel, 'The Ruin', 381.
[693] Simmel, 'The Ruin', 381.

Aalto, a German speaker and reader,[694] may well have been aware of Simmel's work. Aalto's approach to thinking and appreciation of ruins has certain similarities to tendencies in Simmel's 'The Ruin' (1911): in the fragile balance, and possible harmony between human and natural worlds; in the idea of patina on materials, where a natural process, overtaking the surface of a human product, 'makes for the outgrowth of a skin which completely covers up the original one'; or in the peaceful mood of the ruin, expressed where 'the ruin orders itself into the surrounding landscape without a break, growing together with it like a tree and stone.'[695] Simmel also notes through the ruin a 'psychic wholeness' between perception and thought, which may also lie behind an enduring human meaning, mirroring that between ruined building and landscape.[696]

Throughout 'The Ruin' Simmel promotes human presence in the ruin, suggesting the article as a kind of epitaph for 'man as a ruin', where the body settles into the temporal surrounds between life and death, 'felt as a return to the "good mother", as Goethe calls nature.' Here, notes Simmel, 'the saying that all that is human "is taken from earth and to earth shall return" rises above its sad nihilism.'[697] The presence of dimensions of human tragedy (more than comedy) appears also in Aalto's 1957 reflection on the material manifestations accompanying profound emotion, when he notes, 'Human life is a combination of tragedy and comedy. The shapes and designs which surround us are the music accompanying this tragedy and comedy.'[698] A parallel seems to appear between the closeness of human reality and emotions to the temporality of built ruins in the work of Simmel and Aalto.

5.0.3 Preface: Ruins topics: History, Inside-outside, Temporality

Within the sections of this Ruins chapter, episodes are organised through three repeated topics related to a theme of ruins observable in Aalto's architecture, as noted above.

Ruins are introduced in terms of history or the *historical fragment*, where history contains enduring ideas of ancient place, sketched fragments evoke powerful emotions, and ancient archetypes re-emerge in Aalto's modernism. Ruins allow Aalto's architecture to be problematised in terms of exchanges and reciprocities of *inside-outside*, where landscape informs and invades interior environments, while inner rooms exchange conditions with outside spaces, by contrapuntal design, through wartime bombardment or by subtle, body-related detailed design. Ruins also become objects of emotive and poetic reflection in terms of *temporality* or mortality, where earth, planting and time become agents of visible and metaphorical ruination in Aalto's work.

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[694] Schildt notes that 'German was the foreign language Aalto spoke best.' Schildt, introduction, Aalto, "Schöner Wohnen", 260.

[695] Simmel, 'The Ruin', 382-383.

[696] Simmel, 'The Ruin', 385.

[697] Simmel, 'The Ruin', 382-383.

[698] Aalto, "Schöner Wohnen", 262.

These topics of historical fragment, inside-outside, and temporality, used to organise the episodes of this chapter, allow a closer investigation of ruins in Aalto's architecture. Ruins interweave landscape and architecture, allowing an imaginative strategy, both poetic and physical, through which Aalto could challenge and evolve modernist practice. The theme of Ruins – noted by Aalto from 1926, and more widely acknowledged by historians, including Quantrill, Baird, Menin and Samuel, and Weston[699] – enabled Aalto to evolve the technological idealism of modernism from a dominant abstract style into a nuanced reality through interweaving architecture with landscape, itself, in Corner's words, 'a pervasive milieu, a rich imbroglio' of multiple animating dimensions.[700] By interweaving architecture with landscape through Ruins, Aalto acknowledges nature as a force, relating to history, exploiting inside-outside dualities, and reflecting the temporality and mortality of buildings in the landscape.

[699] See Quantrill, *A Critical Study*; Baird, *Alvar Aalto;* Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*; Weston, *Alvar Aalto*.
[700] Corner, Introduction, *Recovering Landscape*, 16.

5.1 Ruins and Place

5.1.0 Introduction: Ruins and Place

In this section's three episodes, the phenomenological strand of Place is used to consider *history*, *inside-outside* relations, and *temporality* in aspects of ruins in Aalto's architecture. The Muuratsalo House continues as the subject through all three episodes of Section 5.1, being a key Aalto work, a personal and innovative courtyard house where dwelling and landscape are intertwined, reflecting Aalto's consideration of place. The first episode draws a historical parallel in terms of place between the relations of the ancient Greek city and its countryside or chōra, and Aalto's courtyard house and its landscape setting. The second episode investigates inside-outside ambiguity, through the Muuratsalo courtyard, as both enclosed and sheltering. The third episode develops a relation between architecture and the earth, and the temporality of architecture and human life, a theme revisited finally to close this chapter.

Summary: Ruins and Place

5.1.1 Chorā: Ruins and historical place at Muuratsalo

In episode 5.1.1, the first of three studies of ruins and place at the Muuratsalo House, place is considered through the historical concept of chōra, a term used by Plato to relate cosmic origins in the *Timaeus*. While chōra has become an object of philosophical debate over 'place' and 'space', the concept of chōra also refers to the rare and valued agricultural land outside the walls of the Greek polis. Through chōra, parallels can be drawn between historical ideas of place and landscape in ancient Greece and Aalto's own sense of place concerning architecture and landscape at Muuratsalo. Interdisciplinary thinking by Malpas, Algra, and Landrum, reveals chōra as a philosophical term disclosing the relevance of landscape as a setting for cities and buildings.

5.1.2 Red ruined room: Inside-outside at Muuratsalo

Episode 5.1.2 investigates the decisive inside-outside relationship of the room and the landscape beyond the building, with reference to Andresen's thinking on Aalto's outside room at Muuratsalo. This 'ruined room' is investigated as the principal element for involving inhabitants in the house with the outside world of the landscape, and is conceptualised in terms of place through Norberg-Schulz's thinking on Finnish landscape and place.

5.1.3 Hic jacet: Humic poetics at Muuratsalo

Episode 5.1.3 reflects on ruins and place in the Muuratsalo courtyard, involving architecture, earth, time and mortality, considering the building's earthly placement, referring to Harrison's thinking on the earthy and organic 'humic' qualities of architecture, and a Stevens poem on placing an object in a landscape. Harrison's interest in the humic and mortality is compounded with Leatherbarrow's architectural thinking on earth's dry surface and moist subsurface. As Aalto's 'playhouse', connected with mortality and time, the Muuratsalo courtyard becomes a duality-rich marker of earthly place in a familiar landscape.

5.1.1 Chorā: Ruins and historical place at Muuratsalo

> One might go further and say that it is out of the connectedness to landscape, our embeddedness in particular spaces and places, that imagination itself arises, on which it draws, and to which it also gives shape and form.[701]
>
> Malpas, *The Place of Landscape* (2011)

> Yet these considerations can be understood as themselves already shaped in and through the landscape, in the broadest sense, the place – which must here be understood to include both the *polis* and its *chōra* – within which Greek life was situated, and in which the temple was itself sited. Moreover, one might also argue that this more prosaic, but also more fundamental, sense of the relatedness to place was itself something embedded within Greek thought as such. To repeat the words of the Greek philosopher Archytus: "to be is to be in place."[702]
>
> Malpas, 'Place and the Problem of Landscape' (2011)

Figure 5.1 AALTO Muuratsalo House
Source: Alvar Aalto Museum, 'The Cultivated Landscape of Alvar Aalto'

Aalto's Muuratsalo House is located on Lake Päijänne in Central Finland and stands on a rock platform on a sloping portion of Finnish forest, built around a level courtyard (Fig.5.1). The house as a whole is related to the lake and surrounding country largely through this courtyard, whose levelled floor is enclosed by over-sized walls with large openings to south and west, controlling lake and hill vistas. Muuratsalo island was accessible only by water when the summerhouse was built, and Aalto's careful map drawing locates the house site and reflects the thought, observation and knowledge invested in the Muuratsalo House site.

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[701] Malpas, Introduction, *The Place of Landscape*, xi.
[702] Malpas, 'Place and the Problem of Landscape', 18.

Figure 5.2 Lake Päijänne, 1950s poster
Source: www.cometofinland.fi

Aalto grew up in the towns and country of Central Finland, and as an adult travelling on Lake Päijänne continued to daydream of placing Italian towers and squares in the forested hills: 'As the steamboat glides across Lake Päijänne or Keitele, stopping off in sometimes quite splendidly cultivated inlets, I while away the time by making corrections in my mind to the buildings we pass.'[703] The landscape of Central Finland, seen condensed in a 1950s travel poster of Lake Päijänne (Fig.5.2), seems to have been understood by Aalto from his early years as the basis of a balanced relationship between humankind and the natural world. As understood through philosophical and historical senses of the Greek term chōra, and applied to an architectural context, the Muuratsalo House courtyard mediates between architecture and the surrounding landscape. This episode portrays the relationship between Aalto's Muuratsalo house and its landscape setting as exemplifying and clarifying the meaning of the difficult term chōra.

In Aalto's work, chōra may be seen as that space outside of, beyond, and around a building, particularly where an actual, vestigial or symbolic courtyard forms a central role in the organisation of the parts of a building, as in many Aalto works. The courtyard, alluding to the Roman, Greek and Middle Eastern atrium house, was part of Aalto's thinking at least from 1926, when he wrote, 'The garden wall is the real external wall of the home ... The garden (or courtyard) belongs to our home just as much as any of the rooms.'[704]

[703] Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland', 22.
[704] Aalto, 'Doorstep', 51.

Figure 5.3 AALTO Muuratsalo House, view from living room
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

This radical ambition of making the garden wall part of the house ‘turns’ the natural landscape closer to the centre of the Muuratsalo House. In turning the landscape into the building, Aalto begins to subvert and alter the state of the building, making its centre an outdoor place, a square roofless room, itself centred on a small dark square firepit. This brings the ‘other’ of natural landscape into the midst of the building, yet paradoxically also turns the building into a microcosm of a walled town, with an open outdoor urban space, a metaphorical *platz*, a *place*, a *piazza*, planted plainly as its central place: a contrary square of levelled land in the Finnish forest (Fig.5.3).

Here, opened to the landscape at its centre and invaded by nature, the building begins falling into ruination, with openings breaching the high courtyard walls. The problem of the outer landscape meeting the inner courtyard can be viewed through the philosophical and historical notion of chōra, a philosophical concept of place and a historical concept of the provident landscape, essential to the ancient city.

The square plan courtyard of Muuratsalo, a microcosm of the urban piazza, extended towards the familiar lake landscape, suggests, through the idea of chōra, philosophical origins, ideas of place, and of landscape as meaningful. Ray proposes that at Muuratsalo the ‘screen walls’ of the courtyard act as ‘huge baffles’ to the house windows, ‘restricting and modifying the view and light.’[705] Beyond managing light, the oversized walls and openings restrict and modify the visual and spatial relation of building to landscape, allowing the level courtyard floor seemingly to extend southward to the level surface of Lake Päijänne, while controlling the westward vista through forest and across water to include the distant tower of Aalto’s Muurame Church (1926-29).

[705] Ray, *Alvar Aalto*, 159.

Malpas differentiates philosophically between the terms and concepts of chōra and topos: while both terms may approach the English term place, they are not simply respectively correlated with place and space.[706] However, Dutch philosopher Keimpe Algra notes that while scholarship may equate topos with place and chōra with space, classical Greek language does not distinguish clearly between place and space.[707] Algra maintains that chōra in Homer's *Odyssey* refers to land, region or ground, and that while chōra in usage 'always denoted a certain *extension*', topos could denote 'location in relation to the surroundings', and was generally considered as 'smaller than, and part of' chōra.[708]

Connecting chōra to both city and landscape, architect Lisa Landrum, in '*Chōra* before Plato' (2016) highlights 'the basic, troubled grounds of chōra', as inhabited territory, viewing chōra as a mythically, historically and politically constructed unit composed of town and country.[709] Thus chōra held primary conceptual importance for inhabiting the Greek polis, as Landrum explains: not only was the polis territorially 'bound to its countryside', but the whole cultural and political structure of the Greek city 'was shaped by its countryside.'[710] Chōra was the valued homeland, the rare fertile farmland beyond the city, existentially vital, and to be protected at a time of conflict. Since the consolidation, inhabitation and use of the chōra predates the growth of Athens as a key power, chōra can be regarded as a construct of landscape, one that precedes the city and forms 'a necessary precondition' for democracy.[711] Thus the idea of the chōra beyond the city walls, involved in the existence, living, and ideals of the city, acquires fundamental importance and meaning for the ancient Greek polis.

In a similar way, the lands and waters of Lake Päijänne in Central Finland, well known and often travelled by Aalto, provide a sustaining chōra, a landscape place that resonates through ruinous walls with the architecture to make an ideally sustaining living place at Muuratsalo, interwoven of landscape, architecture and mythic cultural history.[712]

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[706] J.E. Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge, UK; Cambridge University Press, 1999), 25. Plato's usage of *chōra* as space and *topos* as place, as well as *kenon* as void, is also noted in Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 19, 178.

[707] Keimpe Algra, *Concepts of Space in Greek Thought* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 32.

[708] Algra, *Concepts of* Space, 33.

[709] Lisa Landrum, '*Chōra* before Plato: Architecture, Drama, and Receptivity', in Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Stephen Parcell, *Chora 7: Intervals In The Philosophy Of Architecture* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 345.

[710] Landrum, '*Chōra* before Plato', 331.

[711] Landrum, '*Chōra* before Plato', 331. Cites Robin Osborne, *Classical Landscape with Figures: The Ancient Greek City and its Countryside* (Dobbs Ferry, NY: Sheridan House, 1987), 16.

[712] Architecture, landscape and ruins are argued as intertwined through the concept of chōra in Roberts, 'Aalto Landscape Ruins *Chora*' (2017).

5.1.2 Red ruined room: Inside-outside at Muuratsalo

> The peristyle of a patrician's house, with an unroofed colonnade forming a link between the inner rooms of the house. Ruins at Pompeii.[713]
>
> Aalto, 'Doorstep' (1926)

> The building complex at Muuratsalo is meant to become a kind of synthesis between a protected architectural studio and an experimental centre where one can expect to try experiments that are not ready to be tried elsewhere, and where the proximity to nature can give fresh inspiration.[714]
>
> Aalto, 'Experimental House, Muuratsalo' (1953)

Figure 5.4 Lake Päijänne, beside Muuratsalo House, with swimming platform
Photograph by John Roberts, 2011

In Aalto's words the Muuratsalo House represents a venue for experiments 'not ready to be tried elsewhere'.[715] While Aalto presents the Muuratsalo 'Experimental House' as a constructional laboratory, for largely material experiments, its red brick lined courtyard merits closer attention as a venue for social and spatial experiments, and as a pivotal element in Aalto's thinking on relations between architecture and landscape. Casey uses a conceptual human / nature duality to discuss architecture and place, remarking that 'Once our bodies are comfortably ensconced in buildings, we simply tend to close out the larger world of nature.'[716] Aalto, however, makes a more complex, experimental and meaningful architectural experience at Muuratsalo by both 'ensconcing' people in part of the house while also going beyond the comfortable interior to create a courtyard that balances inside and outside, and

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[713] Aalto, caption, 'Doorstep', 51.
[714] Aalto, 'Experimental House, Muuratsalo', 116.
[715] Aalto, 'Experimental House, Muuratsalo', 116.
[716] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 147.

through its fragmented forms and ruinous surfaces opens out to connect with the 'larger world' of the landscape beyond the courtyard walls (Fig.5.4).

Figure 5.5 AALTO Muuratsalo House, bedroom door to courtyard
Photograph by John Roberts, 2011

The courtyard at Muuratsalo involves little spatial exchange with the indoor rooms: the living room opens functionally to the courtyard through a hinged timber and glass door and a fixed timber-framed window, while the bedroom wing is separated from the courtyard by a high step and solid timber doors (Fig.5.5), with only a slim horizontal high window to light the corridor. The courtyard seems separated from both domestic wings of the house, which form a whole, snug ell that contains and protects the courtyard from wind and forest space, while its level floor grounds and stabilises the house relative to the sloping site and the horizontal lake, while involving inhabitants of the well-determined square-plan house with the indeterminate landscape beyond the courtyard walls. Yet a sense of ruin is intensified in the blunt, excluding relationship between the spatially muffled domestic wings and the spatially bare courtyard, and from the ambiguous materiality of the walls, which solidly frame the courtyard square and yet abandon it to the landscape. These walls that break off in dramatic scale and mass frame the crumbling, fracturing and fragmenting built world of the courtyard's roofless room, which is left outside, as it were, to become infiltrated by the weathering and eroding forces of the natural world and to be invaded and shared within the indeterminate space of the greater landscape.

Figure 5.6 AALTO Muuratsalo House
Source: Andresen, 'Ancient Gathering Forms'

As noted above, the Muuratsalo courtyard can be seen to relate house and landscape through urban and philosophical concepts of place. In this segment the outdoor room of the levelled courtyard is aligned with Aalto's 1926 proposition that the 'garden (or courtyard) belongs to our home just as much as any of the rooms',[717] while in Andresen's words, 'the interior could be designed more as an exterior space.'[718] At stake here is the mutual involvement between the house, the outdoor room and the landscape. The courtyard, Andresen's ruined 'red room' (Fig.5.6), is an outdoor domestic space where 'one might sit around a fire and look out through the fractured wall to the landscape of the lake edge, a view that is essentially reserved for this room.'[719]

At Muuratsalo, while the compact domestic house accommodates holiday and work activities in a general and enclosing manner, the courtyard relates to the landscape in a particular and excluding or exclosing manner, where its surface material decay and spatial openness are combined to create a sense of fragmentation and ruination, and a consequential outward turning of the architecture to combine with natural forces and landscape spatiality to form a unity of place. Place arguably emerges through the relationships of landscape to architecture at Muuratsalo, where, in Casey's sense, 'the natural world surrounds every body and every building', and where the natural world, in the form of the landscape, '*remains around us* as a mute presence tacitly waiting to be acknowledged.'[720] In the 'poetic room' of the courtyard the compact ell of the house is contrasted by the expansive square space that may function as a sitting room in the landscape but also acknowledges the greater presence of the natural world not through mere viewing but through spatial involvement with the surrounding landscape leading to an enhanced poetic and human existence.

[717] Aalto, 'Doorstep', 51.
[718] Andresen, 'Ancient Gathering Forms', 47.
[719] Andresen, 'Ancient Gathering Forms', 52-53.
[720] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 147-148.

Andresen proposes that the prominent 'single poetic room' should act as a centripetal, inwardly focused spatial entity in the landscape, giving identity, meaning or character to the building as a whole. Andresen also sets out six conditions that Aalto's poetic room (at Muuratsalo and elsewhere) might satisfy: sustaining an idea of 'the whole'; being elaborated above other rooms; acting as a 'communal' room; having a relatively simple squarish plan; reflecting a basic human social form; and acting in conceptual interdependence with landscape.[721]

Worthy of emphasis here in terms of place is the conceptual interdependence between the poetic room and the adjacent or surrounding landscape. At stake is the notion of 'involvement', the literal 'rolling-in' of landscape to building and building to landscape implied in this relationship of architecture and landscape in Aalto's method. To articulate this involvement is arguably to go closer to the core of Aalto's architecture and to emphasise the means of his making of place through architecture using especially the trope or theme of ruins.

