

**Alvar Aalto's Muuratsalo house,**  
**understood through Jay Appleton's prospect-refuge theory**

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John Wright Roberts

## **Dedication**

To the memory of my parents, Jim and Janet Roberts.

For Maria, Julius, and Margot.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Statement Of Originality</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Dedication</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Table of Figures</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>xiv</b>
<b>Synopsis</b>	<b>xv</b>
 <b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</b>	 <b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Preface</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1.1 Alvar Aalto: designer of landscapes	1
1.1.2 House architecture: Aalto's Muuratsalo house	2
1.1.3 Appleton and Hildebrand: landscape symbolism and architectural preference	3
1.1.4 Using prospect-refuge theory	3
1.1.5 Research: topic, question, methodology	4
1.1.6 Methodology	4
1.1.7 Literature search: What does the literature suggest?	5
1.1.8 Benefits and justifications of the research	5
<b>1.2 Personal ruminations: Aalto, architecture and landscape</b>	<b>6</b>
1.2.1 Alvar Aalto, and a curiosity about architecture and landscape	6
1.2.2 Centenary re-evaluation	7
1.2.3 Appleton and a landscape theory	7
1.2.4 Hildebrand and a landscape methodology	8
1.2.5 A controversial architect?	9
1.2.6 Australian site and landscape	10
<b>1.3 Dissertation Research: Summary</b>	<b>11</b>
1.3.1 Dissertation key terms	11
1.3.2 Research Question	11
1.3.3 Research Objectives	12
1.3.4 Method of research	12
1.3.5 Architectural experience and architectural history	13
1.3.6 Style, idiom, spelling, etc.	13
<b>CHAPTER 1 NOTES</b>	<b>14</b>
 <b>CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY</b>	
<b>METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2.0 Chapter 2 Introduction</b>	<b>16</b>
2.0.1 Methodology: an overview: architecture and landscape	16
2.0.2 A house and a theory	17
<b>2.1 Research methodology</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1.1 Landscape, experience, and architectural aesthetics	18
2.1.2 Architectural knowledge	19

2.1.3 Landscape knowledge	20
2.1.4 Interdisciplinary knowledge	20
2.1.5 Methodological assumptions: ontology	20
2.1.6 Methodological position: a postpositivist approach	21
2.1.7 Research method and literature	22
2.1.8 Research scope	23
2.1.9 The literature review	24
2.1.10 Literature search methodology	24
2.1.11 Key sources: architectural and landscape anthologies	26
<b>2.2 Argumentation: defined boundaries and limits</b>	<b>26</b>
2.2.1 Ontological and epistemological boundaries: overlap of architecture and landscape	26
2.2.2 Defined boundaries and limits (1): ontology	27
2.2.3 Defined boundaries and limits (2): epistemology	28
2.2.4 Process of argumentation: landscape in architecture	29
2.2.5 Language and terminology	29
<b>2.3 Methodological paradigms</b>	<b>30</b>
2.3.1 Landscape and nature as paradigms for understanding architecture	30
2.3.2 A landscape paradigm	31
2.3.3 Historical methodology: the relation of mankind to the natural order	32
2.3.4 Landscape: history and theory	33
2.3.5 Research in action: literature and the visitor	33
<b>CHAPTER 2 NOTES</b>	<b>35</b>
 <b>CHAPTER 3 THE 1998 AALTO CENTENARY</b>	
<b>LANDSCAPE EMERGES AS A CRITICAL DISCOURSE FOR ARCHITECTURE</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>3.0 Chapter 3 Introduction</b>	<b>38</b>
3.0.1 Alvar Aalto centenary and evolving historical opinion on landscape	38
<b>3.1 Landscape in pre-centenary writing</b>	<b>39</b>
3.1.1 Aalto's words and works	39
3.1.2 Scully: solid forms, not space	40
3.1.3 Giedion: the irrational and organic Aalto	41
3.1.4 Baird: ruins and balustrades	42
3.1.5 Schildt: <i>Sketches, Own Words</i> , and a biography	44
<b>3.2 Landscape in pre-centenary revision</b>	<b>45</b>
3.2.1 Porphyrios: a new discourse	46
3.2.2 Quantrill: urbanism and nature	47
3.2.3 Approaching the centenary: guidebook themes	47
3.2.4 Weston: nature and culture	48
3.2.5 Prelude to centenary: the topic of landscape	48
<b>3.3 Centenary and Landscape</b>	<b>49</b>
3.3.1 Aalto centenary writing	49
3.3.2 Curtis and Frampton: from survey to essay	51
3.3.3 Frampton: Aalto as a designer of landscapes	52
3.3.4 Curtis: mythic landscapes	53
3.3.5 Pallasmaa: logic of the image; fragile architecture	55
3.3.6 Treib: Aalto's nature	56
<b>3.4 Post-centenary: landscape and Aalto's legacy</b>	<b>57</b>
3.4.1 After 1998: Wang and Pallasmaa	58

3.4.2 Samuel and Menin: Aalto's primitive hut	59
<b>3.5 Towards a landscape perspective</b>	<b>61</b>
CHAPTER 3 NOTES	63
 <b>CHAPTER 4 ARCHITECTURE'S UNDERSTANDING OF LANDSCAPE</b>	
<b>ARCHITECTURE'S UNDERSTANDING OF LANDSCAPE, IN TERMS OF NATURE, LANDSCAPE AND SITE</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>4.0 Chapter 4 Introduction</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>4.1 Nature</b>	<b>71</b>
4.1.1 Key sources, key events	71
4.1.2 Nesbitt: the human relationship with nature: representation and symbolization	71
4.1.3 <i>Keywords</i> and <i>New Keywords</i> : nature and culture	72
4.1.4 Forty: historical and theoretical usage of Nature	73
4.1.4.1 Nature (i): nature as the source of beauty in architecture	74
4.1.4.2 Nature (ii): art as a second nature	75
4.1.4.3 Nature (iii): rejection of nature	75
4.1.5 Aalto: philosophy and nature	76
4.1.6 Aalto, nature, and master architects	77
4.1.7 Against the Modernist <i>tabula rasa</i> : context and nature	79
4.1.8 Aalto's humanism	80
4.1.9 Aalto and Le Corbusier: nature and space, self and refuge	81
<b>4.2 Landscape</b>	<b>84</b>
4.2.1 Scully: Modern architecture, landscape, humanism	84
4.2.2 Frampton: organic and biological	84
4.2.3 Curtis: social landscapes	85
4.2.4 Treib: landscape and terrain	86
4.2.5 Berrizbeitia and Pollak: 'reciprocity' of architecture and landscape	87
4.2.6 Forest dreaming: Nordic building, Nordic landscapes	88
<b>4.3 Site</b>	<b>90</b>
4.3.0 Importance of the site: the specificity of a given place	90
4.3.1 Rowe: Le Corbusier, the Ideal Villa, La Tourette, and the site	91
4.3.2 Frampton: cultivating the site	93
4.3.3 Cache: topography and the city site: specificity and identity	94
4.3.4 Burns and Kahn: Site matters	95
4.3.5 Redfield: the suppressed site: Le Corbusier's houses	96
4.3.6 Leatherbarrow: technology and topography	97
<b>4.4 Conclusions: Nature, landscape, site</b>	<b>101</b>
4.4.0 Nature, landscape, site as architectural knowledge	101
4.4.1 Conclusions: the architectural site	101
CHAPTER 4 NOTES	103
 <b>CHAPTER 5 A LANDSCAPE VIEW OF ARCHITECTURE, IN TERMS OF THREE CONCEPTS: LANDSCAPE, GARDEN AND TERRACE</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>5.0 Chapter 5 Introduction</b>	<b>109</b>
5.0.1 Introduction: the lens of landscape: a landscape view of architecture	109
5.0.2 Landscape: key sources	109

5.0.3 Key concepts: landscape, garden, and terrace	110
<b>5.1 Landscape: a view of landscape</b>	<b>111</b>
5.1.1 The word landscape: view or prospect	111
5.1.2 Landscape ontology	113
5.1.3 Landscape and nature: the human presence	114
5.1.4 Landscape: survival or construct	116
5.1.5 Cosgrove: landscape as an ideological concept	117
5.1.6 J. B. Jackson: everyday landscapes	117
5.1.7 Laurie Olin: nature, feelings, the everyday, and the landscape architect	119
<b>5.2 Garden</b>	<b>120</b>
5.2.1 Garden as a landscape type	120
5.2.2 Ideas of garden: place, memory, theatre	121
5.2.3 Appleton: <i>Hortus conclusus</i> as foraging-ground	123
5.2.4 Aben and de Wit: <i>Hortus conclusus</i> and <i>axis mundi</i>	124
5.2.5 The enclosed garden: resolving dualities?	125
<b>5.3 Terrace</b>	<b>127</b>
5.3.1 A basic concept of artificial landscape	127
5.3.2 Hertzberger: terrace and house, space and place	128
5.3.3 Pure, harmonious, civilized landscapes	130
5.3.4 An ideal place: the elevated sheltered terrace	132
5.3.5 The Villa Medici	134
<b>5.4 Overview: the lens of landscape</b>	<b>136</b>
5.4.1 The lens of landscape	136
CHAPTER 5 NOTES	139
 <b>CHAPTER 6 AALTO</b>	
<b>ALVAR AALTO: BIOGRAPHY, HOUSE, LANDSCAPE, AESTHETICS, ATAVISM</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>6.0 Chapter 6 Introduction</b>	<b>144</b>
6.0.1 Early childhood	144
6.0.2 House architecture and landscape	145
<b>6.1 Aalto's life experience</b>	<b>146</b>
6.1.1 Finnish landscape and Aalto's childhood	146
<b>6.2 Aalto's house architecture</b>	<b>148</b>
6.2.1 Aalto's house architecture: eating, sleeping, working, playing	148
6.2.2 The single-family house: architectural ideals and significances	149
6.2.3 Finnish vernacular architecture	150
6.2.4 <i>Aitta</i> : a natural solution	153
6.2.5 Aalto House, Helsinki: home and office	154
6.2.6 Villa Mairea: icon of modernity	157
6.2.7 Muuratsalo summer house: an Experimental House	161
<b>6.3 Aalto, landscape and site</b>	<b>163</b>
6.3.1 A kind of town	163
6.3.2 Aalto's architecture as landscape: Frampton	164
6.3.3 Aalto's architecture as landscape: Curtis' mythic landscapes	166
6.3.4 The landscape of ideas	168
6.3.5 The Italian hill town	169
6.3.6 Levelled land	170

