

UC Berkeley

Places

Title

In the Garden [Speaking of Places]

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7rm60301>

Journal

Places, 11(1)

ISSN

0731-0455

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Publication Date

1997-01-15

Peer reviewed

In the Garden Katie Trager

We've got a pine tree right in the middle of our meditation garden in Redondo Beach. A big, beautiful Scotch pine that inhales with the wind and makes a forest of sound. They hacked it up but good, sawed off the limbs, scattered the insides all over the ground. It bled and wept, sticky tears. But it stayed a magnificent animal. The blood crystallized. Its basic arc is there.

I'm going to draw it soon, on white with pink fluorescent marker. Just the branches, the basic gestures. De Kooning limbs as they come forth from the mind. No compositions. Not going to get sidetracked by that line of rocks beyond the frame, or anything else. Just strokes as they arrive from space.

Now there's an insight I didn't even ask for. Beginnings and endings. Wanting. Not the in-between. Where most of life is. Maybe not. After all, there's every morning and night. Every day a birth. The rush of emerging consciousness. Drawing. Architecture. For a minute it all makes sense. Form-making, the building emerging out of the swamp of voices, the mud of so many desires, so much grasping. When it emerges, what a triumph. Like the tree. Creation. It doesn't even have to be this tree. It just has to be.

The short circuiting. That would explain it — the constant going back to the center — Zen *satori*. The moment of creation, the beginning. If you go back long enough and strong enough the *satori* will organize all the short-circuited paths just like a road, the only road that could've gotten you there. A charitable interpretation. I'll skip the rest.

I wander away from the insight, let it fall where it may. It's a garden, after all. Brown needles pile up in the space between our sidewall and our neighbor's. A whole wilderness lies — cobwebs, mushrooms, time, dirt, dust, deposits, pine tar. It's the Angeles Forest outside the city, rocks in the open sky, the angst of nature. Nature you



don't own and know, blue sky, white, hot rocks. You're only there for a minute in your car. Anyone could appear. You have to fortress the moment, even the angst. You should have downloaded it to someone else. You've got to know your way back to the city in a day. Nothing belongs.

My own pine needle universe the sun lights up.

That line of rocks that wasn't going to be in the composition. It's not set in dirt, it's sand, that's what the soil is here, ancient dunes. A little patch of ancient sea. Anza Borrego, that beautiful spiritland, the same mute patches of sandy earth. Looking up at you. Saying nothing. Ancient mute discovery. No scale. Like you're a little kid. L.A. is just an overlay on these little patches. You can find them anywhere.

Somebody else set the line of rocks. And the plants, the rose bush. The old barrel with metal straps. Even the cat isn't ours. We're renting. It's our own found city. We found it in two hours. Lived here a year and a half. Momentary ownership slides against the layers of time, floating like a plate, waiting for the quake. And it will come. The tiny house is a tear-down; that's why there's so much land and time. Forty-five years of hands trading places, nobody marking the time but the dirt. Constantly found and forgotten. True L.A. Breathe the currents in.

We planted a lawn in the back. Long, green, shiny grass, most of it bent over in the wind. I sit in the net chair hung on the tree, twirling my feet. The Midwest, my childhood, the plains. In the shade. I can touch it.

Anywhere in this palace of a side yard you can see and be seen. Of course, it's L.A. I don't mind. Out past the tree, at the corner, I can see six houses pasted together across the street. Palm trees. Telephone poles. Wires. Neighborhood watch. Stop. People walk by. Cars. Motorcycles. Biplanes overhead. Everybody's fired up on his

Photos by Katie Trager.



own extended short circuit. Trajectories fly by. Like constellations. Moving past. Even the cat pads warily by without a glance.

They pass right by the center. And that's about the only comfort I can get. But it's natural here.

At the side of our meditation hall, our gorgeous stolen slice of land, is a huge townhouse, running the entire length of the yard. Blank. Stucco and siding. Nobody there. A wall of meditation. Our five-foot high cinder-block wall and then this wall. I know what lies beyond, I walk it every day. But for a boundary, this is better. Simpler. A better organizer of meditation. One wall of the tunnel. The koan. A gateway.

Back in the back, in the real meditation area facing west, to the ocean, away from the street, is a truly shattering space. Just framed sky. Above the townhouse deck. So irradiated blue you can't believe it in your heart. It's the ocean rocking, every boat trip I ever took, the floating docks at King Harbor in the 60s. It's my youth on the beach waiting for a bigger and better life to come. It's the family bound for an instant, stopped together in eternal promise.

The siding frame moves back and forth, adjusting the perspective. The ugly crooked lamp. The door nobody comes out of. The essential porch. All the depth that childhood and the world has to offer.

The whole structure hangs there in open space. The sun just radiates that blue eternity until it comes in through the gate and touches you right on the face.

You can't give it more than a sidelong glance. You know it's there. It's part of that well we stumble, short-circuiting, towards.

I focus back in on the ground, sitting with my back to the sun. Creating pathways in the dirt, observing limits, fragments, leaves, pieces of weird plastic trash sticking up from before, going around in circles, remembering so many coun-

tries, lives within lives, trying to position them, trying to slow the progression down. Is it all over at forty-three? No, new directions burst out. I do my work. It was always like this.

This plot of garden now. Is it inside the world out there, or is the world and stream of time inside it? The Chinese boxes begin to load up. It's so openly transparent here, exposed, a constant reminder of the interpenetration. Set in motion, the infinite regression, self in the world.

I give up figuring, concentrating, focusing; I don't want to follow that path right now. I throw my attention up to the sky where the stars move together. No-one is alone there, no wall, but no eyes. There's some kind of path. Everything remembers the big bang but can't quite get back to it. Nothing escapes its fate. They're all drawing from the same well. Parallel gardens in parallel universes.

I'm just as much eternity looking at them as they're eternity staring down at me.

I see this mysticism stuff doesn't give up. It's got the grasp. The short circuit is out there somewhere — death, the edge, whatever reversal there can be — and yet we continue to move through our gardens. Any solace we can create, any worlds, are the bridge, fusion.

The sun lights up our skulls every day. The sky comes in to grace our dirt floor. We let it in and walk right over it.

There's time in the garden yet.