In the Finnish climate of long cold winters, the idea of embracing the garden *within* the house as a real or metaphorical room would seem problematic in practical thermal terms. It also seems to run against inherited architectural tradition, seen in Norberg-Schulz's comment in *Nightlands* (1996) that traditional Finnish building is based on 'composed exterior gestalt [overall form] and cavelike interiors.'[722] It would be a mistake, however, to attribute Aalto's modern re-alignment of architecture with landscape as determined simply by functional climatic or thermal matters. It appears more far-reaching and provocative to consider the landscape itself at a conceptual level, as Norberg-Schulz does, writing of the effects on architecture of an apparent dearth of 'place' in the landscape of Finland:

> Whereas later Swedish building developed toward larger units, the Finnish retained the original division into single houses with simple functions, placed in the landscape in an ostensibly irregular manner. The lack of distinct *place* in Finland's extensive forests impinges unquestionably upon this development; the closed grouping has no existing model in the natural environment. As a necessary complement, the house is conceived as a cave of wood, a place of refuge from open endlessness.[723]

By comparison with forest settlements, traditional urban settlement in Finland in the nineteenth century, following Russian influence, was characterised by an 'airy', open organisation of streets of timber buildings, as a planning measure against the constant danger of fire. The street façades of urban buildings emphasised window design and surround details; a 'dispersed and extensive horizontal gestalt' developed, where lighter colours prevailed: façades were 'treated as applied screens, generally yellow, while end and back faces were red.'[724] Norberg-Schulz observes, with one critical eye on Finnish landscape and the other on building, that despite its apparent simplicity, 'common Finnish architecture has a potential freedom in

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[721] Andresen, 'Ancient Gathering Forms', 52.
[722] Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands*, 64.
[723] Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands*, 63-64; italics by Norberg-Schulz.
[724] Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands*, 64.

accordance with the unfinished land's possibilities', reflecting also an openness to 'a versatile approach to modernism.'[725]

In more material terms, the play between the ubiquitous granite of Finland, not as remote cliffs or mountains but as the 'solid ground' beneath one's feet, and early modern granite architecture, such as that of Lars Sonck, reflects 'the land's web', so that, in the Finnish architectural manner, 'vital organic forms, seemingly concealed within granite, break forth and redefine this material', and as a result it appears that 'the tradition of building is not applied from without but emerges from within.'[726] This material opening out, a disclosure, an exposure, an exclosure, creates through the courtyard's centrifugal form a form of ruin, where the singular white 'rock' of the whole building becomes broken, and through ruination paradoxically becomes part of the greater whole, part of the 'land's web', and an element of Aalto's longed-for harmony of humankind and nature.

Away from Aalto's somewhat distracting idea of technological and building experimentation, the courtyard becomes the heart of an experiment of architectural place-making on the island of Muuratsalo, with its granite ground and forest landscape, its surrounding lake and forested horizons, and its delicate ground cover of mosses, vines and fungi. Through its ruinous surfaces and fragmented square geometry, the outdoor room engenders a unique mingling of room, garden, courtyard, urban piazza and fragmentary ruin, to create a building in the mode of a ruin, surrounded and infiltrated by the natural world of Central Finland, a defining work of architecture and place, at Aalto's Muuratsalo House.

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[725] Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands*, 64.
[726] Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands*, 64-65.

5.1.3 Hic jacet: Humic poetics at Muuratsalo

> Building, which starts from the ground up, is where the fundamental ontology of our mundane lives both begins and ends.[727]
>
> Harrison, 'Hic jacet' (2001)

> Places do not occur naturally but are created by human beings through some mark or sign of human presence. A wilderness in itself is placeless, for it has no human centre or point of convergence around which nature can gather and become bounded.[728]
>
> Harrison, 'Hic jacet' (2001)

> For as long as we think of our houses, cities, and nations as merely places to live, and not as places to die, those houses, cities, and nations can never become homes or reside within the containing limits of mortality from which all shelter and placehood ultimately derive.[729]
>
> Harrison, 'Hic jacet' (2001)

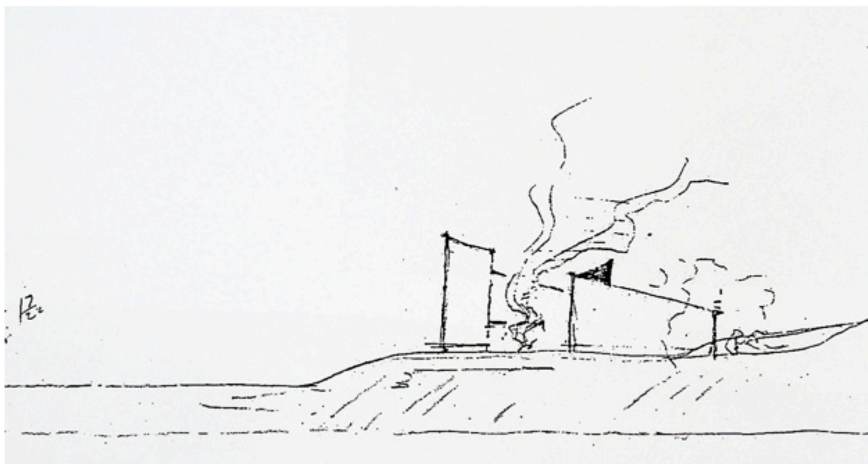

Figure 5.7 AALTO Muuratsalo House, site elevation sketch
Source: AAM

In a site elevation sketch Aalto presents the Muuratsalo House as a windowless, roofless white wedge sitting on a wide rock platform above Lake Päijänne (Fig.5.7). The building in the drawing resembles a hollow vessel, empty but animated by smoke rising from its centre. Aalto's sketch takes artistic liberties, removing trees, raising the waterline, and exaggerating the flatness and size of the rock platform under the building. The twirl of rising smoke suggests a clear human presence within the walls, on the brick floor of the courtyard. Even as a ruin, the building acts as a frame, an enclosure, a base for human activity in the Finnish landscape.

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[727] Robert Pogue Harrison, 'Hic jacet', *Critical Inquiry* 27, no.3 (2001): 394.
[728] Harrison, 'Hic jacet': 407.
[729] Harrison, 'Hic jacet': 406.

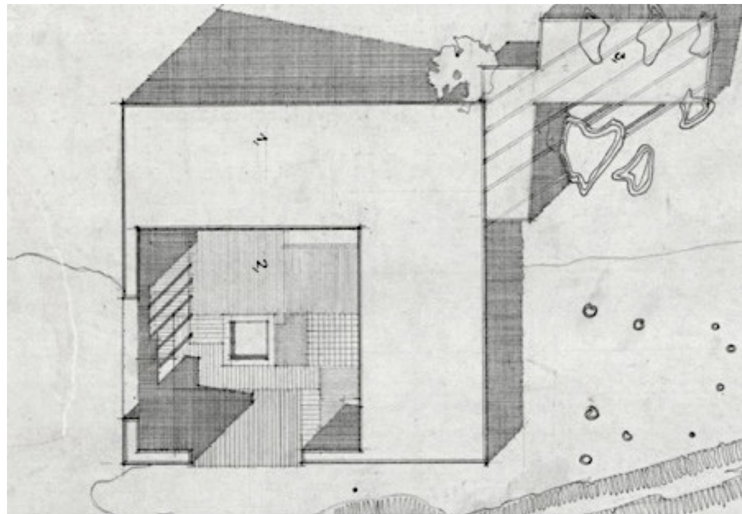

Figure 5.8 AALTO Muuratsalo House, plan
Source: AAM

In another Aalto drawing, a plan showing the proposed Muuratsalo building group, the courtyard stands out as a drafted 'woven' patterned floor, animated by rendered shadows and with a fire pit at its centre, while the roofed house remains largely blank (Fig.5.8). In both drawings the floor of the outdoor courtyard becomes the centre of attention.

The courtyard floor of the Muuratsalo House is represented in these drawings as a marker of the house's situation on the relative 'wilderness' of forested Muuratsalo. Modern architecture can seem anxious to deny mortality, temporality and locality, through its abstract geometry, pure forms, white finishes and radical disconnection from site. Aalto's sketch and plan of the house reveal it as a fragmented would-be ruin, as discussed above, interwoven spatially with the surrounding landscape through its outer walls and courtyard. Yet the building also seems firmly bonded to the ground, involved through the connection of its bounded courtyard's patterned floor with the immediate landscape of the ground directly beneath.

Casey refers to landscape as 'a term that does not fit easily into any neat spatial series', through which he questions the relationship of the standing body to the place where it stands, asking whether landscape and body are 'somehow covertly connected when it comes to matters of place?'[730] The relation of the building to the ground, with overtones of earthly bodily mortality, is investigated here as it might partly constitute architectural place. An otherwise dormant sense of ground, of gravity, and of the body existing and standing alive, between earth and sky, are brought into focus by two articles considering architecture's relationship with the earth, Robert Pogue Harrison's 'Hic jacet' (2001), and David Leatherbarrow's 'Leveling the Land' (1999).[731]

[730] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 24-25.

[731] David Leatherbarrow, 'Leveling the Land', in Corner, *Recovering Landscape*.

Cultural critic Robert Pogue Harrison in 'Hic jacet' (2001) looks to architecture and poetry to consider place and mortality, forming the idea of a grounded, terrestrially located architecture through his reading of a well-known poem by Wallace Stevens (1879-1955). Harrison proclaims the importance of architecture in everyday human life, arguing that building, 'which starts from the ground up, is where the fundamental ontology of our mundane lives both begins and ends.'[732] He continues, reflecting on the necessity of place: 'What is a place? How does it get established? ... In what does its placehood consist?'[733] The co-prominence of architecture and place, connected with earth, suggests wider cultural resonances in the relationship of architecture and landscape, to be found in the Muuratsalo House, particularly in the relation of the 'poetic' ruined room of its courtyard with its supporting ground.

Harrison's argument finds an exemplar in the Stevens poem 'Anecdote of the Jar' (1919):

> I placed a jar in Tennessee,
> And round it was, upon a hill.
> It made the slovenly wilderness
> Surround that hill.
>
> The wilderness rose up to it,
> And sprawled around, no longer wild.
> The jar was round upon the ground
> And tall and of a port in air.
>
> It took dominion everywhere.
> The jar was gray and bare.
> It did not give of bird or bush,
> Like nothing else in Tennessee.[734]

Citing no particular work of architecture, Harrison argues that although a round jar may resemble a funerary urn more than a building, it can be associated with the place-making functions of architecture, forming a 'centre of orientation' around which the 'slovenly wilderness' is focused: 'It lies there as a kind of urn in the midst of the wilderness. The entire transfiguration of the scene of nature – its topical convergence in one place – is due to the introduction of this sign of human worldhood.'[735]

In Stevens's jar on the hill, 'tall and of a port in air', similarly configured to Aalto's high-walled courtyard on its hillside, Harrison sees a redemptive role for architecture, although in a 'humic' sense, relating ontologically to the ground. Such buildings, revealing time and becoming part of the ground where they are made, 'must not only rise from but also redescend into the ground of their edification. They must not only

[732] Harrison, 'Hic jacet': 394.
[733] Harrison, 'Hic jacet': 394.
[734] Wallace Stevens, 'Anecdote of the Jar', in *Collected Poems* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 76.
[735] Harrison, 'Hic jacet': 395.

stand there but also lie there.' He proposes that 'We need an architecture not so much of the humanistic ... as of the humic.'[736] The humic implies human presence not only on the earth's surface but also in the ground, under its surface.

Figure 5.9 AALTO Muuratsalo House, Aalto in courtyard
Source: AAM

At Muuratsalo, inside the 'port in air', the courtyard's patterned brick floor surrounds the central fire, adhering to and making true the earth's sloping granite surface, while, located at a point between the vertical and the horizontal, the fire pit fixes the courtyard downward, out of the air and light and into the earth, at its hollow and smoke-dark centre (Fig.5.9). Thus in Aalto's site elevation the courtyard can be understood as not only a playful summerhouse but also as a metaphorical mournful urn, hollow and animated by fire smoke, and settled on a bare grey granite platform, defining a civilly ordered place in the Finnish wilds, where none was made before.

Menin and Samuel note Aalto's intuitive duality, where the Muuratsalo courtyard 'seems to signify belief in a harmonious relationship between architecture and nature, central to which is an acceptance of decay and death seemingly impenetrable to his conscious self.'[737] Mortality binds to architecture through the Muuratsalo courtyard, where Aalto could embed a dual symbolism of life and death, exuding an air of monumentality through its oversized walls and nested square geometry, its house plan echoed in the square courtyard and again in the fire pit, a chthonic eminence suggesting connection into the ground beneath the level pavement. While the airy courtyard raises its high walls, its hard square floor, curated in detail in Aalto's plan drawing, extends to its firm boundaries and no further. Hard edges define the building against the unruly, formless natural landscape all around, with sky above and water below.

In 'Leveling the Land' Leatherbarrow discusses levelled land and terrain design to see where 'the real drama of place building is played out', and to recover 'a fuller

[736] Harrison, 'Hic jacet': 407.
[737] Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, 101.

sense of landscape.'[738] Leatherbarrow contrasts terrestrial things with subterranean things below the earth's surface, observing in ancient Greek myth and philosophy 'a vertical antinomy between what is dry above and wet below the level of constructed topography', and contrasting the terseness of *form* of the dry, clean, edged terrace with the fluid, shiny, formless *content* of subterranean matter.[739] This humic matter below the earth's surface is linked to the sky by the levelled ground of the terrace, or of the dancing floor, the *choros* of Greek theatre. At its centre can be found either a boss or a well, a connection to a fluid and less-formed underside or underworld; this is also the *omphalos* or *umbilicus*, the navel, the birth-connection to watery beginnings.

Figure 5.10 MICHELANGELO Campidoglio, Rome
Source: Norberg-Schulz, *Meaning in Western Architecture*

In Greek myth a woven wedding-veil placed on the earth's surface by Zeus 'disclosed', says Leatherbarrow, 'an inhabitable landscape ... the earth was shown to be a livable horizon, matter having been abbreviated into a mat'; and so, in this mythic way, 'Through patterned textile, a livable *landscape* first emerged into light.'[740] This surface geometry combined with a central well or mound is found also in the Pantheon and in Michelangelo's Campidoglio (Fig.5.10), all potentially expressing a 'subterranean potential for (re-)emergence.'[741]

[738] Leatherbarrow, 'Leveling the Land', 172.
[739] Leatherbarrow, 'Leveling the Land', 172-173.
[740] Leatherbarrow, 'Leveling the Land', 174-175; Leatherbarrow's italics.
[741] Leatherbarrow, 'Leveling the Land', 179.

Figure 5.11 AALTO Muuratsalo House, fire pit
Photograph by John Roberts, 2011

In common with these ancient Greek figures the Muuratsalo courtyard floor is drawn, constructed and experienced as a self-conscious textile of bricks, a patterned floor laid over a subsurface, literally a *sub-stance*, of unruly matter standing beneath the level floor (Fig.5.11). And at Muuratsalo the central fire pit becomes its *omphalos*, its place of rising smoke within the walls, and at the same time its hearth or focus connecting the living world of sun and sky through the carefully woven and square textile floor to fluid and non-geometric realms of a wild and dark underworld.

While it remains purely conjectural to interpret Aalto's intention at his summerhouse to be so connected to classical myth, it should be remembered that at Muuratsalo much was at stake for Aalto, re-emerging from the darkness of depression at the sudden death of Aino in 1949, to re-marry and 'begin again' in 1953. Fundamental antimonies including between light and dark, endings and beginnings, disorder and order, clarity and obscurity, and others can be found at Muuratsalo. The seemingly, knowingly ruined walls become with the patterned courtyard floor elements of a fundamental existential duality of life and mortality at the Muuratsalo House.

5.1.4 Conclusion: Ruins and Place

This section, investigating Ruins and interweaving selected aspects of the Muuratsalo House and of landscape, provokes a view of Aalto's summerhouse as a building of thought and philosophical density. The open, ambiguous and grounded courtyard of the house is interpreted as a pivotal element in the 'experimental' side of the house's being. The house is made open to the landscape through its ruined, fragmentary walls; the spatial ambiguity where inside becomes outside is enabled by its surfaces and its spatial proximity to the freedom and pleasures of the natural world; and it is grounded, between light and dark, by the square, centre-focused courtyard floor.

The Muuratsalo House appears as a key Aalto work, a courtyard house where dwelling and landscape intertwine, revealing Aalto's consideration of place. Like the classical Greek city with its productive, fertile countryside or chōra, Aalto's courtyard house is predicated on, and thrives on, its landscape setting. Ambiguously inside and outside, its courtyard encloses, shelters and defines limits, but also releases the inhabitant to an existential freedom in the landscape. The Muuratsalo site, like all landscape, not, nor ever, a 'wilderness' but instead a place with orientations, histories, knowledge and tempers, both stands above, and begins to settle into the earth. Placed on the ground on a platform, the house engenders and colours relations between architecture and the earth, and resembles, rather than symbolises, the temporality of architecture and human life. In looking like and *feeling like* human body, human skin, human mortality, rather than posing metaphorically 'as body', the house remains accessible, an everyday excursion into architectural possibility, a place for a fire amongst the trees.

Casey locates the body between place and landscape: 'In my embodied being I am *just at* a place at its inner boundary; a surrounding landscape on the other hand, is *just beyond* that place at its outer boundary.' Between these boundaries, argues Casey, 'implacement occurs. Place is what takes place between body and landscape.'[742] The twirl of rising smoke, speaking of presence to all around, suggests human dwelling within the walls, on the brick floor of the courtyard. Even as a ruin, the building acts as a frame, an enclosure, a base for human activity related to and connecting with ideas of place in the Finnish landscape.

[742] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 29.

5.2 Ruins and Atmosphere

5.2.0 Introduction: Ruins and Atmosphere

In this section's three episodes, the phenomenological strand of Atmosphere is used to consider *history*, *inside-outside* relations, and *temporality* in aspects of Ruins in Aalto's architecture.

Aalto's sketches of ruins and his images of war destruction show two aspects and two different emotional states, and their consequences for design. The openness of buildings to the landscape can trigger new, unexpected, unpredictable emotions, and the visitor may be struck with feelings of melancholy, nostalgia, sorrow, disbelief, or shock at the loss or destruction of buildings and what they represented for their inhabitants. The feelings of loss and also recuperation shift to a mood of ambivalence over the effects of natural growth over time, over walls. Aalto's tendency to foster or tolerate green overgrowth, and frequently to provide means for that growth, is investigated. The drawings and etchings of Piranesi provide a historical and artistic background in art for this desire for abundant greenery in Aalto's modern architecture.

Summary: Ruins and Atmosphere

5.2.1 Olympia sketches: Melancholy in the ruins

Episode 5.2.1 investigates Aalto's 1953 sketches of a ruined wall and columns at Olympia, to consider significances of melancholy associated with ruins. Melancholy in Aalto's drawings of ruin fragments in the landscape is investigated partly through Pallasmaa's 'Melancholy and Time', and partly through Jessica Dubow, 'Still-life, after-life, nature morte' (2011).

5.2.2 1941 images: A damaged but still-beating heart

Episode 5.2.2 considers Aalto's 1941 images of wartime destruction as a compelling discourse on the plight of people affected by war. The atmosphere of the images prefaces Aalto's argument for quality planning and design for re-housing populations following wartime devastation and displacement, arguing against not only temporary building but the entire technologised apparatus of an industrialised *Existenzminimum* approach to mass re-housing.

5.2.3 Overgrowth: Parasitic plants at Aalto House

In episode 5.2.3 elements of nostalgia are observed in the unsettling phenomenon of living plants overgrowing Aalto's buildings. Plants appear not only as landscape materials but also as emblems or agents of ruin in Aalto's work, including Aalto Atelier. Key sources include Benjamin, Porphyrios, and Goldhagen. In Aalto's work a pattern of harmony is made up of smaller strategies of harmony, including the tension between the firmness of architecture and the dissolving, complexifying, ruinous overgrowth of plants.