<b>6.4 Aesthetics</b>	<b>172</b>
6.4.1 Aalto's architectural aesthetics	172
6.4.2 Experiment and laboratory	172
6.4.3 From doorstep to living room	173
6.4.4 Aalto's concavities and Utzon's convexities	177
6.4.5 Asplund, site and Aalto	178
6.4.6 A damaged but still beating heart	179
6.4.7 Aalto and postmodern discourse	180
6.4.8 Porphyrios: scientific, aesthetic and ethical valorizations of nature	181
<b>6.5 Atavistic, primitive, biological</b>	<b>182</b>
6.5.1 Archaic figures	182
6.5.2 Atavism and hunting	183
6.5.3 Archaic, atavistic and biological influences in Aalto's architecture	185
<b>CHAPTER 6 NOTES</b>	<b>187</b>
 <b>CHAPTER 7 APPLETON'S PROSPECT-REFUGE THEORY</b>	
<b>THEORIES AND UNDERPINNINGS: USES BY HILDEBRAND AND OTHERS</b>	<b>195</b>
<b>7.0 Chapter 7 Introduction</b>	<b>195</b>
7.0.1 Jay Appleton: landscape and prospect-refuge theory	195
<b>7.1 Jay Appleton: landscape and prospect-refuge theory</b>	<b>195</b>
7.1.1 Appleton's key publications	195
7.1.2 Appleton's key sources	196
7.1.3 Appleton's quest: habitat theory and prospect-refuge theory	198
7.1.4 Appleton's proposal: a framework of symbolism	199
7.1.4.1 Terminology of landscape symbolism: a prospect-refuge lexicon	199
7.1.5 Pleasure as the driving force	201
7.1.6 Appleton's theory in architecture	202
7.1.7 Hildebrand's use of Appleton's theory to consider Wright's houses	203
<b>7.2 Prospects, refuges and space</b>	<b>204</b>
7.2.1 Spatial choice: prospect and refuge space in architecture and landscape	204
7.2.2 Aesthetics of habitat: Higuchi and <i>zofu-tokusui</i>	205
7.2.3 Norberg-Schulz: existence, enclosure, space and place	206
7.2.4 Bachelard: prospect-refuge spatiality of the house	207
7.2.5 Landscape and architectural space: the courtyard house	209
7.2.6 Landscape and architectural space: enclosed garden	210
<b>7.3 Biological and architectural: nature and culture; biology and humanity</b>	<b>212</b>
7.3.1 Elements of our innate make-up	213
7.3.2 Aalto and Appleton: reconciling nature and biology, culture and humanity	213
7.3.3 A bio-cultural and archaic background	215
7.3.4 The right place: camping and the Alhambra	216
7.3.5 After Appleton: Bourassa and the aesthetics of landscape	217
<b>7.4 The Darwinian adaptationist program</b>	<b>218</b>
7.4.1 Evolved human responses to landscapes	218
7.4.2 The savannah hypothesis	219
7.4.3 Through landscape: an extended view using prospect-refuge theory	221
<b>7.5 Prospect-refuge theory: methodological problems: spatiality, biology, culture</b>	<b>222</b>
7.5.1 Prospect-refuge theory: the problem of spatiality	222
7.5.2 Prospect-refuge theory: the problem of biology	223

7.5.3 Prospect-refuge theory: the problem of culture	224
<b>7.6 Conclusion</b>	<b>225</b>
CHAPTER 7 NOTES	226
 <b>CHAPTER 8 MUURATSALO</b>	
<b>AALTO'S MUURATSALO SUMMER HOUSE: ANALYSIS AND EXPERIENCE, THROUGH THE LENS OF PROSPECT-REFUGE THEORY</b>	<b>233</b>
<b>8.0 Chapter 8 Introduction</b>	<b>233</b>
8.0.1 Introduction: knowledge and experience	233
8.0.2 Three perspectives: approach, outside, inside	234
8.0.3 Method: theory and experience	235
<b>8.1 Aalto's summer house: history and theory</b>	<b>236</b>
8.1.1 A Finnish summer house	236
8.1.2 Ethic of a summer house: work between swims	238
<b>8.2 The summer house: experiment, retreat and refuge</b>	<b>239</b>
8.2.1 Taliesin and Muuratsalo: architects' own refuges	239
8.2.2 Muuratsalo as setting	241
8.2.3 Summer house: prospect and refuge of the house site	242
<b>8.3 Analysis and experience: approach: prospect and refuge</b>	<b>245</b>
8.3.1 Approach by water	245
8.3.2 Site and refuge	247
8.3.3 Entry portal: a threshold between house and landscape	249
<b>8.4 Analysis and experience: outside: prospect and refuge</b>	<b>252</b>
8.4.1 Courtyard and landscape space	252
8.4.2 Courtyard and prospects	253
8.4.3 Courtyard: horizons, lines of vision, prospect and refuge	255
8.4.4 Courtyard and cultural aesthetics: urbanism in the landscape	257
8.4.5 <i>Coulisse</i> and theatricality: combining prospect and refuge	259
8.4.6 Enclosed garden and refuge	260
8.4.7 North and east: side and back doors	262
<b>8.5 Analysis and experience: inside: prospect and refuge</b>	<b>265</b>
8.5.1 Windows, views, prospect	265
8.5.2 Peephole views	266
8.5.3 Interior prospect: the painting loft	268
8.5.4 From the living room: vistas and thresholds	269
8.5.5 Janus and the Finnish home of two faces	271
8.5.6 Interior refuge symbolism	273
<b>8.6 Overview and reflection: prospect and refuge</b>	<b>275</b>
8.6.1 Prospect: approach, outside, inside	275
8.6.2 Refuge: approach, outside, inside	276
<b>8.7 Overview: experience and prospect-refuge symbolism</b>	<b>277</b>
8.7.1 The visitor's experience	277
8.7.2 Conclusion: Muuratsalo aesthetics: knowledge and experience	278
CHAPTER 8 NOTES	279

<b>CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>283</b>
<b>9.0 Chapter 9 Introduction</b>	<b>283</b>
<b>9.1 Research aims and achievements</b>	<b>283</b>
9.1.1 Research topic and question	283
9.1.2 Summary of research achievements	284
<b>9.2 Research methodology: book and building</b>	<b>285</b>
<b>9.3 Research goals, benefits and structure</b>	<b>285</b>
<b>9.4 Research knowledge: literature and experience</b>	<b>286</b>
9.4.1 Research literature	286
9.4.2 Research experience: visit to Aalto's summer house	286
<b>9.5 The field trip as research method</b>	<b>287</b>
<b>9.6 Research findings</b>	<b>287</b>
9.6.1 Findings: prospects and refuges, actual and symbolic	288
9.6.2 Prospect and refuge examples	288
9.6.3 The contribution of architecture	289
<b>9.7 Prospect-refuge theory: building and site; cultural and natural</b>	<b>289</b>
<b>9.8 Problems of prospect-refuge theory</b>	<b>290</b>
<b>9.9 Recommendations: landscape in education; fieldwork in research</b>	<b>291</b>
9.9.1 Landscape and education	291
9.9.2 Fieldwork in research	292
<b>9.10 Future research</b>	<b>292</b>
9.10.1 Research direction 1: evolutionary aesthetics in architecture	293
9.10.2 Research direction 2: Aalto's sites and landscapes	294
9.10.3 Research direction 3: prospect and refuge in Italian urbanism	294
<b>CHAPTER 9 NOTES</b>	<b>296</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>297</b>

## Table of Figures

<b>Figure 1</b> Erik Gunnar Asplund. Skandia Cinema, Stockholm.	78
<b>Figure 2</b> Säynätsalo Town Hall. Southern view, turfed stairs into courtyard.	86
<b>Figure 3</b> Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Villa Dall'Ava, Paris. Living room and garden.	88
<b>Figure 4</b> Ideal villas in ideal landscapes.	91
<b>Figure 5</b> The medieval garden of contemplation, the <i>hortus contemplationis</i> .	120
<b>Figure 6</b> Muuratsalo. Section, looking north.	128
<b>Figure 7</b> Herman Hertzberger, 'Space is a longing'.	130
<b>Figure 8</b> Villa Medici, Fiesole. Ground plan.	136
<b>Figure 9</b> Aitta courtyard house. <b>7a.</b> Competition drawings. <b>7b.</b> Enlarged view.	153
<b>Figure 10</b> Muuratsalo. Perspective view from water. Sketch by Alvar Aalto.	154
<b>Figure 11</b> Aalto House, Helsinki. Ground floor plan.	156
<b>Figure 12</b> Aalto house, Helsinki. Garden (south) view.	157
<b>Figure 13</b> Villa Mairea, Noormarkku. Ground floor plan.	158
<b>Figure 14</b> Villa Mairea. View from south.	159
<b>Figure 15</b> Villa Mairea. North (front) elevation.	160
<b>Figure 16</b> Muuratsalo House. Floor plan with outbuildings.	162
<b>Figure 17</b> Säynätsalo Town Hall. Corridor and northern stairs.	168
<b>Figure 18</b> Fra Angelico, <i>Annunciation</i> (c.1440-50).	175
<b>Figure 19</b> Muuratsalo house. View from living room south into courtyard.	176
<b>Figure 20</b> Villa Mairea. Living room, stairs, fireplace.	177
<b>Figure 21</b> The <i>zofu-tokusui</i> landscape type.	209
<b>Figure 22</b> Interior space and the courtyard house.	213
<b>Figure 23</b> Säynätsalo Town Hall: Transformation of types.	214
<b>Figure 24</b> Aino Aalto. Villa Flora, Alajärvi.	242
<b>Figure 25</b> Muuratsalo. Alvar Aalto using the courtyard's east wall as easel.	244
<b>Figure 26</b> Muuratsalo. Location drawings by Alvar Aalto.	246
<b>Figure 27</b> Muuratsalo. Site plan. Unbuilt irregular structures to east.	247
<b>Figure 28</b> Muuratsalo. Early sketches showing north elevation and site plan.	248
<b>Figure 29</b> Muuratsalo: the forest understorey.	249
<b>Figure 30</b> Muuratsalo. View of house from lake.	251
<b>Figure 31</b> Muuratsalo. Approaching the site by ferry from south.	252
<b>Figure 32</b> Muuratsalo. Approaching house along granite spur.	252
<b>Figure 33</b> Muuratsalo. The house in the forest, seen from the granite spur.	254
<b>Figure 34</b> Muuratsalo. Western elevation: window and screened opening.	254

<b>Figure 35</b>	Muuratsalo. The ‘massively arching open rock’.	256
<b>Figure 36</b>	Muuratsalo. Right to left: courtyard, portal, slot, lake.	257
<b>Figure 37</b>	View west from Muuratsalo house. Muurame Church on horizon.	260
<b>Figure 38</b>	Muuratsalo. The stepped western courtyard opening.	260
<b>Figure 39</b>	Muuratsalo. Diagram, lines of vision.	262
<b>Figure 40</b>	Muuratsalo. Photograph. Line of vision south from courtyard.	263
<b>Figure 41</b>	Muuratsalo. Looking south and west from courtyard.	266
<b>Figure 42</b>	Muuratsalo. White painted outer walls, red brick courtyard walls.	267
<b>Figure 43</b>	Muuratsalo. Northern entry with turf stairs.	269
<b>Figure 44</b>	Muuratsalo. Living room wing, seen from north.	269
<b>Figure 45</b>	Muuratsalo, ‘back’, east view.	270
<b>Figure 46</b>	Muuratsalo. Floor plan.	272
<b>Figure 47</b>	Muuratsalo. Painting loft above.	274
<b>Figure 48</b>	Muuratsalo. View south from living room into courtyard.	278
<b>Figure 49</b>	Muuratsalo. Courtyard portal and dowel trim.	279
<b>Figure 50</b>	Muuratsalo. Corridor of bedroom wing.	281
<b>Figure 51</b>	Muuratsalo. Main bedroom.	282

## **Abstract**

This dissertation reviews the literature of architecture and landscape history published in the period from approximately 1975 to 2008, to consider the role of landscape symbolism in explaining the aesthetic appeal of the house architecture of distinguished Finnish architect Alvar Aalto (1898-1976).

Landscape discourse—the literature, history, theories and terminology of the field of landscape—is relevant in that it may offer insight into Aalto’s well-known affinity for nature, landscape and the architectural site, as recorded in late twentieth-century architectural history, and as set out in Aalto’s own words. Landscape discourse may also enable an enriched reading of Aalto’s house architecture.

The study considers relationships between discourses of architecture and landscape, especially as landscape offers new insight into architectural aesthetics, and focuses on landscape-related themes in Aalto’s domestic architecture. Jay Appleton’s prospect-refuge theory—originally put forward to discuss the aesthetics of landscape and used by Grant Hildebrand to discuss Frank Lloyd Wright’s houses—is adopted as a ‘lens of landscape’ to consider the aesthetic appeal of Aalto’s 1953 Experimental House at Muuratsalo. It is hypothesized that landscape-symbolic elements in the composition of this well-known house may partly account for its aesthetic appeal.

A close reading is made—employing the concepts and terminology of Appleton’s prospect-refuge theory—of compositional elements of Aalto’s Muuratsalo house, both as described in architectural historical literature, and as observed by the writer in person in 2008. Aspects of nature, landscape and site appear to be incorporated and perceived in the house’s composition, along with arguably landscape-symbolic elements, leading to conclusions involving landscape as a factor in the aesthetic appeal of Aalto’s house.

## Synopsis

This dissertation examines landscape in the architecture and thinking of the distinguished Finnish architect Alvar Aalto, to consider landscape as a component of the appeal of his house architecture. This Synopsis introduces the central concerns of the study, and outlines research aims and methods. It also introduces key examples of historical and theoretical writing on architectural conceptions of landscape, and on landscape itself. It looks briefly at Aalto and his domestic architecture, and at Jay Appleton and aspects of his theory of landscape aesthetics.

Kenneth Frampton's 1998 conception of Alvar Aalto's capacity as a 'designer of landscapes'<sup>1</sup> associates Aalto's name with landscape thinking, and suggests that Aalto's architecture is a suitable vehicle for architectural research, particularly for looking at architecture through a landscape lens. The work of Grant Hildebrand, who uses Appleton's theoretical framework of landscape aesthetics to investigate preference for the domestic architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, suggests that Appleton's ideas may shed light on other areas of architectural history, particularly the work of Alvar Aalto.<sup>2</sup>

Writings by Aalto, Appleton, and Hildebrand provide a basis for research aims, objectives, and methodology, as well as a *research topic*—defined as **landscape as a component of architectural aesthetics**.

Personal ruminations outline the study's convergence of two topics: the appeal of Aalto's house architecture; and landscape as setting and complement for architecture. The two areas of interest together form the *research question*—**Can the appeal of Aalto's Muuratsalo house be understood in terms of landscape aesthetics, with particular reference to Appleton's prospect-refuge theory?**

Landscape and Alvar Aalto are brought together to form the *general hypothesis* of the dissertation—that the appeal of Aalto's Muuratsalo house may be understood

in terms of landscape aesthetics, with particular reference to Appleton's prospect-refuge theory.

With the study introduced in Chapter 1, the research intentions and activities of the dissertation—the aims, definitions, processes, assumed realities and knowledge, and other methodological components of the research project—are set out in Chapter 2 *Methodology*, with the literature review process seen as a conclusive and appropriate methodological end in itself.<sup>3</sup>

Chapter 3 reviews Aalto centenary literature to observe recent tendencies in architectural history's understanding of landscape, and of Aalto's work particularly. In Chapter 4, three topics of landscape-related discourse in architectural history and theory—nature, landscape, and site—are reviewed, to gauge architectural historical understanding of landscape.

In Chapter 5, landscape literature is analyzed to frame a landscape perspective on elements of landscape and architecture: reflection on two landscape concepts also found in architecture—the garden and the terrace—shows how landscape discourse may contribute to an expanded understanding of architecture. The landscape paradigm may enable an extended investigation of Aalto's architectural aesthetics; the lens of landscape may reveal layers of significance beyond the building-focused discourses of architecture.

The difference between what may be seen as Appleton's 'biological' version of landscape, and Cosgrove's 'cultural' perspective also helps define the present study, which is interested more in Appleton's 'experience' of landscape as a means of explaining preference for Aalto's architecture, than in Cosgrove's socially and economically 'constructed' idea of landscape (which is also foreign to the general direction of the Aalto literature).

Chapter 6 focuses more closely on literature dealing with Alvar Aalto: his life, houses, landscape, aesthetics, and a theme of atavism pervading his work and

ideas. Chapter 7 considers the theories and writings of Jay Appleton, especially his prospect-refuge theory; it also considers the benefits of the use of Appleton's ideas and theories by Hildebrand and others in explaining preference for landscape-aware architecture.

Chapter 8 is derived from both the literature and this writer's personal experience of the Muuratsalo house. Following Hildebrand's method, the concepts and terminology of Appleton's theory of landscape aesthetics are used to look closely at prospect-refuge symbolism in the Muuratsalo summer house. The writer's experience of the house, and a close reading of the literature are used to reflect on the appeal of the Muuratsalo house and how that appeal relates to landscape aesthetics.

In Chapter 9 the insights of the research into landscape and architecture, especially the value of landscape aesthetic theory to look at Aalto's house architecture, are reviewed to conclude the dissertation.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto' (1998), in *Labour Work and Architecture: Collected Essays on Architecture and Design* (London: Phaidon, 2002), p.238.

<sup>2</sup> Grant Hildebrand, *The Wright Space: Pattern and Meaning in Frank Lloyd Wright's Houses* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Chris Hart, *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Research Imagination* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), p.13.

## Chapter 1 Introduction

**What is it that we like about landscape, and why do we like it?**

**- Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.1**

### **1.1 Preface**

#### **1.1.1 Alvar Aalto: designer of landscapes**

Alvar Aalto (born Hugo Alvar Henrik Aalto, Kuortane, Finland on February 3, 1898; died Helsinki, May 11, 1976) was one of the acknowledged masters of twentieth-century architecture. Since the late 1990s architectural historians have noted landscape themes in Aalto's work. William J. R. Curtis described Aalto's architecture using terms such as 'naturalisation', 'forms inspired by natural phenomena', 'contours of the land', and 'hidden presences'.<sup>1</sup> Richard Weston regarded 'an intense concern for the needs of "the little man" and love of his native landscape' as the sources of Aalto's architecture.<sup>2</sup> The relationship of architecture to nature and landscape is a leading theme in these and other recent historical estimations of Aalto's work.

Kenneth Frampton in 1998 proposed the idea of Aalto 'as a designer of landscapes' as the defining point of his legacy:

His intuitive, biomorphically inspired approach to environmental design caused him to place an enormous emphasis on the capacity of built form to modify equally both the landscape and the urban fabric . . . his achievements as an architect cannot be separated at any stage of his career from his capacity as a designer of landscapes.<sup>3</sup>

This is a watershed opinion, implying that Aalto has to be seen as a designer of not only finely wrought buildings, acclaimed by critics and the general public, but also of landscapes with similarly high aesthetic levels. Thus Aalto's landscape strategies, perhaps hitherto unnoticed as a topic of architectural history, may have

to be comprehended as part of an assessment of his works, his ideas, and his overall legacy.

Frampton's conclusion also seems to imply that any extended study of Aalto requires a sense of the realities and knowledge of landscape, and an openness to include landscape ideas within architectural knowledge, in order to fully appreciate Aalto's motivations and achievements. To think about Aalto's buildings without their landscape context, or without an awareness of his landscape attitudes, is to remain unaware of the full legacy of Aalto. A theoretical framework which might be used to bridge the gap between landscape and architecture would seem an important tool for better understanding the work of Alvar Aalto.

### **1.1.2 House architecture: Aalto's Muuratsalo house**

The architectural type of interest to the present study is the freestanding house, referred to here as 'house architecture'. The house has been seen, across cultures, as 'an instrument, and a model, for conceiving the world in a complex, comprehensive way.'<sup>4</sup> Understood as model and microcosm, the house type offers a suitable vehicle for a study of architecture. The present study focuses on Aalto's house architecture as a means to consider architectural symbolism of landscape as a basis for aesthetic preference for architecture.

In 1953 Aalto built a summer house on the island of Muuratsalo in Lake Päijänne in central Finland. Aalto's retreat occupies a sloping site, in open pine and birch forest, overlooking the lake.<sup>5</sup> The house's compact L-plan encloses the north and east sides of a square brick-paved courtyard, with tall free-standing brick walls completing the west and south sides of a square; the geometric composition extends eastward, as a series of white timber sheds, up the rocky slope. The house was an important project in Aalto's private and professional life, and has been widely photographed as a key work of mid-twentieth-century architecture.

### **1.1.3 Appleton and Hildebrand: landscape symbolism and architectural preference**

In 1975 Jay Appleton (then professor of Cultural Geography at the University of Hull, UK) asked, ‘What is it that we like about landscape, and why do we like it?’<sup>6</sup> Appleton’s ‘prospect-refuge theory’ holds that people prefer landscapes that appear to combine lookout with concealment.

In 1981, using Appleton’s theory, American architect Grant Hildebrand (emeritus professor of architecture and art history at the University of Washington) attributed the broad appeal of Frank Lloyd Wright’s houses to the presence of architectural elements that offered or symbolized natural elements of prospect and refuge.<sup>7</sup> Hildebrand claimed that prospect-refuge theory ‘holds the possibility of describing and exploring issues of spatial choice at a more significant level than has been offered by any other design-related theory.’<sup>8</sup> Hildebrand’s use of prospect-refuge theory to investigate aesthetic preference in architecture underlies its adoption as a paradigm for the present study.