5.2.1 Melancholy: Olympia ruin sketches

A Greek colonnade: Even as a ruin, it has a striking structural clarity and functionality.[743]

Aalto, 'The latest trends in architecture' (1928)

A distinct 'weakening' of the architectural image takes place through the processes of weathering and ruination. Erosion wipes away the layers of utility, rational logic and detail articulation, and pushes the structure into the realm of uselessness, nostalgia and melancholy. The language of matter takes over from the visual and formal effect, and the structure attains a heightened intimacy.[744]

Pallasmaa, 'Hapticity and time' (2000)

Relatedly, we might say that the force of *re*-presentation does not just turn on a constitutive absence. It also finds equivalence in that relationship to loss that we know as melancholia: a past instant, *here*, in front of us; insistently and incessantly present. Or, in Sebald's terms, it is about living amidst the inert, in that atemporal excess of time where a past instant cannot be conjoined with another future one, where the irreplaceable cannot be replaced: a *Vertigo*.[745]

Dubow, 'Still-life, after-life, *nature morte*' (2011)

Figure 5.12 AALTO Olympia, travel sketch, 1953
Source: *Sketches*

[743] Alvar Aalto, 'The latest trends in architecture' (1928), in *Own Words*, 61.
[744] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Hapticity and Time: Notes on fragile architecture', *The Architectural Review* 207, no.1 (2000): 83.
[745] Dubow, 'Still-life, after-life', 193.

This episode investigates atmosphere through the concept of melancholy, looking at Aalto's 1953 sketches of ancient Greek ruins at the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia.[746] In one sketch a relic wall stands in the landscape, a remaining vertical fragment (Fig.5.12). In another sketch, column capitals lie on the ground, in fragments among weeds (Fig.5.13). These sketches of contrasting ruin conditions, which are rarely investigated in detail, radiate a melancholy mortality in their dilapidation and neglect, suggesting the passing of time and a sense of mourning at the sight of cultural collapse. Yet in both sketches Aalto's precisely concentrated drawing also intimates a guarded optimism, suggesting the vital continuity of the thread of history into his version of modern architecture.

Figure 5.13 AALTO Olympia, travel sketch, 1953
Source: *Sketches*

Curtis, addressing modern approaches to ancient ruins and landscapes, cautions that viewing ruins 'is not a neutral exercise', observing that the viewer sees what they choose in the 'open text' of the ruin. He also describes viewing ruins as a process: 'One sees through the ruin to something generic, a principle ... which is in a sense invisible, and turns it into something else; one absorbs and one transforms'.[747] These processes of selection in the 1953 sketches bear fruit in their transformation in Aalto's later work.

The wall with its balancing stones, some carved in detail, recurs in the patched brick panels of the Muuratsalo House, and in the panels of tile, stone and contrasting materials found inlaid, inside and outside, in Aalto's walls after World War II. Elsewhere, the finely observed flutings of the Doric column, the annulets and the compressed capital, carry their embodied pathos into the tile-clad columns that populate Aalto's halls and lobbies. In particular the column flutings are dramatically transformed into the curved footings of the Aalto Atelier office, framing the amphitheatre with its scalloped base lapping around and supporting the long curve of the office wall (Fig.5.14).

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[746] Aalto, *Sketches*, 25, 27.

[747] William J.R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture, Mythical Landscapes & Ancient Ruins*, 1997 Soane Lecture (London: Sir John Soane's Museum, 1997), 2.

Figure 5.14 AALTO Aalto Atelier
Photograph by John Roberts, 2011

These uses of ruins, a kind of salvaging or re-use of ancient materials, represent a cultural trope used by modernist poet T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) to compose his poem 'The Waste Land' (1922), a method acknowledged near its conclusion: 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins'.[748] Eliot's architectural metaphor of shoring-up implies use of fragments to support an otherwise unstable structure; Aalto supported his modernism with historical fragments transformed from the past, sketched lying in the grasses and weeds of their overgrown classical site.

Porphyrios notes Aalto's 'historicist platform ... promulgated and practised since the early days of his career', when Aalto wrote, also in 1922, 'When we see how open-minded past ages have been without being untrue to themselves ... we can accept influences ... our forefathers will always be our preceptors.'[749] Aalto's tendency to resort to historic fragments, Porphyrios argues, is based on stylistic metaphor, owing its architectural status 'not to borrowed badges but to alluded kinship'.[750] This relationship to precedent and predecessors loses none of its pungency through being noted in the open-air museum of the Olympia relics.

Finnish architect Matti Sanaksenaho emphasises the need to experience Aalto's architecture firsthand: 'The best way to acquaint oneself with architecture is not to read about it: it is to look, touch, smell, and listen to it – a building only gains meaning when it becomes part of human life.'[751] The emotional impact of older buildings in situ, including the atmosphere of ruins, in their settings at Olympia, depends on lived experience and involvement with buildings in the landscape. Historic works, even, or especially, in their ruined fragmentary state, as Aalto's sketches indicate, remain emotively communicative and exemplary in their transposition into modern forms.

[748] T.S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), 79.
[749] Aalto, 'The Motifs of the Past' (1922), cited in Porphyrios, *Sources*, 44.
[750] Aalto, 'Motifs of the Past', in Porphyrios, *Sources*, 46.
[751] Matti Sananksenaho, 'Visiting the Houses of Aalto', in Nobuyuki Yoshida, ed., *Alvar Aalto Houses: Timeless Expressions* (Tokyo: A+U, 1998), 213.

Figure 5.15 AALTO Lyngby-Tarbaek landscape cemetery, site plan
Source: AAM

Pallasmaa invokes time in writing of the 'calming melancholy' of the cemetery, citing in particular Aalto's projected Lyngby-Tarbaek landscape cemetery in Denmark (Fig.5.15): 'Aalto's unexecuted crematorium project ... still radiates a calm and beautiful sense of time and melancholy. Architecture gives dignity to death.'[752] Pallasmaa concludes: 'Given our culture's rejection of time, contemporary architecture, however, is rarely capable of evoking an experience of *melancholia*.'[753] Aalto associates architecture, landscape and mortality, licensing architecture to evoke melancholic feelings, emotions more penetrating and complex than the simplicities of health or optimism implicit in modern white buildings.

The proposition made here, that melancholy should be considered in Aalto's work within (and against) the more generally utopian tenor of modernism, suggests an enriching contrary emotional framework as a further element of Aalto's heterodox modernism. For Aalto, moods and feelings were decisive; he wrote in 1922 of his appreciation of 'old architecture': 'The emotions it arouses are so elevated, even intoxicating, that we usually pay no attention at all to details – if there are any.'[754] He observed the need for feeling again later, remarking in 1950: 'Architecture must be deeply rooted in place and circumstance; it requires a delicate sense of form; it must support human emotions.'[755]

Historically, as literary educator Jonathan Flatley notes in *Affective Mapping* (2008), the melancholic was one of four humoral temperaments, including also the sanguine, the choleric, and the phlegmatic.[756]

> In the melancholic state, the world becomes a set of objects with no necessary function or meaning, the object world has been emptied of significance, and in this sense it has also been prepared for allegorical

[752] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Melancholy and Time' (1995), in McKeith, *Encounters*, 317.
[753] Pallasmaa, 'Melancholy and Time', 317.
[754] Alvar Aalto, 'Motifs from Past Ages' (1922), in *Own Words*, 33.
[755] Aalto, 'Eliel Saarinen', 246.
[756] Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 35.

> transformation. The melancholic state of mind, then, even as it dwells on ruins and loss, is at the same time liberated to imagine how the world might be transformed, how things might be entirely different from the way they are.[757]

This sense of transformation attached to melancholic viewing of ruins suits a view of Aalto's regard for ruins as both contemplative and active, as ruminative and creative, and as embracing the historical in search of the new and the newly modern.

Pallasmaa writes of permanence and transience as a central architectural concern, and of noticing and embracing materials changing slowly over time, in his example of shadows and rain emphasising a wall's permanence: 'Ruins make us experience this fragility and depth of time even more vividly than buildings that we use, having lost their mask of utility and become pure metaphysical devices.'[758] In a similar way, Aalto's heterodoxy may partly be found in a different way of thinking of time, an alternative atmosphere not of modern speed, but of temporality expressed in materials, in surfaces and in an emotional range which, once freed from a modern obligation to radiate positivity or happiness, could instead devise means to suggest sorrow, mourning, hesitation, nostalgia or melancholy.

The process of viewing and learning from ruins suggests that Aalto's drawings of ruins in the landscape at Olympia play a role in his work, in that the emotions sensed in an original setting, associated with ruin elements in a drawing, can be carried to inform later work elsewhere. This enduring presence of the past, rather than existing in memory or history, takes on a vital reality in the ruins of Olympia, where the visitor wanders amongst marble and stone fragments *in situ*, carnally 'amongst things', experiencing, and in Aalto's case sharply noting, ruins as more than random matter or picturesque sights.

The Aalto sketches may be seen as observations of atmosphere, of related experiences of mood, in ruin materials drawn differently, either a vestigial stone wall standing, or a jumble of collapsed column fragments lying fallen in the landscape. Scully notes that the landscape of Olympia, a site sacred to Zeus, would have been chosen in early pre-classical times for its special, even unique capacity 'to express the wholeness and oneness of the spiritual and physical universe', so that old and new, man and nature might be 'interrelated in a harmony' through the combination of sacred building and site.[759] Aalto wrote in 'Painters and Masons' (1921), 'Nothing old is ever re-born. But it never completely disappears, either. And anything that has ever been always re-emerges in a new form.'[760] The ruined building elements at Olympia are not in books or museums, but are standing and lying in their original landscape, effectively in a ruined state of harmony.

Aalto maintained harmony as the overarching aspiration for his architecture, and each sketch of a fragment suggests its own unity and harmony with the landscape. In

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[757] Flatley, *Affective Mapping,* 37.
[758] Pallasmaa, 'Melancholy and Time', 314-315.
[759] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 144.
[760] Alvar Aalto, 'Painters and Masons' (1921), in Ruusuvuori and Pallasmaa, *Alvar Aalto 1898-1976*, 69.

his sketches, the wall fragment stands in the sun amongst trees, silhouetted against the sky and the outline of a hill; its stones seem held in balance, even though missing the wall's greater body. The fluting and annulets of the marble Doric capitals, carved sharply on paper by the patient hand of Aalto, rest on the ground amongst weeds, flecked with lichen, missing their columns and their pediment. Aalto draws this ruined wall effectively in elevation, with attention to the individual stone slabs poised in the landscape, while the capitals and details are drawn with rhythm and repetition like the work of a craftsman, and the lichen and weeds are shown with little more than dots and scribble. But amongst the archaeological relics and the landscape settings, Aalto seems to want to capture and fix the atmosphere of the two different ruins in his drawings, where the architecture in the landscape of earth, sky, light, air and greenery are different in each. The wall drawing resonates as vertical and alert while the columns resonate with gravity and melancholic decay.

The ruin connects architecture directly with the space and character of landscape and the dynamic energies of the natural world. In connecting his architecture with landscape through his ruin sketches, Aalto overcomes an inherent melancholy to create a platform across time from which to approach his longed-for conditions of harmony through an alternative modern architecture linking the past to the present through ruins.

5.2.2 Nostalgia: 1941 Images: A damaged but still-beating heart

A generation that had gone to school in horse-drawn streetcars now stood in the open air, amid a landscape in which nothing was the same except the clouds and, at its center, in a force field of destructive torrents and explosions, the tiny, fragile human body.[761]

Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty' (c.1930)

Worse less. By no stretch more. Worse for want of better less. Less best. No. Naught best. Best worse. No. Not best worse. Naught not best worse. Less best worse. No. Least. Least best worse. Least never to be naught. Never to naught be brought. Never by naught be nulled. Unnullable least. Say that best worst. With leastening words say least best worse. For want of worser worse. Unlessenable least best worse.[762]

Beckett, 'Worstward Ho' (1983)

Aalto had witnessed the destruction of towns and cities in Finland. He saw it all burn, saw his Finnish friends in the utmost distress. Aalto realized that no soldier would want to return home from a hated barracks to live in exactly the same kind of building ... Aalto did not want to see his fellow countrymen and women in misery. They should stay on their own soil.[763]

Utzon and Sten Møller, 'Conversations' (2004)

Figure 5.16 AALTO Lecture image, 1941
Source: Aalto, 'Reconstruction of Europe', *Own Words*

[761] Walter Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty,' in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings,* Vol.2: 1927-1934, ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 732. See Emily Apter, 'En-*Chora*', *Grey Room* 20 (2005): 81-82.

[762] Samuel Beckett, 'Worstward Ho' (1983), in *Company, Ill Seen Ill Said, Worstward Ho, Stirrings Still*, ed. Dirk Van Hulle (London: Faber, 2009), 95.

[763] Utzon and Sten Møller, 'Conversations', 8.

A series of slide photographs, depicting women cooking outdoors, and children and old people amongst ruined buildings, tents and shacks, struggling to rebuild amidst the rubble of war, was projected by Aalto in lectures in Switzerland in 1941 (Fig.5.16). Shown to support his ideas for planning and housing to re-house Finns displaced in the 1939-40 Winter War, Aalto's slides reflect an atmosphere of loss while also demonstrating Finnish resilience (embodied in the term *sisu*).[764] The wartime shock of dispossession of people and destruction of buildings is captured in these images, of which Aalto writes directly:

> A touching example of life starting anew is the peasant woman who has found her oven intact among the ruins of her home and is now baking her first loaves of bread there. This is a home without walls or roof, with its damaged but still-beating heart ... And so life goes on. Despite its primitive character, it slowly and touchingly takes on ever richer forms ... work, joy, satisfaction, and rest merge into a harmonious unity.[765]

Jørn Utzon remarked in 2004 that 'Aalto had witnessed the destruction of towns and cities in Finland. He saw it all burn, saw his Finnish friends in the utmost distress.'[766] Aalto's images, with their air of resilience, create an emotional atmosphere of suffering and rebirth, and of hope in the rubble. Yet the terror of World War II with its aerial bombings of cities and its effects on populations, societies and individuals, can also be overlooked. This episode considers Aalto's ruin images in terms of the atmospheric sense of inside becoming outside through destruction, and reflects on the implications and architectural consequences of war images in Aalto's work.

Figure 5.17 St Lô, Normandy, 1944
Source: Bundesarchiv / Wikimedia

The photograph of a young woman resolutely baking bread 'among the ruins of her home' concentrates war's catastrophic consequences into one image. As a writer comments on Samuel Beckett's 1946 account of the Allied bombing of St Lô,

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[764] Emilia Lahti, 'Embodied fortitude: An introduction to the Finnish construct of sisu', *International Journal of Wellbeing 9*, no.1 (2019): 61-82.

[765] Alvar Aalto, 'The Reconstruction of Europe is the key problem for the architecture of our time' (1941), in *Own Words*, 150.

[766] Utzon and Sten Møller, 'Conversations', 8.

Normandy, in July 1944, named 'the Capital of the Ruins' (Fig.5.17): 'The destruction is rendered more potent by the familiar fragments of civilization now absurdly denatured: a bedstead lying in the open air ... remainders and reminders of wholeness.'[767] Aalto's image of the terrifying wartime destruction of dwellings, in the picture of an open-air kitchen, opens a field of 'ruin thinking' that turns from abstract thought to brutal actuality.

While Aalto could construct a lecture around provocative images to turn an audience's thoughts toward reconstruction, the image remains as an indicator of what could be at stake in architecture as he saw it. Against the terror of aerial bombardment, a contemporary version of the 'total war' carried out by armed forces against defenseless civilian populations, re-building through architecture could re-house people in sympathetic buildings rather than in a 'hated barracks' of industrialised housing. Aalto's examples of housing included the site-integrated housing for managers and workers at Sunila (1936-37), where he presented a sustained and coherent attitude towards the challenges of prewar modernisation.[768] Schildt notes Aalto's 'visionary', even 'revolutionary' approach to housing before World War II: 'the location of housing units in a living forest setting, the ingeniously varied floor plans with balconies and garden areas, the convenient access routes, and the pleasant recreation areas. All this was unusual and somewhat revolutionary at the time.[769]

Aalto was using images to argue for his proposed model of suitable housing reconstruction, arguing that 'harmonious unity' could not be attained simply by harnessing the emergent technologies of mass production, but would need to be more finely attuned in response to local site conditions and the nature of each community. Aalto held strong convictions on the balance of landscape and technology as factors in the reconstruction, which he argued, should be inspired by biological not technical models, and should respond in the forms of his proposed houses to site conditions, as Moravansky notes: 'He stressed that standardization in architecture should be based on biological models: "If the character of the landscape is such – should we really build this way?"'[770] Aalto insisted on the need for a strongly qualitative approach to reconstruction. In this context of reconstruction, Scully recalls a 1947 lecture by Aalto, who likened the reconstruction of Finland to that of Periclean Athens: 'he drew the Acropolis and its setting on the blackboard ... Then he said, "In Finland in the reconstruction we will build no temporary buildings, because not by temporary building comes Parthenon on Acropolis."'[771]

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[767] Dúnlaith Bird, 'Light, Landscape and Beckett', *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd'hui* 24 (2012): 240. Reference is to Samuel Beckett, 'The Capital of the Ruins', in *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose 1929-1989*, ed. S.E. Gontarski (New York: Grove, 1996), 275-278.

[768] See Michael Chapman & John Roberts, 'Industrial Organisms', *Fabrications: The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia and New Zealand* 24, no.1 (2014): 72-91.

[769] Akos Moravánsky, 'Baker House and Brick: Aalto's Construction of a Building Material', in Anderson, et al, *Aalto and America*, 211.

[770] Moravánsky, 'Baker House and Brick', 211.

[771] Vincent Scully, 'RIBA Discourse 1969: A Search for Principle between Two Wars' (1969), in *Modern Architecture and Other Essays*, ed. Neil Levine (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 151.

And so in 1941 Aalto argued at length against not only temporary building but against the entire technologised apparatus of an industrialised *Existenzminimum* approach to mass re-housing. Aalto's images show the impacts of war destruction on women, children and old people, leaving them unhoused, baking and cooking outdoors in the raw atmosphere of the open air and the rubble of houses. Despite the apparent pathos of his images, Aalto opposes instant, low-cost mass re-housing of Finnish communities, and praises the efforts of the people in his photographs to re-build for themselves. Aalto insisted that not only was re-housing whole communities in their existing locations essential, but also that the landscape should be more than a mere area for housing. He argued that the real price paid for the cheap comforts of industrialised housing is 'a certain disharmony', and that where an individual house 'no longer grows out of its site and for the people who live in it', there can occur a rupture with the 'genuine psychological needs' of the individual, threatening inner balance and social harmony for both individuals and society.[772]

Ultimately, however, despite his plans for reconstruction of Rovaniemi,[773] Aalto was largely unable to achieve his aims of fully rebuilding Finnish towns in harmony with landscape or the lives of their inhabitants, for reasons beyond the scope of the present study, but which include the difficulties of using tradition and typology to reconcile differences between, to use the words of Porphyrios, 'a culture of workmanship and one of consumption.'[774] Even as Aalto worked his discourse through images of ruins and of resilient Finns, his project of naturalistic reconstruction foundered, his town plans defaulting instead to modernist diagrams of the industrial city, resembling more the Ville Radieuse of Le Corbusier than his own ideal of the forest town. Porphyrios notes that 'However enthusiastic and sincere his passion for naturalism,' as at Rovaniemi, 'Aalto's planning method was the disenchanted method of Modernism',[775] rather than perhaps an adherence to the models he had noted in Italy, in the hill towns, not only resting on terraces and hilltops but also crafted of limited, walled structures aligned as much from within as from the landscape beyond. Perhaps in seeking to make new human, urban places Aalto had found the limits to landscape; perhaps a method lay rather in a longer process, in a balance of old and new, of town and country, and of the relation of particular and general in landscape and in architecture.

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772 Aalto, 'The Reconstruction of Europe', 150.