### **1.1.4 Using prospect-refuge theory**

A number of questions arise from adopting a theory of landscape aesthetics to think about architecture: Does landscape discourse consist of more than garden history and technical issues of drainage and ‘hard and soft’ materials? Is landscape different from, or the same as architecture? What are landscape history and theory, and what can they say about architecture? Can prospect-refuge theory be used to find landscape-symbolic elements in Aalto’s work, and to account for his appeal?

The research topic can comprise, connect, and help define four main areas of interest: Aalto’s architecture; Appleton’s landscape theory; architectural history; and the emerging paradigm of landscape. These interests can be organized into a research project in the field of architecture.

### 1.1.5 Research: topic, question, methodology

The research process sets out to review existing architectural and landscape scholarship, to identify and draw together recently emerged ideas in a zone of overlap between architecture and landscape. The research method of the present study is described as desk-based historical research, involving reading architecture and landscape literature, to investigate the *research topic*, defined as **landscape as a component of architectural aesthetics**.

The desk-based research method consisted of reviewing published literature to gather evidence to consider the *research question*: **Can the appeal of Aalto's Muuratsalo house be understood in terms of landscape aesthetics, with particular reference to Appleton's prospect-refuge theory?**

### 1.1.6 Methodology

Two bodies of literature—covering Alvar Aalto's house architecture, and Jay Appleton's landscape theory—are reviewed within the general hypothesis that the appeal of Aalto's Muuratsalo house may be understood in terms of landscape aesthetics, with particular reference to Appleton's prospect-refuge theory.

Architectural knowledge involving landscape may be said to include the ideas of Aalto and architectural historians, and propositions concerning nature, landscape and site by architects Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier and others, noted in architectural literature since 1975.

Landscape knowledge applicable to architecture includes: landscape history and theory writing published since 1975; historical ideas of landscape, terrace and garden; and interdisciplinary references to landscape preference and landscape aesthetics. A tenet of Appleton's theories is that human landscape sensitivity derives from innate, inherited behaviours, thereby acknowledging Darwin's theory of evolution.<sup>9</sup>

The general argument of the dissertation contends that landscape is a valuable platform for understanding the aesthetic appeal of architecture. In particular, prospect-refuge theory is used as a critical lens to analyze Aalto's Muuratsalo summer house, and to hypothesize that the appeal of Aalto's Muuratsalo house may be understood in terms of landscape aesthetics.

#### **1.1.7 Literature search: What does the literature suggest?**

An initial literature search was made of landscape in architectural history and theory, in landscape history and theory, and of possible areas of common interest between architecture and landscape (for example, the Italian Renaissance villa, the French garden). An initial reading of the literature suggests that landscape discourse (concepts, terminologies, knowledge) may offer new insight into Aalto's architecture.

Investigation of Aalto's house architecture using landscape as a critical lens may reveal new aspects of the aesthetics of his Muuratsalo summer house. Aalto centenary literature suggests that the Muuratsalo house is a particular case where Aalto, for various reasons, used various architectural and landscape strategies to create a personal retreat, on a carefully chosen site within a natural setting. The research question asks whether the appeal of Aalto's Muuratsalo house can be understood in terms of landscape aesthetics.

#### **1.1.8 Benefits and justifications of the research**

The research reviews and assembles a body of existing thought—on architecture and landscape; on Appleton's thinking on landscape aesthetics and Aalto's house architecture; on prospect-refuge theory and the Muuratsalo house; and related interdisciplinary thinking—which may not have been previously assembled. An extended literature review serves scholarship in locating and compiling a reference database of specialized literature relevant to the research subject. This database may also provide a resource for future research into Alvar Aalto, house

architecture, and the historical and theoretical area ‘in-between’ architecture and landscape.

## **1.2 Personal ruminations: Aalto, architecture and landscape**

### **1.2.1 Alvar Aalto, and a curiosity about architecture and landscape**

Alvar Aalto seems to have been constantly present in over three decades of this writer’s architectural education, experience and career. It was a curious notion, and not at all obvious to a young student from the country studying in Sydney in the mid-1970s, how strange-looking buildings in wintry Finland, with fan-shaped plans and odd sections, could be relevant to designing, building and living in sunny Australia.

In London in 1978, as a visitor to the Aalto retrospective exhibition (captured in Ruusovuori and Pallasmaa’s small white catalogue),<sup>10</sup> I was able to see Aalto’s work set out in models, furniture, objects, drawings, sketches, and black and white photographs. Here was Aalto’s world revealed, a realm of lakes and forests, lovingly designed ceilings and windows, fine glassware and furniture, crafted doorhandles, Mediterranean ruins, Greek theatres, contours and terraces, and very interesting rooms and buildings of all sizes, in towns with interesting names. The gentleness and natural force of Aalto’s vision offered an alternative to the New Brutalism and the ‘crisp detailing’ then generally promoted at university.

Most interestingly, to someone from the country, the Aalto buildings seemed responsive to their rural and urban settings, recalling nature and the landscape—with ceilings like skies and clouds, windows for sitting beside, and layered or ambiguous boundaries between inside and outside—yet without imitating nature or landscape. However I was unable to make a ‘pilgrimage’ to any of the Aalto buildings in Europe or the USA; Aalto remained in the realm of books and architectural imaginings, far away and half-real, but not forgotten. The little Aalto catalogue grew worn and dog-eared over the decades, until the 1990s, when the

Aalto centenary approached and his buildings and ideas were revisited by historians, in a range of publications.

### **1.2.2 Centenary re-evaluation**

Aalto resurfaced as a potential research interest around 1998, when his birth centenary prompted a surge of publications and exhibitions celebrating his legacy. Aalto's buildings, apparently still in regular use, highly regarded and well-maintained (rather than abandoned and expensively restored), had been freshly photographed, re-evaluated, and published (in colour), in exhibitions, catalogues, books and other publications celebrating the master architect's centenary. Historians turned from cultural matters towards nature and landscape for reflection on Aalto's architectural legacy; a leading insight to emerge from this interest in landscape was Frampton's evaluation (mentioned above) of Aalto's legacy: 'His intuitive, biomorphically inspired approach . . . a designer of landscapes.'<sup>11</sup>

Aalto, until then renowned for his 'organic' architecture, had become a 'designer of landscapes', an architect whose legacy was relevant for the coming century partly because of his landscape insights. The discourse of landscape, newly adopted by architectural history, seemed to offer new perspectives and new thoughts about Aalto and his architecture.

### **1.2.3 Appleton and a landscape theory**

In the late 1990s, preparing a university course on site and landscape for architecture students, I found a vaguely familiar book on environmental perception and aesthetics, by Jay Appleton, originally published in 1975. *The Experience of Landscape* opened with a pair of questions: 'What is it that we like about landscape, and why do we like it?'<sup>12</sup>

Appleton methodically pursued an answer in a quest which led to his proposing two theories of landscape aesthetics. He postulated firstly that, at a broad landscape scale, people enjoy perceiving country that appears to provide three essential survival resources: food, opportunity for reproduction, and shelter; this large-scale notion Appleton named *habitat theory*. Appleton postulated secondly that people prefer living places which seem to offer a generous balance of secure shelter, and extensive views over terrain. This notion of a view with security, of seeing-without-being-seen, Appleton summarized as *prospect-refuge theory*. Appleton's explanation of preference in landscape perception is now regarded as both a theory of landscape and a leading empirical theory of aesthetics.<sup>13</sup>

Appleton was interested in broader interdisciplinary implications and applications of his work: 'It is my hope that the specialists will find the ideas set out in this book [*The Experience of Landscape*] worthy of being tested eventually in terms of their own disciplines.'<sup>14</sup> As an architecture researcher, I felt compelled to respond to this invitation to consider the topic of aesthetic preference, related somehow to landscape, but in the field of architecture. Appleton seemed to welcome architectural interest in his theories; he claimed to have found ideas close to his own interests in the architectural literature, and reflected that architecture 'has made far more progress than most in bridging . . . "the chasm between art and science."' <sup>15</sup> Appleton's work opened a door to an architectural research area that related architecture and landscape, within a well-explained theoretical framework, and with a ready-made lexicon of prospect-refuge terminology.<sup>16</sup> The question remained as to whether there was any precedent of an extended use of Appleton's theory to investigate architecture.

#### **1.2.4 Hildebrand and a landscape methodology**

Appleton, in the 1996 edition of *The Experience of Landscape*, acknowledged a study by American architect Grant Hildebrand, who had used prospect-refuge theory to hypothesize an explanation for the broad critical and public appeal of Frank Lloyd Wright's domestic architecture.<sup>17</sup> In his 1991 book *The Wright Space*

Hildebrand analysed at least eighteen of Wright's houses in terms of their symbolism of prospect and refuge (along with imagery and symbolism of the *hazard*,<sup>18</sup> a third and minor type of Appleton's landscape symbolism), in order to propose that the appeal of Wright's houses is due to their actual and apparent offering of substantial views, along with shelter and protection—in other words, prospect and refuge.<sup>19</sup>

Further, Hildebrand follows a particular thread of Appleton's theory, to argue that the appeal of Wright's house architecture is not only a result of acquired cultural knowledge, but also, at a perceptual level of 'universal and immediate emotional response', that the architecture seems to appeal to inherited human nature.<sup>20</sup> Following Appleton, Hildebrand argues that, in addition to culturally-specific factors, there appears to be an underlying biological component, a substrate of universal human behaviour, at the base of the appeal of Wright's house architecture—an appeal, argues Hildebrand, connected to inherited human nature. Hildebrand regarded Wright's houses through the lens of landscape; by employing the concepts and terminology of Appleton's theory of landscape symbolism, Hildebrand could explain the enduring broad appeal of Wright's architecture.

### **1.2.5 A controversial architect?**

Appleton wrote in *The Experience of Landscape* that he hoped that architectural criticism might give consideration not only to built *form*, but also to the *pleasure* of interacting with architecture as a criterion of aesthetic excellence.<sup>21</sup> Appleton praised Hildebrand's study of Wright's houses, and asked,

If an in-depth study like Hildebrand's can throw new light on an already well-researched subject like Frank Lloyd Wright, might not prospect-refuge theory perform a comparable service for other controversial architects?<sup>22</sup>

I felt this was a direct invitation (with Hildebrand's well-regarded precedent as a bonus): but was Aalto, I wondered, a 'controversial' architect? Aalto seemed the most obscure and idiosyncratic, and (born 1898) the youngest of the acknowledged 'Modern masters' of twentieth century architecture—amongst figures such as Frank Lloyd Wright (1865-1959), Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, known as Le Corbusier (1881-1965), and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1881-1976).<sup>23</sup>

Aalto certainly had an interest in nature and landscape, evident in his drawings of contours, hills, plants, and ruins in the 1978 catalogue; writings by Venturi and Porphyrrios had recognized an array of difficulties and complexities in Aalto's work; and a broad range of topics was used to discuss Aalto in the centenary publications. Aalto was still 'different': well regarded, and yet an obscure, even mysterious, (if not 'controversial') figure, one whose reputation continued to resonate with images of forests and lakes. Aalto thus seemed to offer a challenge, a rich source of ideas, and a suitable subject for an extended study of relations between architecture and landscape.