773 On Rovaniemi, see McCarter, *Aalto*, 212-246; Trencher, *Alvar Aalto Guide*, 181, 188.

774 Porphyrios, *Sources*, 112-113. On Aalto's planning, see Porphyrios, *Sources*, 83-107.

775 Porphyrios, *Sources*, 106.

5.2.3 Overgrowth: Parasitic plants at the Aalto House

> In Finland, we have difficulties with this process of alchemy ... We also tried out the effect of plants on the brick material. It gives the architect a jolt when he suddenly discovers yellow blossoming parasitic plants on his bricks, and however trivial such things may seem, they do provide impulses.[776]
>
> Aalto, 'Between humanism and materialism' (1955)

> Approached with no reverence or historical awe, ruins are frequently exceptional spaces of unusual complexity which offer unique relations between access and barrier, the open and the closed, the diagonal and the horizontal, ground plane and wall. Such are not to be found in structures that have escaped the twin entropic assaults of nature and the vandal.[777]
>
> Morris, 'The Present Tense of Space' (1978)

> Landscapes refuse to be disciplined. They make a mockery of the oppositions that we create between time (History) and space (Geography), or between nature (Science) and culture (Social Anthropology).[778]
>
> Bender, in Massey, *for space* (2005)

Figure 5.18 AALTO Muuratsalo House, courtyard
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

Plants abound inside and outside Aalto's buildings, growing in pots on the balconies at Paimio, in boxes in the Viipuri Library foyer, encrusting stairs and blurring inside-outside distinctions in Villa Mairea. The roofs of saunas at Villa Mairea and Muuratsalo are planted with turf, while vines routinely overgrow inner and outer walls

[776] Aalto, 'Between humanism and materialism', 180.
[777] Robert Morris, 'The Present Tense of Space', *Art in America* (1978): 76. Cited in Karsten Harries, 'Building and the Terror of Time', *Perspecta* 19 (1982): 68.
[778] Barbara Bender, in Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London; Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2005), 138.

of Aalto's own buildings, at Muuratsalo House (Fig.5.18), Aalto Atelier (Fig.5.19), and Aalto House (Fig.5.21). Aalto drew large trellises for plant growth and shade on the curved façade of Baker House dormitory at MIT (1949) (Fig.5.23), and installed vertical trellises to encourage growth of vines over sections of the Villa Mairea (Fig.5.20).

Figure 5.19 AALTO Aalto Atelier
Photograph by John Roberts, 2011

Aalto regularly included plants in his architecture, expediently placing moveable pot plants indoors, at Villa Mairea encouraging vines with trellises outdoors (Fig.5.20), and referring or inflecting to existing mature trees as necessary. This episode investigates overgrowth as a tactic of natural ruin and decay tolerated and even encouraged by Aalto throughout his career. It connects a landscape-related phenomenon of overgrowth in Aalto's work to aspects of embodiment, and reflects on dimensions of harmony that emerge through Aalto's tactics of overgrowing plant life on walls.

Figure 5.20 AALTO Villa Mairea, courtyard
Photograph by John Roberts, 2011

Nature seems to pose a constant threat to architecture, potentially dissolving its solid forms and compromising its sheltering stability through the agency of growing plants. Baird proposes the opposition of planting and building as a key duality appearing in the 'ruined' appearance of Aalto's buildings, where he frames overgrowth as nature's near-irresistible invasion of architecture: 'the built-form and the planting represent a fundamental and ironic antagonism. It is as though the final victory of nature over the vulnerable creations of mankind had already been conceded in Aalto's works at their inception.'[779] Implicit here is Aalto's complicity in these strategies of concession to a rogue nature, his willingness to encourage overgrowth to destabilise modern ideals of form and space.

Pallasmaa in *The Eyes of the Skin* argues for attention to be paid to hapticity and time in Aalto's work, and upends the normative logic of building's intrusive relation with landscape with his radical suggestion that 'Architecture is essentially an extension of nature into the manmade realm'.[780] In this reversal of a normal anthropocentric version of order, nature seems determined, and possibly destined, to extend into architecture and to overgrow buildings. Such an anxious view of nature's menace creates a conceptual unease or tension between architecture and landscape.

Figure 5.21 AALTO Aalto House, Helsinki
Photographs by John Roberts, 2008, 2011

In a related connection, landscape gardener and educator Julian Raxworthy refers to the 'viridic', derived from the Latin term for green, as a site- and ground-related landscape practice related to vegetation and natural growth.[781] In terms of architecture's ruins the viridic offers a vegetative counterpoint to built tectonics, a dynamic agency capable of overgrowing, softening, decaying, and hastening the collapse of built fabric (Fig.5.21). The viridic can be seen as the power of nature embodied in the action of growth, transforming inert building materials and forms, at once breaking them down and building them up to create new semi-living entities.

[779] Baird, *Alvar Aalto*, 13.

[780] Pallasmaa, *Eyes of the Skin*, 41.

[781] Julian Raxworthy, *Overgrown: Practices between Landscape Architecture and Gardening* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018).

Figure 5.22 AALTO House of Culture / Kultuuritalo
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

Aalto's potted plants were not integrated with his architecture in the manner of Frank Lloyd Wright, who, notes Gissen, 'designed vases and planters specifically for the display of weeds' in his Chicago houses.[782] Aalto instead placed plants indoors post-construction, or clumped planting outdoors near walls and columns, more like an amateur gardener than a landscape architect, adding, but not incorporating, plants as a commonplace strategy to overwhelm and vivify a blank wall or to animate a manmade surface with contrasting organic silhouettes. Aalto indulged the mature growth of plant material over walls, to the degree that plants obscure windows and transform the materiality of walls, from the outside of the House of Culture (Fig.5.22) to the inside of the Aalto Atelier.

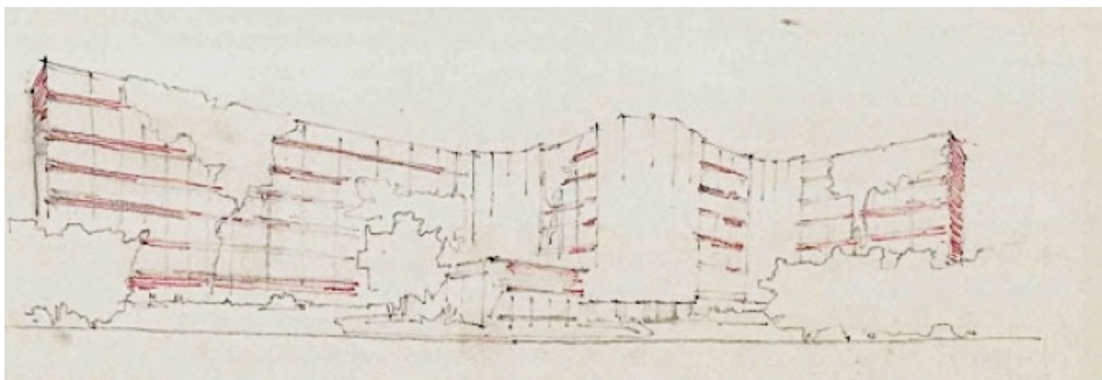

Figure 5.23 AALTO Baker House, project sketch
Source: AAM

Dalibor Vesely in *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation* (2004) writes about the artificial overgrowth of rocaille, an eighteenth century mode of decoration that appears like a form of 'unfinished nature', 'more like a fragment or ruin than a complete creation.' However, remarks Vesely,

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[782] David Gissen, *Subnature: Architecture's other environments* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009), 156.

> ... this unfinished nature is intentional, for it expresses the possibility of completion in the future in the same way that an organism attains fulfillment, wholeness, and perfection through growth. The late-eighteenth-century fascination with fragments, torsos, and ruins cannot be explained simply as reflecting nostalgia for the past; rather, it is the discovery of a creative power that determines the rise and fall of civilizations, a power with which humans can identify.[783]

This perversely creative potential that shines through in the destructive capacity of overgrowing nature is an essential paradox inherent in attaching architecture to nature, with its cycles of birth, growth and death. The overgrowth in and on Aalto's buildings, often drawn but rarely integrated in the building, is like a *memento mori* in reverse, a green death's-head that memorialises the cycles of life not through skulls and bones, but through vines on walls and potted plants in foyers.

Aalto said that at Muuratsalo he had 'tried out the effects of plants on the brick material. It gives the architect a jolt when he suddenly discovers yellow blossoming parasitic plants on his bricks, and however trivial such things may seem, they do provide impulses.'[784] Important here are two related things: the natural-alchemical assay of plants to see how they might affect 'the brick material' of outdoor walls; and the 'impulses' flowing from the experiment, either the immediate feelings of the encounter with the 'parasitic' overgrowth, of dread or surprise, nostalgia or melancholy at nature's momentary triumph, or artistic echoes of a confidence to work in ways that maintain complex relationships with nature without trying to erase the different material and emotive potentials of nature and architecture.

Geographer Barbara Bender proposes that 'Landscapes refuse to be disciplined.'[785] Beyond human classification, urging or control, landscape and nature seem to indicate their power, a wayward energy whose 'impulses' Aalto was able to work with, to welcome, anticipate, and accommodate in his architecture. In Aalto's work an overall pattern of harmony appears to be built up of smaller, though no less important, strategies of harmony, such as the tension between the firmness of architecture and the dissolving, complexifying, ruinous overgrowth of plants. Goldhagen concludes that scientists 'continue to unearth our complex psychological and neurological responses to surface-based cues such as materials, textures, colours, pliability, and density. Exploring the canonical and mirror neuron responses to textures and materials is a rich area for future research.'[786] The relationships between natural and artificial materials in Aalto's buildings and their effects on perception and wellbeing offer areas for such research.

Ultimately, in historical terms, the atmosphere of ruins becomes layered over and acquires further dimensions of indeterminacy and life by effulgent natural growth. The forms, shadows, movement and potential for unpredictable change linked with

[783] Dalibor Vesely, *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation* (Cambridge, MA; London: The MIT Press, 2004), 330.
[784] Aalto, 'Between humanism and materialism', 179-180.
[785] Bender, in Massey, *For Space*, 138.
[786] Goldhagen, *Welcome to your World*, 161.

natural overgrowing greenery – flowers and fruit, harbour for spiders, birds and rare or pestilent species, new smells and sounds, or undermining and collapse – bring a viridic dimension to architecture that was further encouraged and accommodated in Aalto's screens, pergolas and potted *Monstera* specimens. From the six-storey screens on Baker House to the fine vertical trellises of Villa Mairea, Aalto anticipated and made architectural provision for active natural plant growth. The creative power of growth and ruins links his architecture to the past, to nature and to landscape, and also implies a future within which change and growth, overgrowth and collapse, combining landscape and architecture, links the known with the unknown, and to unforeseeable atmospheres, invaded by nature and lived and sensed over time.

5.2.4 Conclusion: Ruins and Atmosphere

Bender's admonition that landscapes 'refuse to be disciplined' can apply also to ruins, making clear that ruins are not picturesque, nor passive, nostalgic, melancholic images of sentimental decay. Instead, ruins have their own agency, whether of the past, of war, or of destructively churning natural ebullience. Ruins can both refuse and *con*fuse the discipline of modernism, whether lying in the Mediterranean sun in the disarray of the once-great classical site of Olympia, scattered around the salvaged bread-ovens of bombarded Finland in 1941, or crumbling under the assault of growing vines and weeds in Aalto's own buildings.

Grosz's idea that nature offers neither a ground nor a limit to culture but rather makes cultural life dynamic, making it 'grow and be capable of reorienting itself', emerges in a study of the vivifying effect of ruins in Aalto's architecture. Aalto notices nostalgia and melancholy but refuses to have his architecture disoriented by these ambiences. Instead, his architecture, through his sketches and uses of ruins, through his images of individual and communal resilience, and through his opening of his architecture to green growth and organic natural urgency, places his work amidst Grosz's observed natural forces, which can keep latent and release into culture the indeterminate, the unknown, the dynamic: 'The most dynamic elements of architecture, as well as those of the arts and social and political life, aspire to revel in the sheer thrill of the unknown.'[787]

In ruins Aalto could find the indeterminacy of nature and its liberation from the constraining framework of modernism, rationality, and technologised construction and society. In the unruly atmospheres of ruins, Aalto could see an architectural alternative to modern speed and smoothness. From ruins, Aalto drew on precedent, on collapse and disarray, and on the fine lines of humanism etched on relics and in standing stone fragments. Through ruins architecture could acquire layers of feeling and of time, atmospheric qualities that distinguish his architecture and grant it a profound cultural basis, shifting it towards a heterodoxy of his own making.

[787] Grosz, 'The In-Between', 105.

5.3 Ruins and Embodiment

5.3.0 Introduction: Ruins and Embodiment

In this section's three episodes, the phenomenological strand of Embodiment is used to consider history, inside-outside relations, and temporality in aspects of Ruins in Aalto's architecture.

This section deals with the proximity of the body to nature in its experience of architecture with a ruined quality, where the influence of the idea of ruins can be seen where the building exchanges materials, spatiality and experience with the adjacent outdoor space or landscape, allowing the body the feeling or experience of landscape while remaining in the shelter, space or comfort of the building. In turn, the consciousness of the architecture can be argued as embodied more than thought or seen.

Summary: Ruins and Embodiment

5.3.1 Inseparable: Aalborg Gallery amphitheatre

Episode 5.3.1 investigates the influence of Aalto's 1950s amphitheatre sketches on design and experience of the amphitheatre form in Aalto's work, particularly at Aalborg Museum. It looks at the Greek theatre as drawn in the landscape of Delphi by Aalto, in light of Scully's comments on classical conceptions of relations between landscape and building. It considers the significance of ruins in the landscape as they inform Aalto's design methods, through Vesely's thinking on fragments and ruins.

5.3.2 Two niches: Inside and outside at Säynatsälo and Villa Mairea

Episode 5.3.2 considers embodiment and ruins in elements at Säynatsälo Town Hall and Villa Mairea, where built niches appear to dissolve or break the outline of the building at the spatial edge between inside and outside. As built forms, these elements locate the fragile human body in and with the architecture, where it challenges inside-outside distinctions. Harries's 'Building and the Terror of Time' provides a background for discussion of time as the putative 'enemy' of buildings, from their completion to their later decay, collapse and demolition, or alteration and rebirth.

5.3.3 The End: Ruins and mortality at Muuratsalo

To conclude the thesis, episode 5.3.3 returns to Muuratsalo House, Aalto's workplace and hideaway, a place mingling mind and senses in building in the Finnish landscape. Muuratsalo, built for 'work between swims', embraces the duality of work and play as its basis for meditation on architecture, landscape and life, and on mortality and transience. Yet mortality haunts the summerhouse in its ruin elements. Notions of transience and mortality are explored through this final episode, noting cultural and emotional resonances of Poussin's landscape painting *Et in Arcadia ego.* Ideas of beginnings and endings emerge out of extended thinking on Muuratsalo House, close to Aalto's self and mortal body in the Muuratsalo landscape.

5.3.1 Inseparable: Aalborg Gallery amphitheatre

> I am inclined to believe that history offers a kind of statistics on how human beings react to their surroundings ... [788]
>
> Aalto, 'Rationalism and Man' (1935)

> A single person standing in the orchestra ... seems to have had the entire landscape constructed around himself.[789]
>
> Scully, *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods* (1979)

> ... the room that "animates" the building makes a reference to the landscape, whether a surrounding landscape, an ancient landscape or an interior landscape. The room and the landscape are related to lend meaning to each other, and they are often made interdependent in the way that a hillside and an amphitheatre are inseparable.[790]
>
> Andresen, 'Ancient Gathering forms' (2011)

Figure 5.24 AALTO Aalborg Gallery, sketch; plan
Source: *Alvar Aalto Band I*

In a particular instance of the outdoor amphitheatre, against the forms of the landscape of Aalborg in northern Denmark, Aalto locates the amphitheatre of the North Jutland Art Museum (1972) (referred to here as Aalborg Gallery) behind the

[788] Alvar Aalto, 'Rationalism and Man' (1935), in *Own Words*, 92.
[789] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods*, 115.
[790] Andresen, 'Ancient Gathering Forms', 44-45.

gallery and against the slope of a wooded hill (Fig.5.24). Treib suggests that the outdoor theatre and sculpture terraces with their 'inherent references to classical antiquity' were 'compounded by the associations with ruins and the passage of time', and represent 'the position of the museum as part of a continuing historical process.'[791] The theatre is settled firmly against the vegetated hillside, from which its tiered seats, encased in sculptural white walls, flow between the hill slope and the levelled land of the larger sculpture garden that bounds the building and extends the gallery.

Characterising the fit between human and landscape that can be enabled by a work of architecture, Andresen writes, 'The room and the landscape are related to lend meaning to each other, and they are often made interdependent in the way that a hillside and an amphitheatre are inseparable.'[792] Going beyond a standard relationship of practical and convenient location, this idea addresses and highlights the alignment between body and landscape that is given form in the outdoor amphitheatre, where the lesson of relating human social presence to socially meaningful landscape is embodied in a collective form where each individual is accommodated. Seated in the landscape in rows of seats, the audience member enjoys community participation, an organised view of a spectacle, and a liberating connection to a landscape with its own meanings through connection with the community through historical events or its inherently provident material agricultural value as the chōra of the city (as noted in 5.1.1).

Figure 5.25 AALTO Aalborg Gallery
Photograph by John Roberts, 2008

Aalto's outdoor amphitheatres offer examples of how architecture can locate experience, both resembling being in the landscape, and also in the landscape itself. Through the outdoor theatre, seemingly inseparable from its site, the human individual and group audience can be located in the landscape after a Classical example that brings architecture and landscape together in new syntheses based on an ancient type. The amphitheatre has a particular exemplar in the outdoor theatre at

[791] Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', 56-57.
[792] Andresen, 'Ancient Gathering Forms', 44-45.

Aalborg Gallery, where the built form settles into an existing hill, in a strategy that arguably continues the historical archetype, installing and adapting it to suit modern urban settings (Fig.5.25).

Figure 5.26 AALTO Jyväskylä University Main Building, outdoor amphitheatre
Photographs by John Roberts, 2008

The outdoor amphitheatre, understood as a natural landscape sculpted rationally for human needs and action, and guided by repetitive curved geometry, may be seen as a geometricised landscape, and so a dualistic cultural archetype, ontologically in-between architecture and landscape. As it appears outdoors in Aalto's work, notably at Aalborg Gallery, and at Aalto Atelier (Fig.5.19) and Jyväskylä University (Fig.5.26), the amphitheatre sustains a mythic presence: part-natural, part-artificial in conception; half-ancient, half-modern in its historical presence; and partly inside, partly outside in its basic spatiality. This dualistic reality also happily accommodates the essential human processes of gathering to listen, take part in, and be affected by social, religious or artistic rituals; tiered seats embody social constructs, either of equality or rank, while closely arrayed seating enacts a form of social cohesion and supports corporate organisation and behaviour.

Enjoyed by audiences indoors and outdoors, the activities of theatre also had the potential to present audiences with a framed vista of their own country as a backdrop to meaningful rituals, so that the amphitheatre could capture people emotionally and intellectually with landscape views that might hold secret, sacred or historical meanings.

Figure 5.27 AALTO Delphi, sketch, 1953
Source: Aalto, *Own Words*

Aalto's travel sketches include drawings of the outdoor theatre at Delphi (Fig.5.27), where the tiered seats seem carved out of the living material of the mountainside, to resonate in space and even acoustically with the space and steep walls of the facing valley.

Figure 5.28 AALTO Calascibetta, sketch, 1952
Source: Aalto, *Own Words*

Aalto also sketched the hillside of Calascibetta in Sicily (Fig.5.28), where agricultural terraces, a natural concave hillside, paths and a hilltop town are enfolded into a single construction where human and natural imperatives are entangled and interwoven in a single conceptual landscape construct. Aalto found this kind of seemingly unforced harmony between architecture and landscape overwhelmingly attractive, and took upon himself the task of re-enacting such ideal forms of urban

unity with nature in the landscapes of Finland, where he could complain gently of 'the lack of a distinct architecture which would blend harmoniously with the landscape.'[793]

Anthropologist Kenneth Olwig, in 'Has geography always been modern?' (2008), describes the spatial formations and social relationships of the ancient Greek theatre:

> The Greek theatre formed a nearly circular cone pointing downward, so that the public was wrapped part of the way around the circular area called the orchestra, where the play took place at the bottom. The players below thus looked up to, and were subsumed by, the collectivity of the polity ... This was a holy place, dedicated to Dionysius. The room of the theatre was thus defined by its centre, which gathered together players, chorus, and public.[794]

Olwig resists commenting on the connection of the 'room of the theatre' to its immediate ground or to middle- or far distant landforms, leaving the theatre typically as a socially focused construct, seemingly built with care for ritual and even divinity but with little regard for the greater external question of meaningful siting in a meaningful landscape. The outdoor theatre appears to have been revived by Aalto, born out of a notion of involving people with both the natural world and with Olwig's 'collectivity of the polity'.

Scully maintains that the classical Greek theatre was located and designed to link theatre participants with the earth as a meaningful venue for habitation. The Greek theatre was not designed to completely enclose space but instead 'to present the clearly abstract, man-made patterns of its drama' against a stage, beyond which 'the greater scale of the natural landscape could open out'.[795] Scully concludes that the evidence of theatre location gives 'good reason to include the Greek theatre among the elements [through which] post-classic cities projected themselves onto the landscape and through which they echoed and complemented distant landscape forms.'[796]

Yet Aalto seemed unwilling, unable or uninterested in his amphitheatre designs to follow the Greek example and relate the theatre to the landscape for his audiences by extending or framing views beyond his indoor and outdoor theatres. Perhaps Aalto felt, and resisted, the temptation to indulge what could seem like 'picturesque' ideas in connecting with landscape views. The classical Greek mentality appears to have related theatre audiences to a meaningful visible landscape through the orientation and form of the theatre. Yet when an educator can write of the Greek theatre, 'the pure geometry of the circled flat space contrasts with and isolates itself from the roughness of the surrounding terrain',[797] it becomes clear that the concept of connecting an outdoor theatre with what lies beyond and in plain view may not be

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[793] Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland', 22.

[794] Kenneth R. Olwig, 'Has geography always been modern?: *Choros*, (non)representation, performance, and the landscape', *Environment and Planning A,* 40 (2008): 1852.

[795] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods*, 192-193.

[796] Scully, *The Earth, the Temple*, *and the Gods*, 193.

[797] Simon Unwin, 'Theatre', in *The Ten Most Influential Buildings in History: Architecture's Archetypes* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2017), 129.

commonly held in the contemporary world, where the outside world can be ignored or disregarded as little more than rough terrain.

Figure 5.29 Delphi, theatre and landscape
Source: Scully, *The Natural and the Manmade*

Scully also considers the particulars of the amphitheatre at Delphi, which Aalto memorably sketched in 1953 (Fig.5.27), bringing out the qualities of the landscape in his observations. At Delphi, notes Scully, the seats of the theatre (Fig.5.29), shared between Apollo and Dionysos, 'settle back into the hollow of the slope. Their convex shape complements an especially concave outpouring of rock on the slope across the valley ... From higher up, the effect of union with the landscape is even more striking.'[798] The point of this hard-won unity is a vast rhyming relationship with the earth, to demonstrate in sight and through feeling, a transformation effected through maintaining connection with strongly defended territory, as Scully describes, 'transforming ancient victory into some measure of kinship with the land.'[799]

In Aalto's Aalborg amphitheatre what seems indisputable, despite a lack of distant views, is Aalto's desire to seat his audience on and in the surface of the earth, a strategy which in phenomenological terms outweighs sight lines by affirming the relationship with the ground, by seating the body with its back to the protective hill, while the front and sides of the body engage with the sun and a cultural spectacle. In the rows and terraces of the amphitheatre settling back into the slope of the site, as Andresen writes of relations between the unique room in Aalto's buildings and the landscape, 'The room and the landscape … are often made interdependent in the way that a hillside and an amphitheatre are inseparable.'[800] As for the ancient Greeks, so for Aalto, the unique room of the outdoor theatre becomes in both conceptual and experiential terms inseparable from the earth, developing its own meanings through creating and sustaining proximity between people and landscape.

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[798] Scully, *The Natural and the Manmade*, 63.
[799] Scully, *The Natural and the Manmade,* 63.
[800] Andresen, 'Ancient Gathering Forms', 44-45.

5.3.2 Two niches: Inside and outside at Säynatsälo and Villa Mairea

> But if you want my blessing for your home, it should have one further characteristic: *you must give yourself away in some little detail*. Your home should show up some little weakness of yours . . . no architectural creation is complete without some such trait; it will not be alive. This trait can be compared to the need for a particularly subtle kind of humour to expose one's own weaknesses.[801]
>
> Aalto, 'Doorstep' (1926)

> I believe that there are many moments in life in which the way things are organized is too brutal, and it is for the architects to give life a more sensitive framework.[802]
>
> Aalto, 'Between humanism and materialism' (1955)

> Such volumetric and iconographic "erosion" ... undoubtedly has its roots in the classical iconography of the niche and the semi-circle ...[803]
>
> Porphyrios, *Sources* (1982)

> The ruin is made meaningful by the interposition, between object and viewer, of a frail human figure.[804]
>
> Dillon, 'Fragments from a History of Ruin' (2006)

Figure 5.30 AALTO Säynatsälo Town Hall
Photograph by John Roberts, 2011

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[801] Aalto, 'Doorstep', 55; Aalto's italics.
[802] Aalto, 'Between humanism and materialism', 179.
[803] Porphyrios, *Sources*, 94.
[804] Brian Dillon, 'Fragments from a History of Ruin', *Cabinet* 20 (2006), 9/9.

Embodiment and ruins are connected in this episode through two 'niches', two different spatial elements in renowned Aalto buildings. At Säynatsälo Town Hall the corridor between ground floor rooms of the main administrative wing is widened at its corner to make a small but socially practical widening. The space juts into the garden and is furnished with a bench whose brick seat continues the existing seating along the corridor (Fig.5.30).

Figure 5.31 AALTO / LINKE Villa Mairea
Source: Armin Linke, in *Second Nature*

In the Villa Mairea fireplace a curvaceous three-dimensional niche, seemingly sculpted from the mass of the large fireplace, sits between inside and outside at the very corner of the fireplace, creating a unique small space with no clear utility (Fig.5.31). Both elements alter their corner settings and reveal different traces of human presence in the room and in the landscape, and they do so by interposing between object and viewer 'a frail human figure',[805] who, even when absent, seems to occupy a fragile zone between the building and the natural world outside.

This episode concerns embodiment and ruins in these two small niche elements in renowned Aalto buildings. Neither element appears either literally or metaphorically as a 'ruin', yet, by their human scale, their fragmentary nature, and their position in their respective buildings between inside and outside, each 'niche' interrupts the rigid order of the building by dissolving some part of its ideal wholeness to establish a detail that articulates the harmony Aalto sought in architecture between architecture and landscape. The embodiment of human activity and presence in these examples demonstrates Aalto's interest in ruins at the level of singular elements and details. Reflecting human presence and participation in the architecture, these detailed elements install the outer natural landscape within the building, while creating a body-related space that uses the conventional order of the architecture to transgress its own limits and locate the body at the edge of the architecture in the landscape.

Considering the theme of Ruins, philosopher Karsten Harries in 'Building and the Terror of Time' (1982) provides a general background for responses to an

[805] Dillon, 'Fragments', 9/9.

architectural commonplace, the notion of time as the ‘enemy’ of buildings, which can seem doomed from the moment of their completion to decay, collapse, demolition, or simply to change over time.[806] The theme of temporality and its implications for both the living and mortal human body and the unliving but mortal building is at stake, perhaps threatened, when Aalto introduces growing and overgrowing plants close by his built walls. Temporality becomes history in Aalto’s Delphi sketches, drawn as research and processed to become new material for Aalto’s modernism in his auditoria and outdoor amphitheatres. The body becomes memorialised and its presence preserved in the building, regardless of time, through tropes of shelter, memory and the built ruin,[807] and in the perpetual proximity of Aalto’s niches to the garden and its seasonal and mortal temporality.

Aalto recognises the potential to be unlocked in relations between architecture and landscape in the ‘Doorstep’ essay (1926), where he argues that ‘Two things stand out plainly: the unity of the room, the external wall and the garden, and the formation of these elements so as to give the human figure prominence and express her state of mind.’[808] Seen this way, this landscape-related architecture becomes part of a discourse with psychological and phenomenological implications, putting the human figure’s sense of self and her social, spatial presence at stake between inside and outside.

Landscape theorist James Corner has argued for recognition of the ‘deeply sensuous and experiential’ dimensions of landscape, ‘heightening experiences, and embedding time and nature in the built world’.[809] Here, in two Aalto works, a personal and sensuous carved niche at the Villa Mairea and a social bench placing people close to, or in, a garden space at Säynätsalo, the outside world emerges not as a backdrop but as an interwoven part of a world where architecture and landscape need each other to be related, even mutually ‘embedded’ to create a harmonious whole.

At Säynätsalo the individual or small group can withdraw from the regular social space to read, think or converse, effectively in the garden, while optionally participating in interior life. The courtyard, with its sun, vines, water and levelled grass space becomes the container of the intimate space of the bench: one sits in, not beside the courtyard. While the inner context is social, even petty-bureaucratic, the outer context is carnally amongst the ‘things of the world’, to use Merleau-Ponty’s phrase; inside the administrative complex the individual can sit, wait, relax, worry, close to the outside world, beside the snow, vines or sun.

At Villa Mairea, the niche hovers between inside and outside, containing light, and seeming to echo the curves of landscape things: the pool, the artificial hill, clouds, snow, the swirling river below the house. Positioned at a corner of a larger corner of the greater house, the niche is at once at the periphery and at the centre of perception of the room, altering and de-stablilising its geometry with curved forms

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[806] Karsten Harries, ‘Building and the Terror of Time’, *Perspecta* 19 (1982): 58-69.
[807] Harries, ‘Building and the Terror of Time’, 68.
[808] Aalto, ‘Doorstep’, 51.
[809] Corner, Introduction, *Recovering Landscape*, 16.

suggesting a human body sculpted subtractively from the space of the room and the landscape. The light and shadows of the outer world lodge in the niche, to be experienced or to resonate indoors. The vines, the forest, the air of the forest are drawn into the room in being seen through the subtracted form of the niche as it frames glimpses of the landscape.

It is arguably through the architectural freedom offered by ruins, in challenging, distorting or disturbing plans and material orders, that such elements can be incorporated in Aalto's designs. Aalto maintained that nature was the symbol of freedom, and, he said, 'Sometimes it is even nature that creates and maintains the concept of freedom.'[810] In placing his architecture's occupants into the contained natural world of the courtyard, and in encouraging the landscape to enter the hearth, the room and the body of the house of the Villa Mairea, Aalto dissolves boundaries, corners and edges, and swaps conditions to improve the occupants' bodily sensing of the room or corridor space. Ray writes of Aalto that his overall design method at Säynätsalo was of 'setting up an ideal geometry which is then subjected to distortion'.[811] In both instances the distortion of geometry seems effected through interrelationship and exchange with landscape space, arguably a more effective 'distortion' than merely playing with geometric nuances.

The niche in both examples begins a re-imagining of the room by re-focusing the room away from itself and from its inner space, to the outside space of the landscape. In this way, and especially with the involvement, via the niche, of the person with a pool or another distinctive landscape element outside, the interior can be better understood, as an example of Andresen's notion of Aalto's 'rooms in the landscape', whereby 'the room that "animates" the building makes a reference to the landscape, whether a surrounding landscape, an ancient landscape or an interior landscape. The room and the landscape are related to lend meaning to each other'.[812]

However, unlike the amphitheatre on the hillside (see 5.3.1, this chapter), these niches are human scale elements improvised to extend the architect's empathy into making gentle details from otherwise unaccommodating corners. Aalto remarked that, 'Only when the constructive parts of a building, the forms derived from them logically, and our empirical knowledge is coloured with what we might seriously call the art of play, only then are we on the right path. Technology and economics must always be combined with a life-enhancing charm.'[813] Aalto clearly and emphatically mandates such 'charm', to be 'always' included as a counter to the threatening mechanisation and rationalisation of modern life – whether in the 1920s or the 2020s – through the inclusion of such seemingly-improvised design details. This recalls a concluding tip from Aalto to readers in his 'Doorstep' essay:

> ... one further characteristic: *you must give yourself away in some little detail*. Your home should purposely show up some weakness of yours ... no

[810] Alvar Aalto, 'National Planning and Cultural Goals' (1949), in *Sketches*, 102.
[811] Ray, *Alvar Aalto*, 117.
[812] Andresen, 'Ancient Gathering Forms', 44-45.
[813] Aalto, 'Experimental house at Muuratsalo', 234.

> architectural creation will be complete without some such trait; it will not be alive. This trait can be compared to the need for a particularly subtle kind of humour to expose one's own weaknesses.[814]

Whether through artistic, social, or self-deprecating humorous gestures, Aalto follows his own advice, showing up his own 'weakness' in his body-based exchange of vision, space and feeling between inside and outside.

Pallasmaa writes of an architecture of 'weak image', of architecture that instead of seeking to control, instead yields, becoming 'contextual and responsive' rather than stubbornly, logically consistent, and veers away from consistency of form – such as a firm fireplace corner or a relentlessly square courtyard or corridor corner – and concerns itself with 'real sensory interaction over idealisation and conceptual manifestations.'[815] And it is in this tendency that Aalto exchanges strong image and formal clarity for subtractive inflection, to make room for the small human figure between building and landscape.

While the building shares part of its wholeness with the outer landscape, the individual's encounter with the building is made more complex and involving, and in ways that standard modern elements – a plate glass wall, or a sliding glass door, or a 'picturesque' window view – are less likely to effect. Here, through the body near the window, present or hinted, a harmony is set up and animated by Aalto, between people and their surroundings, beside windows which, may, as William Gass writes, 'remain in the long walls of ruins, symbolically useless openings',[816] or may sparkle as playful elements, at once close to human bodies and close to the natural world.

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[814] Aalto, 'Doorstep', 55.

[815] Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', 297-298.

[816] William H. Gass, 'Opening the window a crack', in Peter MacKeith, ed., *Primary Architectural Images*, seminar document 2002 (St Louis: School of Architecture, Washington University, 2001), 44-45.

5.3.3 The End: Ruins and mortality at Muuratsalo

> Throughout his career, Aalto repeatedly invoked the word "human," asserting that architecture should "serve human life" or that it must "humanize" a world overwrought by the conditions of modernity ... Aalto's "humanism" was an inexpertly articulated call for Modernists to create a rationalist architecture of the *human being*: a physiological, perceiving, thinking creature.[817]
>
> Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet' (2008)

> Architecture is not an encounter with an unusual, uncanny, or even supernatural dimension that is deployed somewhere beyond everyday life experience. Rather, if it is magical, it discloses a dimension, *Stimmung* – an attunement of being that is always operative beneath conventional consciousness, in that carnal realm of exchange with our animal bodies, our true embodied minds.[818]
>
> Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement* (2016)

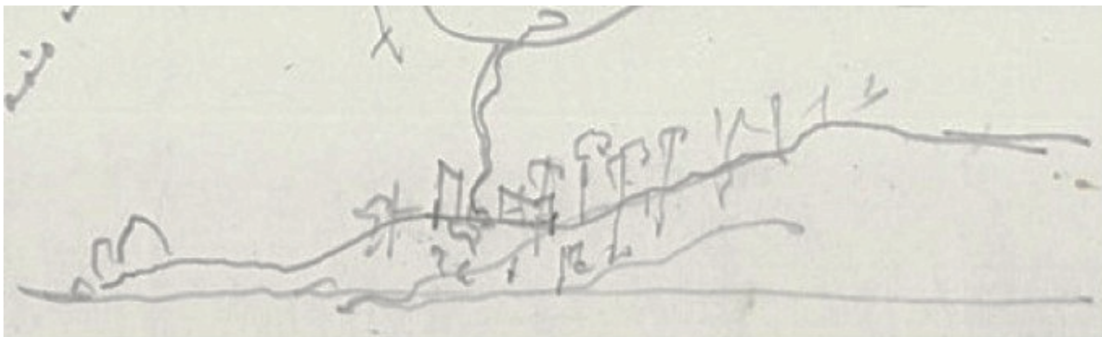

Figure 5.32 AALTO Muuratsalo House, site section sketch
Source: AAM

Aalto's Muuratsalo House was built in 1953, soon after Säynätsalo Town Hall and on a nearby forested island, at a crucial juncture in Aalto's life, as 'not only a place to live and work' but also 'a sort of experimental house.'[819] The extended house, including the site and the courtyard, accommodated and offered the domestic pleasures of Aalto's later life, of companionship, relaxation, painting, swimming, sauna, and work.

Yet a bittersweet air of melancholy and mortality seems to pervade a visitor's senses on visiting Muuratsalo, as Weston reflects:

> Muuratsalo both infiltrates the senses and engages the mind in a poetic meditation on our place in the world. Aalto seems to be telling us that nature will always win out in the end: that death is the birthright of every organism – be it architectural or biological ... and as a civilization, we should renounce the

[817] Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet': 46; cites Aalto, 'The Humanizing of Architecture', 102-107.
[818] Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement*, 229.
[819] *Alvar Aalto Band I*, 200.

hubris of victory over nature and seek a sustainable symbiosis of nature and culture.[820]

Aalto commented on architecture related to work and play in 1956: 'If form somehow fails to be logically connected with everyday life and holiday life, or both, it will suffer and lose significance, for architecture is a long-term project. It has time to suffer losses long after the building has been erected.'[821] The Muuratsalo design hinges on the relationship between building and site (Fig.5.32), where the duality of architecture and landscape reflects the duality of 'everyday life and holiday life'.[822] At Muuratsalo architectural significance itself seems at stake at a phenomenological level, in the relationship between the timeless natural site, the massive yet open building, and the ephemerality of the sensing body at the summerhouse, working indoors, relaxing outdoors, taking the sauna, or swimming off the rocks.

The 1939-40 'Winter War' and the later 'Continuation War' with Russia (1941-44) affected Aalto's world: his brother committed suicide at the outbreak of war, and six of Aalto's office staff died in the conflict, along with the Aaltos' Artek founding partner Nils-Gustav Hahl.[823] The war's effects were deeply personal and psychological: 'Aalto's equilibrium,' note Menin and Samuel, 'was shaken to the core by his terror of death,' and in 1940 Aalto, 'unable to admit his trauma', fled to Stockholm, where he was found hiding in a hotel room.[824]

Considered in the perspective of the accumulated distress of wartime, followed by the traumatising unexpected death of his wife Aino in 1949,[825] the effects of World War II on Aalto's outwardly dynamic yet psychologically fragile self may also be reflected or manifested in his work. An example can be found in the Muuratsalo House, built after both the war and Aino's death. Both Aalto's personal trauma and his objective recognition of the suffering of his fellow Finns reflect in the treatment of the white surfaces of the brick walls, thinly whitewashed and artificially distressed, giving the appearance of an experienced and aged skin, a different sense of white to the idealised abstract smoothness of modernism's white walls.