### **1.2.6 Australian site and landscape**

The research was partly an extension of my teaching interest in historical, theoretical and technical aspects of the architectural site. The architecture with which I was most familiar through direct experience—the work of the 'Sydney School' architects of the 1960s and 1970s (a group of practitioners including Bruce Rickard, Peter Johnson, Ken Woolley and Bill Lucas), along with the work of Glen Murcutt and Richard Leplastrier—was responsive to particular site and landscape conditions. It was also influenced by local and global vernacular architecture; and seemed to have learned from the landscape awareness, sensitivity to site conditions, and formal strategies of Wright and Aalto. Landscape architect Anne Whiston Spirn acknowledges the unusual affinity some Australian architects seem to have with landscape:

architects such as the Australians Glenn Murcutt and Richard Leplastrier . . . regard landscape processes as active agents and design their buildings to respond to wind, water, light, and heat . . . To most artists and architects, however, nature is generally not an active agent, though it is a source of inspiration, of symbolic forms to be drawn upon, a scene to be represented, a site to be occupied and transformed, something perceived.<sup>24</sup>

This Sydney School experience had prepared the researcher, and after five years of teaching about site and landscape, it seemed appropriate and timely to try to find out what it was that people liked about Aalto's architecture, and why.

### **1.3 Dissertation Research: Summary**

#### **1.3.1 Dissertation key terms**

Alvar Aalto; aesthetics; architectural history and theory; experience; Grant Hildebrand; house architecture; Jay Appleton; landscape; landscape aesthetics; lens of landscape; literature review; Muuratsalo house; nature; preference; prospect-refuge theory; prospect symbolism; refuge symbolism; site.

#### **1.3.2 Research Question**

This study aims to examine aspects of landscape in the composition of Alvar Aalto's Muuratsalo house, framed in terms of the research question:

Can the appeal of Aalto's Muuratsalo house be understood in terms of landscape aesthetics, with particular reference to Appleton's prospect-refuge theory?

Problems arising include definition and description of: Aalto's architecture and Appleton's theory of landscape aesthetics; Aalto's aesthetic appeal; landscape knowledge; landscape in Aalto's ideas and in evolving critical views of Aalto;

relations between landscape and architecture; landscape themes and architectural aesthetics in an Aalto house.

### **1.3.3 Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research, required to actualize the main elements of the research question,<sup>25</sup> include: a review of architecture's understanding of landscape, and of how the field of landscape frames its body of knowledge and understands the world; discussion of landscape in Aalto's house architecture; discussion of Appleton's theory of landscape aesthetics and associated ideas; and the use of Appleton's theory to analyze and discuss Aalto's Muuratsalo house. These objectives organize and frame the contents of the dissertation.

### **1.3.4 Method of research**

The study reviews the literature on Aalto's house architecture, particularly the Muuratsalo house, and investigates Aalto's ideas as architectural ideas connected to landscape. The study also reviews the literature on Appleton's landscape theory, and—against a background of landscape ideas relevant to architecture—argues for the potential use and value of Appleton's prospect-refuge theory as a theoretical lens to investigate the appeal of the Muuratsalo house.

The research process concludes with an analysis and description of the Muuratsalo house, from the literature and from personal experience. A narrative which re-creates a visit to the Muuratsalo house uses the terminology of Appleton's prospect-refuge theory, as well as firsthand observations and photographs by this writer, to gauge the presence and the aesthetic effects of landscape-symbolic elements in the house.

### **1.3.5 Architectural experience and architectural history**

The study reviews two main kinds of opinion on Aalto's Muuratsalo house: reported experience of the house, and architectural historical reflection on the house. A study involving reception of a work of architecture tends to involve reflection on an encounter with the building in its landscape or urban context, creating a critical narrative based on firsthand perceptions and emotional responses, while historical reflection considers and situates the building in historical and theoretical contexts. This study's method of review acknowledges these two approaches, creating a viewpoint synthesized from immediate encounters with a project—involving perceptions of site, views, landform, vegetation, horizons, other buildings, routes of approach, sensory experiences, etc.—as well as from a consideration of the project's location in historical and contemporary thought.

### **1.3.6 Style, idiom, spelling, etc.**

Spelling and definitions, unless otherwise noted, are derived from the *Macquarie Dictionary*.<sup>26</sup> Reference is made to *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*,<sup>27</sup> and the *Oxford American Dictionaries* on Apple Computer.<sup>28</sup> Selected definitions and etymology are from the online *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Idiom, punctuation, and citation and other style formats follow *The Chicago Manual of Style, 15th Edition*, as recently adopted by SAHANZ.<sup>29</sup> Spelling in quoted material (e.g., 'leveling', 'savanna') is left in its original form, unless otherwise noted or corrected. Some brief translations from French or Latin are by this writer, as noted.

## CHAPTER 1 NOTES

<sup>1</sup> William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, third edition (London: Phaidon, 1996), pp.453-57.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, (London: Phaidon, 1996), p.227.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto' (1998), in *Labour Work and Architecture: Collected Essays on Architecture and Design* (London: Phaidon, 2002), p.238.

<sup>4</sup> Peter J. Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), p.58. Reference to Wilson is found in Norman Crowe, *Nature and the Idea of a Man-made World: An investigation into the evolutionary roots of form and order in the built environment* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> *Alvar Aalto: Volume I 1922-1962*, edited by Karl Fleig (Basel: Birkhauser, 1963), pp.200-03.

<sup>6</sup> Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape* (Chichester and New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975), p.1. Republished in 1996 as: Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, revised edition (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1996/1975). References in the present study are to 1996 edition unless otherwise noted.

<sup>7</sup> Grant Hildebrand, *The Wright Space: Pattern and Meaning in Frank Lloyd Wright's Houses* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Hildebrand, *The Wright Space*, p.16.

<sup>9</sup> Jay Appleton, 'Prospect and Refuge in the Landscapes of England and Australia', in *Geographical Essays in Honour of Gilbert J. Rutland*, edited by Ian Douglas, John E. Hobbs and John J. Pigram (Armidale, NSW: University of New England, 1975), p.11.

<sup>10</sup> *Alvar Aalto 1898-1976*, edited by Aarno Ruusuvuori and Juhani Pallasmaa (Helsinki: Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1978).

<sup>11</sup> Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto', p.238.

<sup>12</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.1.

<sup>13</sup> See reference to 'psychobiology' as one of four *empirical* approaches to aesthetic theory (the other three are information theory, semantics, and public opinion), as opposed to *formal* aesthetics; s.v. 'Aesthetics', in Meto J. Vroom, *Lexicon of garden and landscape architecture* (Basel: Birkhauser, 2006), p.34; note also reference to prospect-refuge theory, s.v. 'Behaviour', in Vroom, *Lexicon*, p.58.

<sup>14</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.xi.

<sup>15</sup> Appleton reflected that architecture 'has made far more progress than most in bridging, in Brenda Colvin's phrase, "the chasm between art and science."' Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.12-13; reference is to Brenda Colvin, *Land and Landscape: Evolution, Design and Control* (London: John Murray, 1970/1947).

<sup>16</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.79, p.91, p.96.

<sup>17</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.250-52.

<sup>18</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.86.

<sup>19</sup> Hildebrand, *The Wright Space*. The notion of 'symbols of environmental opportunity' is discussed in Jay Appleton, *The Symbolism of Habitat: an interpretation of landscape in the arts* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> Hildebrand, *The Wright Space*, p.33.

<sup>21</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.250.

<sup>22</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.254.

<sup>23</sup> Curtis' list of 'modern masters' also includes Giuseppe Terragni, Erik Gunnar Asplund and Louis I. Kahn. See Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, p.131.

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<sup>24</sup> Anne Whiston Spirn, 'The Authority of Nature: Conflict, Confusion, and Renewal in Design, Planning, and Ecology', in Bart R. Johnson and Kristina Hill, editors, *Ecology and Design: Frameworks for Learning* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2002), p.34.

<sup>25</sup> Chris Hart, *Doing Your Masters Dissertation: Realizing your potential as a social scientist* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005), p.88.

<sup>26</sup> *The Macquarie Dictionary*, 3rd edition (Macquarie University, NSW: Macquarie Library, 1997).

<sup>27</sup> *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

<sup>28</sup> *Oxford American Dictionaries*, electronic version for Mac OS.X.4, 2005.

<sup>29</sup> *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003/1906).

## **Chapter 2 Methodology**

### **Methodology of the Research**

#### **2.0 Chapter 2 Introduction**

##### **2.0.1 Methodology: an overview: architecture and landscape**

The research methodology used in this study involves gathering a body of evidence from the field of architecture, and investigating that evidence from a landscape perspective, to evaluate what landscape discourse—particularly Jay Appleton’s prospect-refuge theory—can reveal, in terms of extending current understanding of twentieth-century architectural history.

The research methodology approaches the problem of the appeal of Alvar Aalto’s house architecture. This is done through reading published opinions of historians and theoreticians from the fields of architecture and landscape (architectural history and theory, landscape architecture, garden history, geography, and related fields), and writers from associated disciplines (biology, literature, anthropology, and others). Facts, opinions and the experiences of writers familiar with Aalto and his house architecture are seen through the ‘lens of landscape’. It will be argued that an appropriate lens of landscape for the present study is Appleton’s prospect-refuge theory, used to reveal and discuss the symbolic architectural representation of natural landscape elements, which are arguably responsible for the aesthetic appeal of Aalto’s Muuratsalo summer house.

Research reveals a historical and theoretical space overlapping between architecture and landscape, as noted for example by Berrizbeitia and Pollak.<sup>1</sup> Architectural history and theory have long considered various ideas of nature related to architecture, and are seen to exhibit an emerging awareness of landscape and the architectural site. Landscape is understood (by its own admission) as an emerging field, informed by diverse historical, theoretical and practical areas, and relating the natural and artificial worlds in a way distinct from, though not unlike, that of architecture. It is useful to note David Leatherbarrow’s observation of the relationship between the two fields: ‘Not

really the same, nor entirely different, landscape and architecture are quite simply *similar* to each other.’<sup>2</sup>

The study aims to add to existing historical opinion on Aalto. It anticipates that the appeal of Aalto’s Muuratsalo house can be partly explained by use (following Hildebrand) of Appleton’s theory of landscape aesthetics to reflect on architecture. The study implies broadly that the lens of landscape, used to interpret architectural composition and experience of architecture, provides evidence of landscape as a factor in the aesthetic appeal of architecture.