The Muuratsalo House, with its square footprint on its forest site, is a Finnish summerhouse, made 'for the architect's own pleasure and play', as Aalto states in his plan description.[826] Architect Christian Gullichsen observes that Aalto's architecture could be both mental and sensuous, noting that his work 'shows an intellectual and an emotional dimension not often seen in high modern architecture.'[827] Gullichsen sees dimensions of empathy in Aalto's work: 'an emphasis on the physical and psychological comfort of the occupants, the ambition to balance the abstract with

[820] Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, 121.
[821] Alvar Aalto, 'Form as a symbol of artistic creativity' (1956), in *Own Words*, 183.
[822] Aalto, 'Form as a symbol of artistic creativity', 183.
[823] McCarter, *Aalto*, 110.
[824] Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, 89; cite Schildt, *Mature Years*, 14.
[825] Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, 89.
[826] Aalto, 'Experimental House at Muuratsalo', 234.
[827] Christian Gullichsen, Preface, in Reed, *Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism*, 10.

familiar motifs, and a tactile sensitivity for materials and textures'.[828] For Gullichsen, whose parents commissioned Villa Mairea, Aalto's architecture reflects a body-based sensuousness, a quality that can also be extended beyond Villa Mairea to Aalto's architecture more broadly, embodying a spontaneous, emotionally attuned ideal: 'The obvious sensuality in his approach to the details reflects his Dionysian appetite for life.'[829] Yet, paradoxically, the Dionysian Aalto chose to base his summerhouse design around a conceptually sober square-plan white-painted house in the woods, perhaps as an ordered, disciplined, partly Apollonian respite from the voluptuous waters and woods of the island site, where the fragmented ruinous forms of the building testify to the artificial, imagined nature of this order, both imposed on, and opposing and balancing, the calm of the lake island site.

Figure 5.33 AALTO Muuratsalo House, Aalto emerging from sauna
Source: AAM

At Muuratsalo Aalto also sought to develop a balance not only between landscape and architecture, but also between play and architectural work, often continued away from Helsinki with associates at the summerhouse. Aalto wrote, 'we should unite our experimental work with a play mentality or vice versa',[830] sandwiching work and relaxation, as he reiterated: 'in summer I stay in my house on the island of Muuratsalo, where there is no telephone and where I can work completely undisturbed, between swims.' (Fig.5.33).[831] And Aalto indeed designed the summerhouse for 'work ... between swims'. Work spaces are ubiquitous at Muuratsalo, where drawing and related work can be done inside the main room on two tables or in the upstairs loft on a further two tables, while in one of the rear buildings another work table is shown in plans; even outdoors, experimental work continues, where Aalto improvises a painting easel in a tiled courtyard niche. Against this desire for work, play was also accommodated, in the courtyard and fire, in lounging on rocks, with a deep water swimming deck close by the house, a sauna by

[828] Gullichsen, Preface, 10.
[829] Gullichsen, Preface, 10.
[830] Aalto, 'Experimental House, Muuratsalo', in *Sketches*, 116.
[831] Aalto, unpublished 1957 interview, related in Schildt, *Mature Years*, 261.

the lake edge, a boat and jetty, and the 'paradise' of the largely undamaged forested site surrounding the house for exploring and for looking after.

Yet it is not only buildings and structures, but immersive experience in architecture and natural site that are made significant at Muuratsalo, evident in Jetsonen's observation of Aalto's delight in the retreat: 'he liked to paint, swim, enjoy the sauna, and relax – Muuratsalo was his beloved retreat, a place where he could silently listen to nature.'[832] Aalto's value of the natural site emerges in architect Nils Erik Wickberg's recollection of visiting Muuratsalo in 1953: 'Aalto took me on a hike into the forest and showed me all the rare plants he "had" on his site. And, later, when we sat by the open fire in his yard, he pointed up toward the southern sky where the stars were already shining and said: "And the North Star seems to be there, too."'[833]

The landscape at Muuratsalo thus becomes valued and animated through participation, its indeterminacy contrasting with the diagrammatic rational plan, and becoming, as landscape theorist James Corner notes, a conceptually developed landscape in its own right, 'a pervasive milieu, a rich imbroglio of ecological, experiential, poetic, and expressively *living* dimensions.'[834] Landscape, written into the brief and the program of the summerhouse as a milieu combining a Finnish ecological microcosm with sensuous experience, becomes an animating component interwoven with the architecture, and its necessary adjunct for summer living.

In this respect, philosopher Edward S. Casey in *Getting Back into Place* (1993) observes, 'The *sensuous surface* is an aspect of the surrounding array that stands out in our first encounter with a particular wild place. The surface is the moment of impingement, what my sensing body first notices.'[835] For Aalto both the water and the site of Muuratsalo, a relative 'wild place', offer a diversity of surfaces, textures and emphatically physical feelings. Casey, citing ecological psychologist J.J. Gibson's remark, that 'The surface is where most of the action is', argues also, 'My lived body rejoins a wild place – this free standing grove of trees, that unruly patch of sea', confirming the potential for harmony between the human and the site, aided, mediated and brought into closer relationship with the landscape through the building.[836]

Thus the sensuous ground of the island, the lake water and the sun-warmed rocks, the duality of work and play, of culture and nature, interweave through experience to 'concretise' the Muuratsalo summerhouse as a place. Aalto's design involves his constant urge to duality, between the limits of the courtyard and the unlimited space of the lake, the partly bounded square and the unbounded space of the natural site. Balancing the intellectual construction of geometry, the physicality of Muuratsalo involves the phenomenological presence of the body at large on the site: in the

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[832] Jari Jetsonen and Sirkkaliisa Jetsonen, *Alvar Aalto Houses* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011), 145.
[833] Jetsonen and Jetsonen, *Alvar Aalto Houses*, 145.
[834] Corner, Introduction, *Recovering Landscape*, 16.
[835] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 209.
[836] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 210.

water, in and out of the sauna, and walking on rocks, mosses and ground amidst living things: trees, bushes, vines, ferns, grasses, fungi.

Figure 5.34 POUSSIN *Et in Arcadia ego*, Louvre, 1638-39
Source: Open access

And yet it seems that a cloud must pass over this animated summer scene, an emblem with resonances in the engraved motto 'Et in Arcadia ego', found by shepherds on a tomb in Poussin's classicistic pastoral painting *The Arcadian Shepherds*, or *Et in Arcadia ego* (1638-39) (Fig.5.34). Two critics in the 1930s compare this Poussin painting and a second Poussin *Et in Arcadia ego* as commentaries on life and mortality. Jerome Klein points out that the inscription 'Et in Arcadia ego' carved on a monument 'is meant to show that death is encountered even among the greatest felicities.'[837] Anthony Blunt proposes that Poussin's two versions are differentiated, in that 'in the first there is only regret and disillusionment shown at the transitoriness of life, whereas in the second there is resignation.'[838]

[837] Jerome Klein, 'An Analysis of Poussin's "Et in Arcadia Ego"', *The Art Bulletin* 19, no.2 (1937): 314.
[838] Anthony Blunt, review, Poussin's 'Et in Arcadia Ego', *The Art Bulletin* 20, no.1 (1938): 96.

Figure 5.35 AALTO Muuratsalo House
Photograph by John Roberts, 2011

This same idea of mortality in the midst of life and landscape appears to destabilise the sensuous harmony of living at Muuratsalo, to check the balance of work and play with the imagery of ruins in the forms, materials and finishes of the Muuratsalo House. The idea of the presence of death, with associated emotions in Poussin of regret, disillusionment or resignation, do not seem out of place at Muuratsalo, where the simple-looking white walls of the summerhouse seen from the lake can appear like a monument, a cloud or indeed a fragmentary, partly, overgrown ruin, located high amongst the hillside trees and settling into its lake isle site over time (Fig.5.35). The Muuratsalo House balances its square geometry with incipient ruin and decay, while rational ordered work is balanced or dislodged from balance by sensuous indeterminate play in a process of connecting spatially with the natural world of the site.

Great natural or human force seems to have been exerted in breaching the white walls to make colossal windows and a portal, while everyday life goes on, in fixing screens, applying paint, trimming vines, raking and burning leaves or documents. The Muuratsalo square plan, extending far out and dissipating into the natural place, or inviting the natural place through the great portal opening into the built space, immerses the body and mind in the sensuous landscape, forming a harmonious whole, indeed, to use Moholy-Nagy's words, a 'rational biological whole', enabling for the individual 'a heightening and harmonious development of their powers'.[839]

Muuratsalo represents a retreat from the world in a section of the world that had great meaning for Aalto, providing him with a personal, professional, regional and natural dreaming that encompassed world wars, international conflict, peace and reconstruction. Its conceptually 'experimental' nature suggested gambling with physics, nature and the human soul, risk of failure, and life as a kind of experiment. At the Muuratsalo House, white walls could contrast with red brick, lake waves could be countered by the rock-solid house, and the house's cultivated cubic wedge

[839] Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision*, 60.

seemed always menaced by growing plants and by its own ruptured, crumbling, observing, sensing, mortal body, as though it were Aalto himself, in place in a deep reality of Finnish landscape.

Hugo Alvar Henrik Aalto passed away in Helsinki, following a heart attack, on 11 May 1976.

Figure 5.36 Alvar Aalto
Source: AAM

5.3.4 Conclusion: Ruins and Embodiment

In Section 5.3 the body in the building and the body in the landscape emerge as close presences in architecture enabled by the close, living presence of nature in ruins, where architecture opens to the landscape and appears to offer to the elements the single, bare-seeming individual body, the everyday person sitting outdoors against a slope, on the edge of a building, on the edges of a building and a site.

Casey discusses the duality of humankind and nature, and the relationship of bodies and buildings: 'Once our bodies are comfortably ensconced in buildings, we simply tend to close out the larger world of nature. Yet the natural world surrounds every body and every building ... it *remains around us* as a mute presence tacitly waiting to be acknowledged.'[840] At Aalborg the natural world is acknowledged through the amphitheatre seats that flow out from the dark of the surrounding hillside forest – and set apart by the jagged white silhouette of its painted edging. That dazzling white profile draws a line of separation beyond which neither the forest nor the human needs to venture, and emerges as a startling addition to the ruin form of the amphitheatre, bounding and defining its ancient form against the hillside's dark obscurity, so that, as Andresen says, 'The room and the landscape are related to lend meaning to each other', perhaps 'inseparable' but always tensely different, in their own realms.

At Säynätsalo and in Villa Mairea, where forms relate to the human body, elements can be regarded as details of ruin, suggesting or accommodating the body in the architecture at a created edge, a threshold where the architecture seems close to breaking the distinction of inside and outside. Yet the body is carried along within the architecture, and ruin is alluded to, by resemblance or by apparent exposure. Exploiting the body's sense of risk, or the thrill of sensing its bare skin exposed to the cold air and open space, the trees, sky and snow of the landscape, Aalto's architecture involves the visitor through their senses with landscape. Extending modernism through this approach, making architecture both significant and comprehensible through the concept of embodiment, not only begins to answer questions on Aalto's work, but also, as Goldhagen notes, 'illuminates dark rooms in the understanding of modernism, and indeed in the understanding of architecture itself.'[841]

Georg Simmel in 'The Ruin' (1911) observes 'the peace whose mood surrounds the ruin', comprehending the harmony developed between ruin and landscape: 'Expressing this peace for us, the ruin orders itself into the surrounding landscape without a break, growing together with it like tree and stone.'[842] Aalto's ruins at Muuratsalo enact a drama of contrasts and exchanges, which can seem like a contestation between building and biological life through which a harmony is evolved. Yet the individual, whether human or fungi, whether at work or at play, seems fated to one day pass from earth's vibrant surface, to retreat finally to the realm of the

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[840] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 147-148.
[841] Goldhagen, 'Alvar Aalto's Astonishing Rationalism', 268.
[842] Simmel, 'The Ruin', 383.

humic, to settle into the ground and be overgrown. Through ruins architecture can be revealed in its ‘longer game’, of temporality and mortality. Pérez-Gómez in *Built Upon Love* (2011) reminds the reader of architecture’s power and presences:

> Architecture is manifest in those rare places that speak back to us and resonate with our dreams; it incites us to real meditation, to personal thought and imagination, opening up the space of desire that allows us to be at home while remaining always incomplete and open to our personal death, unveiling a glimpse of the sense of existence and revealing our limits.[843]

This existence, these limits and the incitements of architecture to reflection, are found in ‘those rare places’ resonant with dreams and actuality; such places, manifest in dreams, require landscape to manifest most fully, as this section has argued and revealed.

[843] Alberto Pérez-Gómez, ‘Built Upon Love: Towards beauty and justice in architecture’, *Mosaic: a journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature* (2011), 47.

Chapter 5 Ruins: Conclusion

Findings and conclusions: Ruins, Aalto, landscape

In the ruin references that recur in Aalto's work, from his early articles on Finnish art and architecture to his 1950s sketches of ancient Greek relics and sites and the crumbling walls of Egypt, Morocco and regional Spain, where landscape and aged buildings seem left alone to dilapidate in the Southern sun, a sense of complete freedom, extending that which Aalto found symbolised in nature, emerges to liberate his work from the strictures and orthodoxies of technical urbanised modernism. On his Mediterranean holidays, away from the discipline of drafting and the confinement of double-glazed windows, Aalto could see how buildings and landscapes could lie together, convened in the informal ease of a *longue durée* of neglect and relaxed decay, culminating in images of a harmony of place, atmosphere and embodied ease, and obscuring the facts of destruction and civilisational collapse.

Figure 5.37 PIRANESI *View of Paestum*, drawing
Source: Sir John Soane's Museum

Invited into 'Aalto's world' not as picturesque indulgences nor as foreshadowings of mortality, the Classical and everyday ruins of the South, as in Bob Dylan's line, '... all fall there so perfectly / it all seems so well timed',[844] self-arranging with the casual compositional power of cherry flowers on a branch.[845] Aalto's images of overgrown dilapidated shanties, abandoned fortresses and collapsed city walls, of architecture disarmingly at ease with landscape, become Aalto's version of Piranesi's late drawings of Greek temples at Paestum (1777-78), where people and animals lounge amongst Doric columns and weeds grow against the sky (Fig.5.37).

Ruins, drawn so frequently by Aalto on vacation, become a wellspring for Aalto's work, licensing in his own work a looseness of composition, an opportunistic finessing of silhouettes, rails and edges, and his tying together of a heterotopic

[844] Bob Dylan, 'Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again', *Blonde on Blonde* (1966); in *Writings and Drawings* (Frogmore, UK: Panther, 1973).
[845] Aalto likened the possible variation of units within standardised modular building systems to the variation of individual forms of fruit tree blossoms; see 'The Reconstruction of Europe', 154. Utzon cites Aalto's 'nature fable' to describe variation of standardised housing units, in Weston, *Utzon*, 26-28.

jumble of rooms and elements beneath a skyline or inside the skin of a ground floor plan. Thus are enabled the ease of the Atelier amphitheatre, the ambiguity of the corner niche at Säynätsalo, the disarray of the plan of the Alvar Aalto Museum, and the general appearance of surprising details, elements, vistas and atmospheres.

Figure 5.38 AALTO Alvar Aalto Museum
Source: McCarter, *Aalto*

These works, all from after World War II, can be seen as constituting a reflective narrative on the loss, trauma, destruction and displacement that affected and transformed Western culture between 1939 and 1945. Of these works, few are more surprising than Aalto's reprise of the daring wave-wall of his pre-war New York Pavilion (1939), demolished after its use, but reconceived and built in Jyväskylä in the Alvar Aalto Museum, as if to remind the curious visitor of how architecture can capture landscape and recall its feeling in its forms, and also quietly proclaiming, in his own work, not in words but in deeds, 'lest we forget' (Fig.5.38).

Figure 5.39 AALTO Grave of Alvar Aalto, Aino Marsio-Aalto, Elissa Aalto, Helsinki
Source: M. Lång, 2015 [846]

Thus Ruins offers a thematic area suitable for investigating landscape in Aalto's work, and a theme of landscape related to architecture that creates beginnings and endings, extending to Aalto's memorial for his wife Aino (1949) (Fig.5.39), and which also underlies, like one of many strata of Aalto's intellectual bedrock, his creative imagination. The theme of Ruins, like Waves and White, informs Aalto's means of making architecture meaningful in everyday human living, and profoundly significant in cultural terms, through its constantly variable relationship to landscape.

[846] Wikimedia Commons / Photograph by M. Lång (2015). Noted 1 Apr 2021.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

6.1 DISCUSSION

6.1.1 Landscape: Towards an architectural ontology

> Insight into the world of the forest – forest wisdom – is at the heart of everything Aalto created, a biological experience which never allowed itself to be overpowered by technocratic civilization or shortsighted rationalism. This is not a matter of romanticism or mysticism, but of their opposite, an extreme sense of reality, a sharing in nature's wisdom and rationality.[847]
>
> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Early Years* (1984)

The present study investigates the significance of landscape in Aalto's work as a way of understanding his work, as an artificial thing of the built 'human' world of architecture in the context of the greater 'non-human' natural world of living things and natural forces. This was a fundamental duality for Aalto, who enacted a philosophy of duality or positive skepticism, to create harmony by thinking, arguing and creating architectural work through repeated tactics of dualities, dialectics, oppositions and complementaries, setting an entity against its conceptual counter or putative opposite, to synthesise a new whole. A fundamental resource for Aalto's thinking and work, as for its experience and analysis, was the duality of humankind and landscape.

Yet this duality is more complex than a simple 'man versus nature' opposition. Aalto's biographer and friend Göran Schildt notes Aalto's understanding of the relationship of people and environment in terms of the Finnish forest: 'The forest is not hostile to man, quite the reverse, it confers on man all that he needs for a biologically sound life.'[848] And far from haunting his modernity with an irrational Romantic 'dreaming', the forest gifted Aalto with an awareness of nature's rationality, a landscape-based 'forest wisdom', gained through experience of nature, biology and landscape in 'the world of the forest'; as Schildt explains, Aalto developed 'an extreme sense of reality, a sharing in nature's wisdom and rationality.[849]

In Aalto's world the building can involve people with landscape, in the form of forest, water or rocks, not only as Finnish experience, but also as in Schama's Western landscape triad of wood, water and rock, as cultural history.[850] For Schama, Western culture retains its old senses of nature: 'its nature myths ... have, in fact, never gone away.' Moreover, the myths and memories of other cultures, 'of the primitive forest, of the river of life, of the sacred mountain – are in fact alive and well and all about us if only we knew where to look for them.'[851]

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[847] Schildt, *Early Years*, 34.
[848] Schildt, *Early Years*, 34.
[849] Schildt, *Early Years*, 34.
[850] Schama, *Landscape and Memory*.
[851] Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 14.

In the present study *nature* and *landscape* are noted as key terms for discussion of Aalto's architecture. Their differences have helped to establish a basis for the present study's argument, that landscape should be regarded as fundamental to understanding Aalto's heterodox modernist architecture.

6.1.2 Nature to Landscape

While nature is associated with biological principles, in Aalto's work landscape involves the presence of people, place, bodily sensations, and designing for experience. Landscape is argued as basic to Aalto's architecture, as both the particular place where architecture is conceived, built and experienced, and the representation of that particular place in the fabric and inside the spaces of the work of architecture.

Nature, despite its inherent dynamism, could offer relatively steadfast governing principles of form, organisation and matter, while landscape could be contingent, in its physically challenging scale and formations, its variable locations, slopes, climate, verdures, geologies and ecologies, and in its ways of interweaving people and buildings. Amidst such contingent factors, Aalto could make buildings that mediated landscape conditions, so that people might be placed in the midst of the landscape, while remaining sufficiently buffered by the body of the building, dwelling within a building made to be, as Johnson says, like a body, and articulated like a figure in the landscape, at ease and in harmony through being connected and involved with the surrounding world.

While nature offered Aalto a philosophical or theoretical background for thinking about architecture and its relation with the world, landscape provided experiences, examples and practical means of acting through architecture. While nature could be cerebral and cultural, landscape was actual and experiential: landscape could be seen, measured, built in, sensed, and remembered; importantly, it could also accommodate human presence and activity, by definition excluded from concepts of nature. Landscape, unlike nature, did not require philosophical explanations; it was an actuality, a reality that could be seen, drawn and felt, in its many forms and seasons. Landscape offered a common ground, as it were, where the 'little person' would be included and involved in the natural or urban world, from their doorstep; as Aalto said, the outside world should be part of the inside of the house, beginning from the entry to the garden: 'The right spot for our doorstep is where we step out of the street or road into the garden.'[852] Landscape, as discussed below, appears thus to offer an ontological basis for Aalto's thinking and work in architecture.

6.1.3 Ontology of architecture: Building, being and landscape

Aalto's seriousness in both advocating and incorporating landscape in his work suggests landscape as essential to the ontology of his architecture. This study proposes that the order that architecture can project into human existence by

[852] Aalto, 'Doorstep', 51.

engaging with the vastness of the world, of space and of time, and mediating, as Pallasmaa proposes, 'between the world, the divinities and the mortals', that is, its ontological meaning, is dependent on and cannot operate without the 'experiential properties, qualities, intentions and existential meanings' that landscape can provide.[853]

One facet of architecture's conjunction of everyday life with landscape is noted by Harrison, arguing for the philosophical essentiality of building to being: 'Building, which starts from the ground up, is where the fundamental ontology of our mundane lives both begins and ends.[854] For Aalto, a principled consideration of the 'mundane lives' of everyday people, the 'little person', dealing with the effects of modernity and modernisation, remained consistent in his philosophy. The socio-ethical fundamental of the 'little man', along with the notion of beginning 'from the ground up' – that is, beginning with landscape and the architectural site – remained dual pillars of Aalto's method for fifty years from the late 1920s.

The presence of landscape in Aalto's architecture expands its capacity to make architecture into a meaningful medium for elaboration of humankind's complex relationship with nature, by giving it a material and spatial expression as related to the ground. Thus while Aalto provides a model as a practitioner, his work provides a general model and a particular examples of how architecture might be involved with landscape, to re-engage the modern urban user or visitor of architecture in a new recognition of their relationship with the greater natural world beyond the building.

6.1.4 White, Waves and Ruins: historical epistemology

It is argued in this study that Aalto developed his variant version of modernism by numerous means, in part by involving his architecture in the landscape, and, conversely, by involving landscape in his architecture. In doing so Aalto broadened the scope of architecture's involvement in the world, transforming the idea of landscape to become more than a modern idea of vegetative vistas, framed by strip windows or viewed through plate glass window-walls.[855] Landscape can become instrumental in the building's accommodation of the sensing individual human, as they approach, move through, see, contact, engage with, and even leave a building.

This study organises Aalto's work historically into three landscape-related thematic areas, White, Waves and Ruins. These themes, as noted above, emerged as relevant to investigating landscape in Aalto's work through the author's experience of Aalto's architecture, following earlier research into landscape symbolism in the Muuratsalo House, and subsequent research into landscape across Aalto's

[853] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Placing the Mind', in Pekka Passinmäki and Klaske Havik, eds, *DATUTOP* 38, Understanding and Designing Place - Considerations on Architecture and Philosophy (Tampere: Tampere University School of Architecture, 2019): 55.

[854] Harrison, 'Hic jacet', 394.

[855] See for example Le Corbusier's sketches of lake and mountain landscape framed by the horizontal windows of Villa Le Lac (1926), in Bruno Reichslin, 'My Father Lived One Year in This House. The Scenery Fascinated Him', in Cohen, *Le Corbusier: An Atlas of Modern Landscapes*, 64-71.

architecture. While other potential themes relevant to Aalto's work – such as style, materials, technology, the vernacular, biography – may appear to offer areas for reflection on landscape, the selected historical themes focus on phenomena of whiteness, undulation and decay, which stand out in their own right, while being also both specific to Aalto's oeuvre and appearing repeatedly throughout his body of work from the 1920s to the 1970s.

The built White, Waves and Ruins, rather than being capricious expressive 'features', are perceived and used as part of everyday life in Aalto's private and public buildings. The chosen themes comprise a sufficient selected 'sample group' of buildings from Aalto's oeuvre, while the themes and buildings are acknowledged, if not emphasised, in the critical literature on Aalto. The three themes also accord with Aalto's propensity for dialectical argument, in being conceptually balanced by opposite or complementary characters: white may be balanced by colour or darkness; waves and curved forms are complemented by calm, flatness or orthogonal forms; ruins are complemented by the geometric wholeness, formal purity, utopian timelessness, and the general nature-denial of modern architecture.

White runs as a recurrent theme throughout Aalto's work from Viipuri Library to Alvar Aalto Museum, evident in Aalto's architecture in the variety of white surfaces, the diversity of white materials, and the relation of white forms in their landscape contexts to natural light and shadow. Barely noticed in critical and historical commentary are the everyday resonances between the mood, physicality and variety of the natural whiteness and the light of the snow-clad Finnish winter landscape, and the 'whiteness' of Aalto's architecture.[856] These and other resonances between architectural white and landscape whiteness create senses of occasion and place through the state and texture of drifted snow, through the atmosphere of winter light and shifting ephemera, and through the play between visual and haptic essences of ephemera and the materiality of buildings.

The theme of Waves offers an architectural trope for naturally occurring waves, seen from the ceiling of Viipuri Auditorium to the posthumously completed Essen Opera. Waves in Aalto's work are identified here at three scales: the large, single wave, hill, or mountain peak, in built form housing unique program elements against an expanse of mundane program; medium-sized rhythmic, repeating, undulating waves giving form to ceilings or stairs, contrasting with stable walls or floors; and the tiny, numerous surface waves of repeating ripples, or ribbed surfaces, animating or illuminating otherwise dull expanses or banal spaces. Aalto's widely illustrated curved forms are found in section or plan, rising from level sites or juxtaposed against rectilinear built elements. Wave-forms arguably heighten bodily experience of space and contribute to a building's relationship to landscape.

The theme of Ruins**,** evident in work from Villa Mairea to Aalborg Gallery amphitheatre highlights the heterodox nature of Aalto's version of modernism. While

[856] As exceptions, see: Takashi Koizumi, *Light Space in Finland: Exploration of Light – A journey through northern architecture* (Tokyo: Petit Grand Publishing, 2009); Henry Plummer, *Nordic Light: Modern Scandinavian Architecture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012).

orthodox modernism denied history, Aalto's work acknowledges Finnish and European architectural history; while modernism was concerned with timelessness and efficiency, Aalto's architecture reflected and responded to the 'real time' of seasonal and annual change. And while white modernism radiated an imagery of universalism and weightless cleanliness, Aalto's work appears by contrast conceived, designed, built and experienced in negotiation with locality, gravity, weathering, natural growth and mortal decay. Ruin strategies afford Aalto particular design opportunities: to conceptually salvage and collage historical forms and materials into modern works; to embody vitality and mortality together in overgrowing greenery and aging materials; and to open his modern work physically to natural elements and landscape space. Experience of Aalto's ruins is read here in association with a wider cultural interest in ruins, to investigate landscape significances in his architecture.

Thus a historical epistemology of Aalto's work can be framed and created through the three themes of White, Waves and Ruins. These categories constitute different yet partly overlapping areas of Aalto's oeuvre from the 1920s to the 1980s, into which phenomenological concepts can be projected to interpret landscape as significant and meaningful in his work. The three historical categories form the basis of the three key chapters of this study, Chapters 3-5. Out of this historical organisation, a detailed reading of Aalto's work proceeds, using historical-theoretical concepts of phenomenology, Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment, as noted below.

6.1.5 Phenomenology: Place, Atmosphere, Embodiment

While selected Aalto works are organised into landscape-related thematic areas of White, Waves and Ruins, the study adopts three phenomenological concepts, Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment, to consider the significance of landscape in Aalto's work. This method of intersecting historical themes with phenomenological concepts offers a historical-theoretical framework to investigate Aalto's work systematically, through the sequence of close readings and interpretations of buildings and other elements of his architecture.

The thinking of Norberg-Schulz and Malpas is used to investigate landscape and architecture through the concept of Place.[857] Böhme and Tawa are referenced in consideration of Atmosphere in landscape and in architecture.[858] The thinking of Goldhagen and of Johnson is consulted to consider Embodiment in relations between landscape and architecture.[859]

These phenomenological concepts are used in this study to generate insight and provoke argument, to investigate the involvement of landscape in Aalto's thinking and in experience of his architecture, and to reflect on the significance of landscape, around the historical themes of White, Waves and Ruins in Aalto's work. The three concepts are introduced below.

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[857] Norberg-Schulz, *Genius* Loci; Jeff Malpas, 'Place and the Problem of Landscape'.

[858] Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the subject matter of architecture'; Tawa, 'Vaporous Circumambience'.

[859] Goldhagen, *Welcome to your World*, 136-138; Johnson, 'Embodied meaning of architecture'.

6.1.6 Place

Regarding the phenomenologically fundamental notion of place, Weston refers to a 'culture of place' in Aalto's thinking, suggesting the relevance of place for a conceptual approach to Aalto's work.[860] In a more theoretically intense and provocative way, the thinking of Norberg-Schulz in *Genius Loci* establishes place as a conceptual framework for looking more closely at landscape in Aalto's work.[861] Norberg-Schulz's thinking on place, a fully articulated system of thinking connecting landscape, dwelling and built form, rather than the broader notion of 'critical regionalism' identified by Lefaivre and Tzonis and expanded by Frampton,[862] offers a conceptual framework to consider the involvement of architecture with landscape in Aalto's work.

Malpas philosophically merges architecture and building, seeing both as central to one's engagement with the world, as a means, 'even (if we think architecture broadly enough) the primary means, by which we engage with the world, and with the happening of world, as it occurs in and from out of place.'[863] Architecture becomes crucial in articulating human presence and essential for being in place, in participating in the world, becoming part of its 'happening', and allowing 'that happening to be revealed. Architecture is for nothing if not for this.'[864] Thus in Aalto's world the building can proclaim human presence intertwined with nature or landscape, in the form of forest, water or rocks, to cite not only a Finnish commonplace, but also a triad adopted by historian Simon Schama to discuss landscape in Western cultural histories.[865] Schama proposes that even though it might be assumed that the culture of the West 'has evolved by sloughing off its nature myths, they have, in fact, never gone away.' Furthermore, Schama argues that the myths, cults, obsessions and memories of other cultures, 'of the primitive forest, of the river of life, of the sacred mountain – are in fact alive and well and all about us if only we knew where to look for them.'[866] Schama indicates the deep and often neglected sedimentary layers of mythic strata underlying architectural expression, which orthodox modernism works to erase, but which Aalto's heterodoxy was prepared to mine and make into the forms and sensings of his work.

Place can be sensed empirically in Helsinki in two essential Aalto buildings: first, in the unfolding red waves of the House of Culture or Kultuuritalo, seen by a visitor approaching central Helsinki along Sturenkatu as a gesture of welcome, from the hill behind the building to the terrace of the roadway; and second, in the long white wall of Finlandia Hall, where the white marble façade gleams across Töölö Bay. Beyond Helsinki a sense of place resonates at a more intimate scale at Aalto's Muuratsalo

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[860] Weston, 'Sense of Place', in *Alvar Aalto*, 122-145.

[861] Norberg-Schulz, 'Phenomenon of Place'; Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci;* see also Christian Norberg-Schulz, *The concept of dwelling: On the way to figurative architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985).

[862] Alex Tzonis and Liliane Lefaivre [*sic*], 'The Grid and the Pathway. An introduction to the work of Dimitris and Susana Antonakakis', *Architecture in Greece* 15 (1981), 178; in Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism', 20-21, n12 30. See also Liane Lefaivre, *Critical Regionalism: Architecture and identity in a globalized world* (Munich; New York: Prestel, 2003).

[863] Malpas, 'What Is Architecture For?', 121-122.

[864] Malpas, 'What Is Architecture For?, 122.

[865] Schama, *Landscape and Memory*.

[866] Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, 14.

sauna, where the light of the Finnish sky bursts across the floor of the small dark room through the low vent window, bringing animating landscape elements – light, wind, temperature, sounds of reeds, smell of water – of Central Finland into the room to surround the body of the sauna bather. Clearly also, the sauna indicates that place, atmosphere and embodiment are not discrete, cool-blooded constructs, but rather co-exist in lived, sensed experience of architecture and landscape. From such empirical prompts, investigation of the concept of Place leads to the literature that opens up particular views of place through landscape. Place manifests variously in Aalto's work, in a phenomenology of landscape.

Place is accounted for in the white surfaces of Muuratsalo House, citing Malpas's thinking on boundedness and openness, denoting the white wall as a modern surface, connecting it to landscape, and framing Aalto's white walls in the landscape as part of his heterodox modernism. In rural Alajärvi, Aalto's Town Hall makes a non-modern inflection to local circumstance, relating to landscape through its articulated black and white walls, a vision of local place resonating in a winter epiphany in Joyce's 'The Dead'. In the white-clad Alvar Aalto Museum, winter, war, animal whiteness and Finnish *sisu* merge national and personal identity with place, referring to a differently material, non-pictorial 'animal view' of landscape factors in a memorial urban work.

In Waves, place appears in the different wave-forms of stairs enclosing and freeing a courtyard in a forest town; and in the drawn waves of Aalto's site plan contours. At Otaniemi Auditorium Aalto's 'surprise' great wave, the hollow mountain or magic mountain at the campus centre, recalls Hokusai's *The Great Wave*, an orienting wave-peak that mediates between people and landscape, connecting the individual or group with a particular place. At Säynatsälo Town Hall medium-scale body-sized stairs connect courtyard and the surrounding landscape, contrasting enclosure and motion, creating experiences of interiority and place. Waves are evident in the contour line drawings of Essen Opera site plan, exemplifying Aalto's use of the contour drawing where site plan, floor plans, interior forms coalesce in a kind of topographic unity, exploiting drawn wave-forms to merge building, site and visitors' experience.

In Ruins, place is argued in various examples, centred on the Muuratsalo House. One Muuratsalo episode draws a historical parallel through place: between the relations of the ancient Greek city and its chōra, the provident rural landscape beyond the ancient Greek city walls; and the ancient-seeming walls of Aalto's courtyard house and the emotional providence of the site's landscape spaces and existential character. The second Muuratsalo episode investigates Aalto's germinal concept of inside-outside ambiguity, through the courtyard, seen as both enclosed and liberating, through ideas of the courtyard as the outdoor room, between house and landscape, and sharing characteristics of both. The third episode develops a relation at Muuratsalo between architecture and the earth, meditating on the temporality of architecture and human life, through comparing the building to a funerary container, a marker of mortality sited at a certain place on the earth's surface.

6.1.7 Atmosphere

The concept of Atmosphere refers to the natural layers of air surrounding earth's surface, whose phenomena – light, clouds, fog, rain, storms, rainbows, auroras, mist, sunrise – can create different moods in natural places. Atmosphere refers also to the moods or ambiences of events, spaces, buildings, as perceived by the human body, senses and mind.

Atmosphere is concerned distinctly with the vaguer and less tangibly physical qualities of architecture that can be perceived in the less palpable, less solid, less bounded gaseous or fluid mediums of air, light, sound and temperature, and their related emotional states. Atmosphere, writes Pallasmaa, 'is a kind of virtual, experiential, and multi-sensory place, which usually has shapeless, indefinable and ephemeral boundaries'.[867] Pallasmaa endorses research into atmospheres, noting that while atmosphere and mood might be seen as 'overarching qualities of our environments and spaces', they are yet to be fully investigated or theorised in architecture.[868]

Böhme argues in *Atmospheric Architectures* (2019) that atmosphere can apply with equal value to landscape, to architectural space, and to people. Thus Böhme notes different experiences of a landscape: 'the serene atmosphere of a spring morning or the ominous atmosphere of a stormy sky ... the delightful atmosphere of a valley or the homely atmosphere of a garden'; he suggests that when one enters a room, they can 'immediately feel enveloped in a cosy atmosphere', or may 'end up in a tense atmosphere.' And an individual person, observes Böhme, may emanate 'an awe-inspiring atmosphere', while 'an erotic atmosphere' may surround a man or woman.[869]

The everyday, yet special, character of the objects in these examples indicates how widespread the idea of atmosphere may be in everyday thinking. Böhme's examples also suggest a broader value and relevance of atmosphere in framing discourse on architecture and on landscape. Thus the reality, the ontological status of atmospheres in Aalto's architecture can become unclear, either being connected to the ambience of an environment or to the feelings of the visitor – hence the unclear 'haze' of atmosphere in architectural phenomenology. Different kinds of atmosphere can be sensed unexpectedly by a first-time visitor to Aalto's buildings, and can be further interpreted through the architectural and interdisciplinary literature. Thus empirical experience can be extended into a critical discourse through the research process of the present study.

In empirical terms, a visitor to Aalto's work can sense atmosphere, in and around the buildings: in the afternoon sunlight appearing through rain clouds and shining on the wet and overgrown bricks of the Muuratsalo House courtyard; in the warm light filtering through the ripples of timber joinery into the stair corridor of Säynatsälo Town

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[867] Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Place and Atmosphere', in Jeff Malpas, ed., *The Intelligence of Place: Topographies and Poetics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 132.

[868] Pallasmaa, 'Place and Atmosphere', 137.

[869] Gernot Böhme, 'Atmosphere, a Basic Concept of a New Aesthetic', in *Atmospheric Architectures*, 13-14.

Hall; or in the sight of Villa Mairea's white walls on a rise, as the visitor approaches uphill through orchard and trees, towards the house and a forest backdrop behind. Prompted by these examples, the researcher turns to the architectural literature and to philosophical approaches to consider atmosphere in a wider context, in and around the buildings.

Atmosphere is discussed through the chapter themes of White, Waves and Ruins. In White, atmosphere is found in the white surfaces in painting, in late nineteenth century Nordic landscape painting, Cézanne, and the Cubism of Picasso and Braque as they influenced both Aalto's painting and the inner and outer co-compositions of walls, interiors and outer landscapes at Villa Mairea. White is reflected atmospherically at Aalto Atelier, through forms both in snow and like snow, and in the complete sculptural whiteness of the whole building. In a less assertive posthumous example, everyday means transform an otherwise blank regional white wall at Seinäjoki Theatre, to resemble a landscape-like site plan or contour drawing.

Atmosphere in Waves manifests in the experience of atmospheric effects recalling the Finnish night sky, created by a floating, tilting wall in the great interior aurora wave of New York Finland Pavilion. Waves create atmosphere through the design and location of the body-sheltering, curved and undulating wave ceiling in Aalto's Summa House, a timber cave with angled views into the forest, through a body-scale window beside the woods. Myth emerges in the watery substances of ponds and pools, fish eggs and protective head-and-tail forms, in works including Aalto's Helsinki House and Seinäjoki Town Hall.

Atmosphere manifests in Ruins, in sketches and images of people living in war-damaged houses. Aalto's sketches of ruins and images of war destruction suggest different emotional states, of melancholy or nostalgia and their design consequences. The openness of buildings to the landscape can create unpredictable emotions, resulting in new approaches to reconstruction, and to a realisation that drawings and buildings can be laded with non-modern moods and a conditional optimism. Aalto maintained a tendency to build with green overgrowth in mind, seen in the altered ambiences provoked by potted plants, weeds, and overgrowing vines, reflecting the atmospheres of Piranesi's drawings of ruined Paestum.

6.1.8 Embodiment

The third phenomenological concept, Embodiment, refers to meaningful physical or psychological human encounters with the world through architecture. Embodiment may be defined against atmosphere, in that atmosphere tends to be generated by the more ephemeral, even airy, characteristics of architecture such as light, temperature, or acoustics, while embodiment registers more through perception of the mass, texture and matter, and the movement and forceful presence of architecture.