### **2.0.2 A house and a theory**

Recent and emerging ideas on the relationship between architecture and landscape are used to form the basis of an argument that landscape can be understood as a factor in the aesthetic appeal of architecture, which is exemplified by the enduring high critical and public regard for the architecture of Alvar Aalto. In the present study, it is postulated that landscape symbolism, articulated in the concepts and terms of Jay Appleton’s prospect-refuge theory, can be found in Aalto’s Muuratsalo house, and is a factor in its enduring high esteem.

The subject matter, or vehicle, of this study may be defined as: **Alvar Aalto’s Muuratsalo house, understood through Jay Appleton’s prospect-refuge theory.** Research use of this subject matter—a distinguished architect’s summer retreat, and a broadly acknowledged landscape theory—does not imply hagiography of a ‘great’ architect, a ‘masterpiece’ of architecture, or of a ‘grand, unifying’ theory. Historical interest in Aalto experienced an upsurge in the mid-1990s, especially around his 1998 birth centenary. Aalto’s summer house at Muuratsalo is a small, remote, personal work, and its composition appears at first glance to embody geometric or urban ideas, rather than landscape ideas, or the ‘irrational’ or ‘organic’ themes often mentioned in critiques of Aalto’s work.

## **2.1 Research methodology**

### **2.1.1 Landscape, experience, and architectural aesthetics**

Kate Nesbitt's 1996 reader *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995* is useful for clarifying the relationship between landscape and architectural aesthetics, in that it includes landscape as a topic for architectural thinking within the postmodern theoretical paradigm of phenomenology (see below).<sup>3</sup>

Nesbitt's interdisciplinary survey discusses aesthetics as 'a philosophical paradigm that deals with the production and reception of a work of art.'<sup>4</sup> Jay Appleton was interested in the basis of landscape aesthetics; he asked 'What is the source of that pleasure which we derive from the contemplation of landscape?'<sup>5</sup> His answer brought him to what he describes as 'the threshold of a new perception of landscape'.<sup>6</sup> A similar 'threshold of new perception' of Aalto's architectural aesthetics may be envisaged as an outcome of the present study.

Nesbitt includes site and landscape within the interdisciplinary framework of phenomenology, which 'underlies postmodern attitudes towards site, place, landscape, and making.'<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the present study is not framed by phenomenology. Without engaging with that philosophy, the present study is able to point to a connection in the literature between landscape and a phenomenological view of Aalto's work, made by Juhani Pallasmaa in his essay 'Logic of the Image' (1998). Pallasmaa observes that experience is an important element in the reception of Aalto's architecture, which is 'a convincing and stimulating example of tactile architecture . . . he acknowledges that we confront architecture through our entire bodily and sensory existence, not solely through the judgement of the eye.'<sup>8</sup>

The idea of 'experience' is also a key concern in Jay Appleton's thinking on landscape aesthetics; his book is titled *The Experience of Landscape*, reflecting his own personal and theoretical interests in the 'relationship between the

individual and their environment', as well as the work and ideas of his philosophical mentor, John Dewey.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.1.2 Architectural knowledge

If the fields of architecture and landscape, as noted earlier in this chapter, are seen as not entirely different but similar, then it appears valuable to consider those similarities and differences. However, such a project, taken seriously, would be a work of interdisciplinary ontology and epistemology beyond the scope of the present study. It should suffice here to indicate the epistemology of the study in an outline of the two kinds of knowledge which are important to frame and discuss *Landscape as a component of architectural aesthetics*: architectural knowledge, and landscape knowledge.

Architectural knowledge, relevant to the present study, may be said to include the following:

- terms and concepts (building, nature, culture, landscape, site, composition)
- architectural history (modernism, attitudes, neglect/enlistment of landscape, repression of site, Aalto's house architecture, Aalto centenary, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier)
- architectural theory (postmodernism, humanism, phenomenology, *genius loci*, aesthetics, topography, site)
- Alvar Aalto's house architecture (Finland, childhood, life experiences, personality, influences, forest, hill towns, landscape, works, house architecture, own words and essays, legacy, critical opinion, the 'little man', Muuratsalo house, etc.)
- Aalto's Muuratsalo house (personal life, architect's own house, program, ideas, context, experiment, retreat, play, nature, landscape, site, perception, reflection, significance, paradise)
- Muuratsalo house as research vehicle (house, composition, rooms, courtyard, terrace, views, visitors, reception, aesthetics, drawings, images, firsthand experience, etc.)

### 2.1.3 Landscape knowledge

Landscape knowledge relevant to the present study, for an architectural audience—interested in landscape, though not technically educated, nor theoretically or historically informed beyond the epistemological limits and experiences of architecture—may be said to include the following:

- landscape terms and concepts (nature, landscape, site, garden, terrace, aesthetics/beauty, views)
- landscape history (Hunt’s ‘three natures’: nature, farming, garden; *hortus conclusus*, Renaissance garden, landscape painting, Modernism)
- landscape theory (the picturesque, reception theory, aesthetics, habitat theory, prospect-refuge theory, functionalism, ecological perspectives, *genius loci*)
- landscape, technical (levels, water, earth, geology, vegetation, horticulture, materials, construction)
- aesthetic theories of Jay Appleton (prospect-refuge theory, habitat theory, atavism, behaviour, aesthetics, experience, emotion, intuition, preference)

### 2.1.4 Interdisciplinary knowledge

Interdisciplinary knowledge, as referred to in the literature by the present study, includes geography—landscape, everyday landscape, human geography, physical geography, social theory—as well as anthropology, biology, evolutionary biology, and English literature.

### 2.1.5 Methodological assumptions: ontology

Methodological assumptions necessary to research this topic in an architectural historical framework include the following ontological notions:

- Alvar Aalto as a significant and influential twentieth century Finnish ‘modern master’ architect, a historical figure, an architectural theorist, designer of house architecture, architect of the Muuratsalo summer house

- Jay Appleton as a contemporary geographer, author of three published books and numerous articles on landscape, important through the contribution of prospect-refuge theory
- ‘Landscape’ denoting the field of thought comprising: history and theory of landscape architecture, garden history, landscape design, everyday landscape, landscape as a sub-field of geography; also a natural world setting as perceived and experienced by people

#### **2.1.6 Methodological position: a postpositivist approach**

The ‘positivist/objectivist approach’, proposed and described as a research model by Linda Groat and David Wang, at first glance seems to align with the discourses of landscape, which is pervaded, perhaps grounded, by technical imperatives and a formative background of civil engineering and agriculture.<sup>10</sup>

The influential landscape theorists Ian McHarg and J. B. Jackson had significant life experience of real landscape, and did not warm to abstract theories, maintaining instead the validity and the imperatives of their respective interests in ‘design with nature’ and ‘everyday landscapes’.<sup>11</sup> Indeed the ‘groundedness’ and positivism implicit in their publications was influential (in landscape history and practice) on instituting a realistic, strategic, and literal approach to solving problems and visually seeing landscapes, rather than an interpretative way of landscape thinking.<sup>12</sup> However, in the 1990s, writers such as James Corner, Elizabeth Meyer and Charles Waldheim adopted and promoted various ‘emancipatory’ discourses, such that the positivist discourses of landscape were complemented, though not necessarily displaced, by new layers of interpretive discourse.<sup>13</sup>

An example of interpretive discourse directly opening up new understanding of Aalto’s attitude to landscape is Kenneth Frampton’s 1998 proposition that Aalto’s ‘heterotopic’ design method (a notion coined by Demetri Porphyrios) was a counter to the architectural rationalism of the late 1920s.<sup>14</sup> In Frampton’s view,

Aalto's 'fragmentary aggregational manner' of composition was not positivist, monovalent or consumerist, nor was it irrational; rather, his 'heterotopic' method related to the landscape, and his buildings 'were constituted as topographic structures' rather than expressionistic sculptures; Frampton judges that Aalto's buildings 'were laid into their surroundings in such a way that one could not discern with certainty where building ended and context began.'<sup>15</sup>

The research method is not 'emancipatory'; it recognizes multiple realities, and is informed, as noted above, by the insights of Nesbitt and other postmodern thinkers, but is not directly or overtly engaged with social, political, cultural, ethnic, or gender issues, and the roles they play in 'the social construction of reality'.<sup>16</sup>

The research method of the present study, rather than emancipatory, interpretivist/constructivist, or naturalistic, should ultimately be understood as taking a postpositivist approach to its subject matter. The researcher makes dispassionate, objective observations of the 'data' (largely, written articles) and selects and organizes material to form an argument about architectural and landscape aesthetics, against the constant theoretical background of landscape aesthetics. However, in Chapter 8 the impressions and responses of the writer as a visitor to Aalto's Muuratsalo house in 2008 are included, to enrich the appreciation of the use of Appleton's theory as a mode of understanding architectural experience. Thus an element of interactivity between researcher and subject begins to generate elements of a more 'constructed' interpretivist reality for the research, to create or construct a point of view to answer the research question.

### **2.1.7 Research method and literature**

At the outset of the present study it appeared that one relevant method of enquiry might involve research of original documents and archival material, to complement and extend existing knowledge of a particular building or architect.<sup>17</sup>

Another approach might involve typological research into one or more projects or buildings.<sup>18</sup> Yet another approach might concentrate on the relationship of a particular building with its site, with reference to related documents and historical commentary, to reveal new knowledge or support a theoretically grounded hypothesis.<sup>19</sup>

Two different bodies of literature provide necessary terms and concepts for the present study: architectural literature referring to the landscape ideas and house architecture of Alvar Aalto; and landscape history and theory from 1975-2009. A reading of critical literature—primarily, published books and, secondarily, journal articles, written in, or translated into, English—provided research data. The internet was not a primary mode of research, serving rather as a medium for obtaining journal articles from electronic databases; there is little reference to internet resources in the primary scholarly, historical and critical literature of the surveyed period and topics.

#### **2.1.8 Research scope**

Research was initially intended to be limited to use of Appleton's prospect-refuge theory to investigate reasons for the appeal of Aalto's Muuratsalo house. The literature review expanded to look at the fields of architecture and landscape as context, and at the two historically interesting 'protagonists', Alvar Aalto and Jay Appleton, as exponents of ideas and problems of their respective fields.

The 1998 Aalto centenary was an opportunity for architectural historians to reassess their ideas on Modernism by focusing on one of its leading exponents, as demonstrated by Peter Reed's catalogue of the Aalto centenary exhibition in New York;<sup>20</sup> landscape gave terms and language for saying something new in architecture about Modernism and Aalto, as shown by Marc Treib's essay in the same volume.<sup>21</sup> An opportunity arose to expand personal understanding of a historical/theoretical area—though not yet a recognised 'field'—between

architecture and landscape, and to incorporate material from both architecture and landscape, which may not have previously been brought together.