The notion of embodiment or embodied cognition used in this study derives from two key architectural sources and related philosophical sources. Pallasmaa in *The Eyes of the Skin* advocates the sense of touch, of the haptic, of the sensing skin and body,

as essential to architectural experience of the work of selected modernists, including Aalto, to counter a perceived hegemony of visual perception over the other senses in architecture, and in culture generally.[870]

Focusing particularly on Aalto and his early work, Goldhagen in 'Ultraviolet' argues that from around 1930 an 'embodied rationalism', going beyond technologically and mechanically rational methods of design and construction, became central to Aalto's design method, and so becomes central to understanding his work in phenomenological terms. Goldhagen's forensic investigation of phenomenological dimensions of embodiment in Aalto's early work underlies the use of the concept in this study. Goldhagen's framing of Aalto's 'embodied rationalism' both in architectural history and historical and recent findings in neuroscience gives exemplary authority to her interpretive method and findings, as in her observation of Aalto's intuitive and conceptual processes:

> ... early writings and projects suggest that as a young architect Aalto partly intuited, partly conceptualised philosophical and psychological concepts that today's scholarship lays bare: the intersensory and often unconscious nature of cognition and the deep enmeshment of reason with emotion and bodily experience.[871]

From Goldhagen's critique emerge both the long arc of Aalto's determination to build using phenomenological principles that can integrate reason, feeling and experience, and the intuitive and conceptual depths of architectural substructures and their built manifestations.

Johnson in 'Architecture and the Embodied Mind' (2002), proposes that at an essential, basic level, 'human meaning is grounded in our embodiment', and that human beings 'are embodied. As long as we dwell on *terra firma* we are incarnate.'[872] Without citing architects or buildings, Johnson attaches modes of architectural meaning to recent findings of the cognitive sciences on embodiment of thought and mind, arguing that real-world experiences, such as of containment, verticality, motion and physical forces, become central to human construction of worldly meaning, and that architecture, in creating such experiences, 'resonates with the deepest levels of our connection to our environment.'[873]

In empirical terms, a visitor to Aalto's work can sense embodiment, in and around various Aalto buildings, even in their images. White is found in the physicality of a white curved concrete ceiling that floats and reflects light over readers and books in Seinäjoki Library. White is instrumental in explaining Aalto's obscurant thesis of *materia*, in a reading of the embodied materiality of a minor transitional space in Jyväskylä Festival Hall. White gives a medium through which to gauge an embodied sense of perception of white walls in the winter streetscape, understood through

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[870] Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*.

[871] Goldhagen, 'Ultraviolet': 45.

[872] Mark L. Johnson, 'Architecture and the Embodied Mind', *OASE* 58 (2002): 76.

[873] Johnson, 'Architecture and the Embodied Mind', 88.

commentary on paintings by Agnes Martin, in a photograph that conveys a certain 'memory of sensation' at Aalto Atelier.

Waves create a sense of embodiment in their rhythmic repetition and curved organic forms. Large scale Waves manifest in the experience of ascending an interior hill of built stairs to reach floors, and likeness to the nearby hill landscape in Aalto's Jyväskylä Main Building. Medium sized body-scale waves are encountered and landscape is sensed in the stairs, undulating walls and fittings, changing light, and paths in Aalto's foyers, and in Säynätsalo Town Hall. Very small waves and surface shimmers are recalled and echoed in the haptic finesse, recalling delicate landscape details, of detailed fittings and details in the Villa Mairea.

In Ruins, embodiment reveals an architectural vulnerability in two niches, edge conditions where the proximity of the body inside the building to nature barely outside creates or requires a ruined quality, exchanging materials, and body spatial experience with the adjacent outdoor space or landscape, allowing the body the feeling or experience of landscape while remaining in the shelter, space or comfort of the building.

Thus through concepts of Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment, a phenomenological appreciation of a building can be developed as a rich means to articulate an understanding of the design and experience of a work of architecture. It is argued in the present study that when these phenomenological concepts and related perceptions go beyond the building footprint to involve landscape, the more complete reading of architecture that results becomes ontological, in dealing with the whole meaningful reality of experience, and responding to its research question: *What is the significance of landscape in Aalto's architecture?*

6.2 CONCLUSION

6.2.1 Research aims

In response to the research question *What is the significance of landscape in Aalto's architecture?* the research project aimed at its outset to achieve two essential things. First, it aimed to identify landscape-related themes in Aalto's work. Second, it aimed to create a theoretical perspective on Aalto's work, based on those themes. The project responded directly to those aims as noted below, articulating the historical-theoretical significance of landscape in understanding Aalto's architecture.

First, by organising selected examples of Aalto's work and investigating the examples in the 27 episodes, the research identified a number of works from Aalto's oeuvre – drawings, images, details, elements, interiors and buildings – where landscape seemed, on first inspection, connected in some way to their design and experience. However, the repeated visual and sensed connections that appeared between these many examples – from both the author's experience of the architecture in situ and from the Aalto literature – and the observed landscape conditions adjacent to, near, or in view of the architecture, prompted a sense that not only was landscape connected with the architecture, but that it was decisively involved in its conception, production and experience.

Once it was included as a critical element in a survey of the conceptual and experiential framework of Aalto's architecture, landscape became difficult to dissociate from critical reflection on his buildings. The generally evident involvement of landscape with Aalto's architecture, and the experienced involvement of the visitor with landscape elements in his work, together suggested the direction of the study. The development of themes of White, Waves and Ruins for the study emerged from examination of the author's own notes and images of Aalto's buildings as encountered in their everyday settings, and from topics identified in the Aalto literature and in his 'own words', and facilitated the organisation of the analysis of his work in terms of landscape.

Second, to create a theoretical perspective on Aalto's work, a conceptual framework was needed. From the literature architectural phenomenology, as articulated and set out by Norberg-Schulz in *Genius Loci* offered a suitable discourse, with its roots in philosophy and its references to Nordic landscape and occasional citations of Aalto's work. Landscape could be observed in Aalto's work at three levels or scales of proximity to the building and the visitor: first, in a distant or middle-distance view; second, as proximate to the visitor, as the site and the building's exterior and entry; and third, in perceiving and using the building at close quarters, through to physical contact with handles, rails, steps and other built elements.

Through research of the architectural theoretical literature, three phenomenological concepts emerged as viable for investigating Aalto's architecture at three experiential scales. At a distant scale, the concept of Place offered theoretical perspective on landscape and natural space in Aalto's work. At a middle scale of site and exterior, extending to interior spaces and rooms, often conjoined in Aalto's work, the concept of Atmosphere related architecture and landscape, inside and outside, through an

existing mode of analysis. At a closer scale of contact and bodily experience, both of handling and touching rails and edges of the building and being physically moved by stairs and enclosed and directed by walls and corridors, the emergent concept of Embodiment, of embodied cognition, offered fresh perspectives on the haptic and tactile aspects of Aalto's work often observed by Pallasmaa. These concepts were not only visible and evident in Aalto's work, but were also evident in the landscape at the three scales of experience: in distant rural, suburban or urban landscape settings; in the forms of trees, flowing water, geological formations and topography at whole-building scale; and in water surfaces, rock textures, tree bark and branches, the surfaces of ground and snow, through to the tips of leaves and mosses close by Aalto's work.

With the achievement of these research aims, the work of analysis of White, Waves and Ruins in Aalto's architecture proceeded, using three phenomenological concepts, Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment. The research analysis was organised and carried out, to argue that landscape was decisive in experience and critical understanding of Aalto's architecture. This decisiveness and centrality of landscape in Aalto's work led to the findings noted below, and ultimately to the conclusion, in terms of the research question, that landscape was significant to understanding Aalto's architecture. Indeed landscape appeared as significant and meaningful to the degree that it could be said to be ontological in his work, that is, to be vital to its being, to its conceptual and experiential reality, to its existence.

6.2.2 Research findings

The study makes a number of findings through its investigation of landscape in Aalto's work, and is able to argue the following, related to key concepts of Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment.

The heterodox nature of Aalto's modernism is contingent partly on the presence of landscape in Aalto's work, from conception to making to experience.

Place in Aalto's architecture is articulated through its white walls and white buildings in rural and urban settings, inflected and materially connected to local conditions. Place is sensed in large wave-form campus buildings, in waves of stairs that usher people through built places, and in the seas of waves of contour lines where buildings are drawn in site plans. And in its open, ruined forms, Aalto's Muuratsalo courtyard relates people to historical rural spaces, to inside-outside relationships, and to the ground around and coolly beneath his architecture

Atmosphere in Aalto's work appears in its connections in terms of white in painting, with the forms and materiality of snow, and with white interior walls. Atmosphere is sensed in wave-forms in a large dramatically suspended wall, in a wave ceiling hovering near a forest, and in the mythic waters of built pools. A mood of melancholy emanates from Aalto's ruin sketches, and a sense of nostalgia for loss of buildings and security arises in images of war-wrecked houses, both becoming instrumental in

construction and reconstruction, while Aalto's welcoming of overgrowth creates both experienced harmony and conceptual tensions.

Embodiment in Aalto's work and its experience is evident in the white material curves, body-scale white stair elements and dematerializing images of white buildings. Embodiment is sensed in a wave-like indoor staircase, in the curving foyers of public buildings, and in repetitive sensuous details in the *opus con amore* of Villa Mairea. And Aalto's embodied rationalism is seen in his fixation with the ancient amphitheatre, sketched in situ and built in modern outdoor settings, in niches that locate the body between building and landscape, and in the details of a summerhouse between ideals and mortality.

Thus a method of analysis using phenomenological concepts can reveal the conceptual and lived, experiential proximity between architecture and landscape.

The connection of Aalto's architecture with landscape, where architecture is understood as mediating between the vulnerable individual or community and the immediate landscape, implies human involvement rather than aesthetic effect, so that Aalto's work can be seen as made for the contemporary 'little person', and as a buffer against technologised production and often hostile urban environments.

6.2.3 Contribution to knowledge; Limitations

The study makes its contribution to architectural scholarship through its close readings of selected Aalto work, interpreting landscape in his architecture with reference to phenomenological concepts of Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment.

The proposition of landscape as ontological, arrived at through the phenomenological analysis of this study, is consequential in three key ways.

The proposition that landscape is ontological in Aalto's architecture, supported by the research findings, can be regarded as decisive in a historical estimation of Aalto's status as a heterodox modernist architect. Distinct from abstract ideas of 'nature' in its potential for experience and sensing, and more encompassing and universal than restrictive notions of the Finnish 'forest', landscape distinguishes Aalto's work from that of his modernist peers: from Le Corbusier's painterly ideas of nature and of landscape as a framed view, from Mies's rationalist building, and from Gropius's abstract urbanism.

It infers that phenomenology opens Aalto's work to close investigation and reveals an almost fractal architectural sensitivity to nature, to human psychology and senses, and to the potentials of building to relate the everyday person to the natural world framed as landscape.

It indicates landscape as a largely neglected topic in architectural history. In Leach's sense that a 'broader, more generous and more contemporary definition of architectural history's scope would include a correspondingly wider definition of

evidence',[874] landscape, as used to investigate Aalto's work, arguably serves to extend historical architectural research into newer areas of interdisciplinary interest to expand its contemporary reach and relevance.

While this study is limited in its reach, in not being an exhaustive study of Aalto works, and in not visiting Aalto's work methodically and in different seasons and social settings, nonetheless it represents an expansion of Aalto studies, both in looking again at well-known and obscure examples of his work, and in using the methods of phenomenology to look at those examples in connection with the sensing everyday human and the natural world framed and understood as landscape.

6.2.4 Speculation: On the value of the investigation for architecture in general

This investigation provides a framework for a reading of architectural experience that includes landscape as essential to the experience. By including landscape in his method Aalto elevates landscape from being misunderstood or underestimated as a mere source of views, gardens and car parks – the result of a dominant modern focus on orthodoxies of form, geometry, technology, and a deterministic emphasis on the autonomous building – to become an enlightening essential resource for architectural creation and experience.

Aalto creates architecture that appears to give gives landscape-related experience to the individual visitor, whose experience can recall Colin St John Wilson feeling 'so powerfully moved by the experience' of Scharoun's Philharmonie or Schinkel's Altesmuseum,[875] or Harold Bloom's reader, who reads literature not 'for easy pleasure or to expiate social guilt', but rather 'to enlarge a solitary existence'.[876] Aalto makes architecture that can not only offer a functional building for its everyday user, the individual 'little person', but can also reward the same 'little person', who pauses one day in or near an unfamiliar building. There, through the architecture, as a result of its involvement with the landscape, that person may sense their identity and being in a particular place, feel psychologically reassured, or faintly sense the ease of their body's movement through the building.

Versions of epiphany, like those cited by St John Wilson, and related to landscape, can be experienced by the visitor in numerous Aalto works: on emerging from the red brick courtyard through the gateway to stand amongst the lake, trees and rocks at Muuratsalo; at moving amongst the columns, benches and shifting ceilings of the foyer of Finlandia Hall; at seeing the vine-covered walls of Kultuuritalo advancing like standing waves on arriving in Helsinki for the first time along Sturenkatu; and in the close proximity of weeds, vines and soft stones framed by a fragmentary white building in the staged outdoor ruin of Aalto Atelier. In these works and others, the unprecedented surprise of Aalto's original architectural forms actively framing or

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[874] Leach, *What is Architectural History?,* 83.

[875] Colin St John Wilson, 'Apologia', in *Architectural Reflections: Studies in the philosophy and practice of architecture* (Oxford; Boston: Butterworth Architecture, 1992), xiii.

[876] Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The books and school of the ages* (London: Papermac, 1995), 518.

entering one's immediate space is balanced by the realisation that the architecture draws on its involvement with landscape to simultaneously increase and soften its effect on the individual visitor's perceptions.

Thus the present study, through its use of phenomenology, opens ways to notice, comprehend and articulate actual and possible relationships, and the dynamic involvement made accessible between people, building and landscape through its inquiry into the significance of landscape in a phenomenological understanding of Aalto's architecture.

6.2.5 Further research

Through this research landscape has been found to offer a diverse basis for architectural discourse, suited to exploration of Aalto's work and thinking from the 1920s to the 1970s. Through this research, the significance of landscape in Aalto's work, only occasionally investigated previously, emerges as an area of historical-theoretical architectural interest.

While the literature notes Aalto's interest in landscape and acknowledges its importance as an area for study of Aalto,[877] Finnish curators have only recently (2019-20) produced a themed exhibition on landscape in Aalto's work.[878] However, the exhibition appears without an accompanying historical study at the comprehensive level of Cohen's edited multi-author publication *Le Corbusier: An Atlas of Modern Landscapes* (2013).[879]

While archival research was not a component of this study's research, material from the Aalto archive relating to nature, site and landscape – drawings, survey maps, letters, sketches, site documents, photographs, movies, juvenilia, etc. – stands to open new avenues for investigating the significance of landscape for Aalto. While Schildt published Aalto's articles in *Alvar Aalto: Sketches* (1978) and *Alvar Aalto in his Own Words* (1997), a more comprehensive curation and investigation of Aalto's sketchbooks, travel drawings and photographs would cast new light on the significance of landscape in his work and methods.

In terms of further inquiry into Aalto, future studies could use contemporary philosophical thinking, such as Malpas's thinking on place,[880] Elizabeth Grosz's thinking on architecture, nature and the earth,[881] or Bruno Latour's thinking on politics

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[877] McCarter, *Aalto*, 237.

[878] 'The Cultivated Landscape of Alvar Aalto' (Museum of Finnish Architecture, Helsinki, 25 Sep 2019 - 12 Apr 2020; Alvar Aalto Museum, Jyväskylä, 14 May 2020 - 25 Oct 2020), devised by Tom Simons, with texts by Teija Isohauta, co-produced by the Museum of Finnish Architecture and the Alvar Aalto Foundation. https://www.alvaraalto.fi/en/services/exhibitions/the-cultivated-landscape-of-alvar-aalto/ See: https://tlmagazine.com/aalvar-aalto-museum-the-cultivated-landscape-of-alvar-aalto/ Noted 13 Dec 2020.

[879] See Cohen, *Le Corbusier: An Atlas of Modern Landscapes*; the *Atlas* accompanied a 2013-14 exhibition of Le Corbusier's landscape-related drawings, paintings and designs.

[880] Malpas, *The Place of Landscape*.

[881] See Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside*; also Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

and climate,[882] to further investigate Aalto's work in conceptual terms. Beyond philosophy, through landscape and phenomenology, architecture may continue to become better understood for its cultural and environmental contribution, in contemporary contested global Australian landscape settings.

Relations between seeing and other senses noted in this study, between the visual capacities of the eyes and the sensing capacity of the body, suggests an area for further research in human-architecture-landscape relations. Art historian James Elkins asks, 'What happens if we stop and take the time to look more carefully?'[883] In response, a wider exploration of phenomenological sensing, a guide to 'how to use your senses' in perceiving natural / landscape phenomena, could investigate and better articulate perception of place, and embodied and atmospheric sensing of the world.

In terms of landscape, the present study creates a body of knowledge for future historical-theoretical work, based in the knowledge made around Aalto and his work, and offering a means to envision and approach the relationship of architecture to landscape in thinking, teaching and practice. The known influence of Aalto on later architects such as Utzon, Siza, Murcutt and Shigeru Ban, in terms of materials, mood and landscape, and Zumthor's use of phenomenology to gauge the qualities of his own work, indicate the infiltration of Aalto's work into later practices, which may be investigated, explained and articulated more fully.

Phenomenological concepts such as Place, Atmosphere and Embodiment, used to read landscape in Aalto's work, might also be used to trace landscape or urban phenomenology in Aalto's modernist peers such as Le Corbusier, Kahn, or other architects with a commitment to landscape such as Utzon or Murcutt, Scarpa or Siza. Contemporary European practices such as OMA, Mecanoo, MVRDV, UNStudio, or Herzog & de Meuron, led by highly trained and artistically gifted practitioners, and producing numerous buildings across a spectrum of cultural and landscape contexts, are largely unnoticed in terms of phenomenological analysis. Their work may be readable and comprehensible in new and significant ways in terms of their use of emergent digital technologies to design, model and build contemporary work.

Aalto anticipated a dynamic world where his heterodox modernist buildings would be inhabited and used; his time-friendly buildings suggest that he understood that both 'nature' and 'culture' would continue to be at stake, if not at existential risk, and that people, place and modernity's dynamism of change would need to coexist. Aalto said, 'You can't save the world, you can only set it an example.'[884] His architecture seems likely to remain relevant to a younger generation's speculations and expectations, involving people with nature, landscape and the living world.

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[882] Bruno Latour, trans. Catherine Porter, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).
[883] Elkins, *How to Use Your Eyes*.
[884] Schildt, *Decisive Years*, 230.

In influential younger Nordic firms (BIG, Snøhetta, Helen & Hard) the changing human relationship with nature has become a key theme in their partly speculative practices, recognizing a Nordic exploitation of nature rather than perpetrating belief in its unspoiled or mythic state.[885] Beyond Scandinavia, the blurring or distinction between nature, landscape and architecture, viewed through the framework of practices such as Helen & Hard or Studio Gang,[886] engaged with the dynamics of biological processes and natural, industrial and recovered landscapes, can underpin a repositioning of architectural thinking, connected with landscape, regarding social justice, biodiversity, environmental repair and planetary futures.

The human animal remains constant in its size, sensibilities and physiology, striving to dwell and survive in its societies amidst the evolving built world and the changing, threatened natural environments of the twenty-first century, much as Aalto's 'little person' lived through the changes of the twentieth century. The work of architecture in contributing to social and environmental harmony, noted by Aalto, continues.

This now concludes the research.

John Roberts
Newcastle

1 June 2021

[885] Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen, 'Aalto and the New Nordic', in Kries and Eisenbrand, *Alvar Aalto: Second Nature*.

[886] Martin Braathen, Reinhard Kropf, Siv Helene Stangeland, eds, *Helen & Hard: Relational Design* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2012); Studio Gang, *Architecture* (London: Phaidon, 2020).

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