#### **2.1.9 The literature review**

The literature review process is important as a means to ground the study in the knowledge of one or more fields of enquiry, and to develop an awareness of the theoretical and philosophical beginnings of key writers in the area/s of research.<sup>22</sup>

The literature review process has been defended and legitimised by social scientist Chris Hart as a conclusive and appropriate methodological end in itself. Hart points out that many published books are in fact extended or composite literature reviews, using the research of others to advance a singular project or the frontiers of a field.<sup>23</sup> Hart outlines the literature review process as a *sine qua non* of research, defining literature review as:

The selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed.<sup>24</sup>

Bringing together knowledge from different fields is a method of synthesis with its own definitions, processes and outcomes, from which new judgements, insights and propositions can be formed.

#### **2.1.10 Literature search methodology**

Literature was restricted to printed monographs, anthologies, and articles, in English, or translated (usually from Finnish or Swedish), generally from 1975-2008. A general exception is the corpus of articles and speeches by Alvar Aalto—some written as early as the 1920s—which provide a rich source for historians

into the twenty-first century.<sup>25</sup> Archival material in Finland was not referenced, partly because the writer does not currently read Finnish or Swedish languages, partly because it seemed important to comprehend the existing literature as an underpinning for the present study, and partly because the breadth of literature in English containing conceptual approaches from architecture, landscape, and other fields appeared to present a significant challenge in gathering, reviewing, interpretation and application in response to the research question.

The literature search proceeded from a primary overview of core architectural literature—in anthologies, surveys, readers and selected monographs—on the key terms *Aalto*, *Appleton*, and *landscape*. The search became both broader and finer with a secondary review of anthology introductions, bibliographies, footnotes, references, and indexes containing or relating to three key terms relevant to notions which connected landscape and architecture: nature, landscape, site (see Chapter 4 for discussion of these terms/themes). Other terms of research interest overlapping between architecture and landscape included: biology, experience, evolution, landscape aesthetics, phenomenology, topography; also such terms as archaic, garden, humanism, primitive, terrace, courtyard.

Diverse fields had to be read; there is no architectural anthology devoted to landscape; interdisciplinary work had to be found, overviewed, read, reviewed, assessed, and presented within a framework consistent with research aims. The term *nature* is problematic and requires a degree of definition; *landscape* as a concept has diverse parentage, and is part claimed by geography, and is partly independent as a discipline or field, within which it is partly claimed by praxis, and partly by history and theory. A typically grounded landscape architecture textbook such as Michael Laurie's *An Introduction to Landscape Architecture* (1986) indicates themes and topics that constituted landscape design practice in Western countries in the late twentieth century.<sup>26</sup>

The theme of atavism found in Appleton's *The Experience of Landscape* suggests the possibility of interdisciplinary enquiry into fields such as sociobiology, paleo-

anthropology, or evolutionary psychology, to consider the heritability of human environmental behaviour.<sup>27</sup> Since research into these psychological and biological fields was therefore relevant to this study's selective reading of Aalto, it required research beyond architecture and landscape.<sup>28</sup>

#### **2.1.11 Key sources: architectural and landscape anthologies**

Architectural history and theory writings have been anthologized in recent collections by K. Michael Hays, Harry Francis Mallgrave and Kate Nesbitt, and in the collected essays of Kenneth Frampton, Juhani Pallasmaa, and Vincent Scully.<sup>29</sup>

Landscape writing has been anthologized recently by James Corner, Michael Spens, Simon Swaffield, Ian Thompson, Marc Treib and Charles Waldheim,<sup>30</sup> and in the essay collections of John Dixon Hunt, J. B. Jackson, David Leatherbarrow and Marc Treib.<sup>31</sup> From such collections, certain themes of interest to the present study—aesthetics, atavism, nature in architecture, the architectural site, phenomenology, topography, and others—emerge when landscape discourse is used to approach and interpret a work of architecture.

### **2.2 Argumentation: defined boundaries and limits**

#### **2.2.1 Ontological and epistemological boundaries: overlap of architecture and landscape**

In 1971 Aalto wrote that 'for millennia, art has not been able to disengage itself from the nature-bound human environment, and neither will it ever be able to do so.'<sup>32</sup> The realities and the knowledge of architecture and landscape architecture may be understood as engaged within a relationship involving art, nature and humankind, much as framed by Aalto.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Leatherbarrow identifies the fields of architecture and landscape, as 'similar' fields, and in a single framework which he

terms ‘topography’.<sup>33</sup> While this study is not framed within Leatherbarrow’s concept of topography, it concurs on the relative closeness, even ‘similarity’ of the two fields, and is interested in a historical area where architecture and landscape overlap or intersect in their knowledge and realities.

### **2.2.2 Defined boundaries and limits (1): ontology**

The dissertation argument is framed by the following ontological and epistemological boundaries:<sup>34</sup>

*Defined boundaries and limits (1): ontology—selected things and realities of (a) architecture and (b) landscape.*

A postpositivist ontology maintains its critical focus by holding to the sceptical and nuanced idea that the ‘out there’ realities, of architecture things and of landscape things, may not be known certainly, but within a range of probability, as is the case when dealing with the uncertainties of critical opinions and theoretical reflections as data. The literature pertaining to the present research topic is not ‘interpretive/ constructivist’ nor ‘emancipatory’: the researcher is working from within a singular reality; data is manipulated objectively with the aim of framing a logical argument; and the realities of the research are constructed neither by social or political discourses, nor by other participants—they are rather written works of history and theory, and built works of architecture.

Assumed things and realities of *architecture* in the present study include the following: the life, words and buildings of Alvar Aalto are assumed to have physically existed; historical figures such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Erik Gunnar Asplund, and others, and their works and ideas, are similarly assumed to have existed. Aalto’s Muuratsalo house has been visited and experienced by historians and architects, including this writer; their reflections on experience and their critical writings are accorded veracity as research data. The term ‘nature’ has three main usages in the present study: the physical world of earth, water, and living things; a force or presence within the cosmos and living

things; and as a construct of thought and language, often as a complement to human 'culture'.

Assumed things and realities of *landscape*, understood as a perceived section of the earth's surface (rather than a 'construct'), include perceivable entities such as the Muuratsalo island site of Aalto's summer house, or Italian hill towns. At a different scale of temporal and spatial reality, pre-historic environments are assumed as humankind's evolutionary 'landscapes', within Charles Darwin's theory of evolution; Appleton, following Darwin's theory, assumes that the (as yet unprovable) influence of archaic environmental experience underlies human landscape preferences, as well as Appleton's concept of 'landscape symbolism'.<sup>35</sup> The things of landscape are known through discursive language (rather than, say, images or site data) which unifies diverse threads of interdisciplinary knowledge and assumptions on landscape.

### **2.2.3 Defined boundaries and limits (2): epistemology**

*Defined boundaries and limits 2: epistemology - within the theoretical and historical knowledge of (a) architecture and (b) landscape.*

The epistemological scope of the study generally spans landscape themes in recent architectural history and theory, and recent and emerging themes in landscape history and theory, particularly as they involve architecture.

Architectural knowledge includes: architectural history, on the siting and composition of Aalto's 1953 Muuratsalo house; Aalto's own ideas on landscape and archaic human themes; and architectural theory of nature, landscape and site. Landscape knowledge includes especially landscape history since 1945; and landscape theory since 1975, along with geographical, anthropological and other interdisciplinary references to concepts of landscape aesthetics.

#### **2.2.4 Process of argumentation: landscape in architecture**

Argumentation begins with the upsurge of interest in the work and ideas of Alvar Aalto at the time of the 1998 celebration of Aalto's birth centenary, in which landscape emerged as a newly important critical paradigm, particularly for estimating the value and extent of Aalto's legacy. The argument proceeds by discussing theoretical relationships between architecture and landscape, and the particular examples of Aalto and Jay Appleton, to demonstrate the validity of landscape discourse as a theoretical platform for new understanding of Aalto's house architecture. Argumentation concludes with the use of Appleton's prospect-refuge theory of landscape aesthetics as a theoretical lens to focus on landscape symbolism in the composition of Aalto's Muuratsalo house, and to argue that landscape is a significant factor in the aesthetic appeal of Aalto's house.

#### **2.2.5 Language and terminology**

Since the 1990s an area of architectural history and theory has developed, concerned with how architecture relates to natural and artificial landscape and, conversely, how landscape is included in architecture, as setting, view, or even symbolic or metaphorical element. This area is approached variously by writers such as Anita Berrizbeitia and Linda Pollak, Carol J. Burns and Andrea Kahn, Philip Goad, David Leatherbarrow, Elizabeth Meyer, Christian Norberg-Schulz, Marc Treib, and others.<sup>36</sup> Their writing features multidisciplinary sources and references, and tends to have a knowledge base grounded in architecture, landscape, or art history and theory. Landscape for these writers becomes a paradigm, with shared landscape assumptions and a landscape terminology, concepts and words. This landscape paradigm presents architecture and landscape historians with a way of seeing the built world through a discourse which comprehends the natural world, and the relation of the built world of architecture to its natural world setting. The landscape paradigm differentiates these writers from those for whom the relationship of architecture with the natural world is of less concern, or is not mentioned.<sup>37</sup>

The landscape theory developed by Jay Appleton known as prospect-refuge theory assumes an inherited basis for landscape preference; the theory may offer, in Appleton's words, 'a frame of reference for examining the aesthetic properties of landscape from one particular theoretical base.'<sup>38</sup> Through methodological use of a landscape theory, as Hildebrand demonstrated, it is possible to consider architectural aesthetics:<sup>39</sup> prospect-refuge theory may similarly be used to illuminate the question of the appeal of Aalto's house architecture. Appleton's prospect-refuge theory allows the notion that the emotional appeal of Aalto's house to the visitor, user or inhabitant—even to a viewer of its images—is partly the result of inherited responses to landscape symbolism in his architecture.

## **2.3 Methodological paradigms**

### **2.3.1 Landscape and nature as paradigms for understanding architecture**

As mentioned above, Nesbitt's *Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995* is distinguished by its inclusion of themes of nature, landscape and site, notions which had previously gained little historical and theoretical prominence in architectural discourse, either singly or aggregated.<sup>40</sup> Within a postmodern paradigm of phenomenology, Nesbitt locates architectural thought on nature, landscape, and site alongside theoretical themes such as semiotics, urbanism, critical regionalism, the body, and sustainability; for Nesbitt, theory 'addresses the relationship between architecture and nature, as developed through construction of the site.'<sup>41</sup>

In *Words and Buildings* (2000) historian Adrian Forty explores selected key terms—form, function, modern, nature, culture, and others—from the history of architectural theory (the term nature is discussed further in Chapter 4). Forty follows philosopher Raymond Williams, who, in the 1976 cultural lexicon *Keywords*, glosses historical usages of terms for discussing culture and society; Williams indicates that *nature* (of which landscape may be understood as a category) is often opposed to the term *culture*.<sup>42</sup> An understanding of landscape—the term and the concept, its etymology, history, knowledge, and disciplinary

formation—and its relationship with architecture are important for an argument that landscape may partly underpin architectural aesthetics.

### **2.3.2 A landscape paradigm**

Architectural discourse on issues deriving from the placement of a work of architecture is a recent phenomenon; historians of landscape have commented on Modernism's marginalisation of landscape discourse, noting landscape's limited interest in its own history and theory, and its lack of theoretical formation. Treib notes that American landscape architects of the 1930s, such as James Rose and Garrett Eckbo, felt they could begin with a 'clean slate', with no history to look back upon, and that landscape history 'was meaningless because its significance belonged to other places and other times.'<sup>43</sup> Landscape and garden historian John Dixon Hunt complains of landscape architecture's historical ignorance: 'Landscape architecture in Europe and the United States has come to its phase of modern self-consciousness very late, long after some of the other arts.'<sup>44</sup> Hunt is also critical of landscape theory:

Of all the modern arts none has displayed such a meagre command of analytical, including rudimentary philosophical, language as landscape studies. Steven R. Krog is surely right when he stigmatizes landscape architecture as "a discipline in intellectual disarray." With a "deficiency of theoretical discourse" . . . [t]his lack of critical sophistication in historical matters and in overall explanatory skills . . . is one of the reasons why landscape architecture has been a particularly inhospitable field for modernism.<sup>45</sup>

Hunt has attempted to redress this situation through his own recent writings on gardens and landscape.<sup>46</sup>

### 2.3.3 Historical methodology: the relation of mankind to the natural order

A historical methodology of seeing relationships between architecture and landscape was developed by historian Vincent Scully, who argued that ancient Greek sacred architecture ‘explores and praises the character of a god or group of gods in a specific place.’<sup>47</sup> Following this study, in *Architecture: The Natural and the Manmade*, he put forward the idea of landscape as the primary and essential condition for architecture, and proposed a view of architecture based on human responses to the challenges of the natural world.<sup>48</sup> Scully’s argument was focused on ‘the essential fact of architecture and, indeed, of human life on earth: the relationship between mankind and the natural order.’<sup>49</sup> Scully argued that that relationship was firmly grounded in the larger reality of nature, and in human response to the opportunities and threats offered by nature, in a given place: ‘the first fact of architecture is the topography of a place and the way human beings respond to it with their own constructed forms.’<sup>50</sup>

The aesthetic value, and the meaning, of architecture can be framed by attitudes to landscape; for example, Scully sees classic French gardens (Versailles, Vaux-le-Vicomte, Chantilly and others) as architecture which connects the natural and the manmade worlds ‘at the scale of the entire visible environment.’<sup>51</sup> This large-scale view of architecture is enabled by a methodology of looking beyond the built architectural object to see architecture engaged with the facts of landscape; in this view Le Corbusier’s Ronchamp chapel is ‘as much an active sculptural body as any Greek temple... on the top of its hill in the face of the Jura.’<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Le Corbusier’s La Tourette and Chandigarh projects ‘stand out in the landscape like Greek temples, sculptural embodiments of human action . . . truly at home only in the landscape, not urban at all.’<sup>53</sup> Scully is able to articulate an extended architectural understanding of Greek temples, French gardens and Modernist monuments by describing the perception or experience of the building, as it sits, actively and sculpturally, in the landscape, embodying human will, action, even emotion, in the natural world.

#### **2.3.4 Landscape: history and theory**

The word *landscape* has a northern European etymology, with its own history relative to the natural histories of Holland, Germany and Great Britain particularly (as discussed further in Chapter 5).<sup>54</sup> The intellectual discourse of landscape has a history deriving in part from the history of the garden.<sup>55</sup> Garden history has deep practical roots in horticulture and civil engineering; on a theoretical level the garden was central in eighteenth-century formation of aesthetics of the sublime, the beautiful and the picturesque. The picturesque was in turn a major element in the intellectual history of ideas of nature and beauty, expressed in the ideas of Shaftesbury, Burke, Locke, Hume and Kant.<sup>56</sup>

In the twenty-first century, landscape is becoming an increasingly independent theoretical discipline and a sphere of practice, forming itself both with and against architecture, geography, and other disciplines. Some emerging landscape writers are seeking an independent field of landscape, embracing architecture and art theories and practices, along with interdisciplinary ideas such as ‘mapping’, ‘representation’, ‘measuring’, ‘topography’, ‘eidetic landscape’, even ‘site’, to align landscape relative to a diverse array of historical, cultural and ecological concepts.<sup>57</sup>

#### **2.3.5 Research in action: literature and the visitor**

The research process of the present study will consider evidence from the fields of architecture and landscape, which already seem to have a relationship of overlaps and ‘in-between’ areas of historical knowledge, theory, and practice. The literature reveals that Aalto’s buildings appear to have an affinity with landscape, and with quite particular conditions of their urban and non-urban sites. The study looks closely at one architectural project, from one theoretical position, through a review of interdisciplinary literature.

In Chapter 8 of the present study, evidence from the literature review is combined with personal experience and observation of Aalto’s architecture. A visit to

Aalto's Muuratsalo house allows a visitor to consider at first hand the effectiveness of Appleton's lens of landscape in considering the role of landscape symbolism in the appeal of Aalto's house. In this way the insights of scholars of architecture and landscape are combined with a singular personal experience to enable a more particular consideration of the role of landscape aesthetics in the appeal of Aalto's house architecture.

## CHAPTER 2 NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Anita Berrizbeitia and Linda Pollak, *Inside Outside: Between Architecture and Landscape* (Gloucester, Mass.: Rockport, 1999).
- <sup>2</sup> David Leatherbarrow, 'Introduction: The Topographical Premises of Landscape and Architecture', in *Topographical Stories: Studies in Landscape and Architecture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p.1.
- <sup>3</sup> Kate Nesbitt, Introduction, in Kate Nesbitt, editor, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), p.28.
- <sup>4</sup> Nesbitt, Introduction, p.30.
- <sup>5</sup> Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, revised edition (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1996/1975), p.14; see 'Perception and the arts', pp.14-21.
- <sup>6</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.44.
- <sup>7</sup> Nesbitt, Introduction, p.28.
- <sup>8</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', *Journal of Architecture*, Winter 1998, v.3, n.4, p.297. See also Juhani Pallasmaa, 'The Geometry of Feeling: A Look at the Phenomenology of Architecture' (1986), in Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, pp.447-53.
- <sup>9</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.43.
- <sup>10</sup> Linda Groat and David Wang, *Architectural Research Methods* (New York: Wiley, 2002), pp.32-34.
- <sup>11</sup> John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*, edited by Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997); Ian L. McHarg, *Design with Nature* (New York: Doubleday, 1971).
- <sup>12</sup> Marc Treib has written on both figures; he criticizes McHarg, who 'cited the natural world as the only viable source of landscape design . . . No talk of meaning here, only of natural processes and a moral imperative.' Marc Treib, 'Must Landscapes Mean?', in *Settings and Stray Paths: Writings on Landscapes and Gardens* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p.112. Treib praises Jackson for having had 'the courage to define the landscape in other than pictorial and formal terms.' Marc Treib, 'The Measure of Wisdom: John Brinckerhoff Jackson', in *Settings and Stray Paths*, p.192.
- <sup>13</sup> James Corner, 'The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention', in Denis Cosgrove, editor, *Mappings* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999); Elizabeth Meyer, 'Situating Modern Landscape Architecture' (1992), in Simon Swaffield, editor, *Theory in Landscape Architecture: A Reader* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); Charles Waldheim, 'Landscape as Urbanism', in Charles Waldheim, editor, *The Landscape Urbanism Reader* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006).
- <sup>14</sup> The term 'heterotopic' appears to follow Demetri Porphyrios' usage as it describes Aalto's compositional method; see Demetri Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism: Studies on Alvar Aalto* (London: Academy Editions, 1982). The notion of heterotopia derives from Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970).
- <sup>15</sup> Kenneth Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto' (1998), in *Labour Work and Architecture: Collected Essays on Architecture and Design* (London: Phaidon, 2002), p.252.
- <sup>16</sup> Groat and Wang, *Architectural Research Methods*, p.33.
- <sup>17</sup> See for example Rory Spence, M.Arch. thesis, *Sources of Theory and Practice in the Work of Richard Lepplatrier* (Kensington, NSW: University of New South Wales, 1997).
- <sup>18</sup> See for example Werner Blaser, *Courtyards in Marrakech: The living presence of Islamic history* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2004).
- <sup>19</sup> See for example E. M. Farrelly, *Three Houses: Glenn Murcutt* (London: Phaidon, 1993).

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- <sup>20</sup> Alvar Aalto: *Between Humanism and Materialism*, edited by Peter Reed (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998).
- <sup>21</sup> Marc Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', in Reed, *Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism*.
- <sup>22</sup> Groat and Wang, *Architectural Research Methods*, pp.47-49.
- <sup>23</sup> Chris Hart, *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Research Imagination* (London: Sage Publications, 1998).
- <sup>24</sup> Hart, *Doing a Literature Review*, p.13.
- <sup>25</sup> *Alvar Aalto: Sketches*, edited by Göran Schildt, translated by Stuart Wrede (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1978); *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, edited by Göran Schildt, translated by Timothy Binham (Helsinki: Ottava, 1997).
- <sup>26</sup> Michael Laurie, *An Introduction to Landscape Design*, second edition (New York: Elsevier, 1986). Chapter headings include 'The Human Environment: Landscape Architecture'; 'The Garden in History'; 'Landscape and Natural Resources'; 'Climate and Microclimate'; 'Landscape Engineering'; etc.
- <sup>27</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.60-61.
- <sup>28</sup> See for example: Jerome H. Barkow, Lida Cosmides and John Tooby, editors, *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary psychology and the generation of culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Joseph Carroll, *Literary Darwinism: Evolution, Human Nature and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (London: Penguin, 1997).
- <sup>29</sup> K. Michael Hays, editor, *Architecture Theory since 1968* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1998); Frampton, *Labour Work and Architecture*; Harry Francis Mallgrave, editor, *Architectural Theory: Volume 1: An Anthology from Vitruvius to 1870* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2006); Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*; Juhani Pallasmaa, *Encounters: Architectural Essays*, edited by Peter MacKeith (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2005); Vincent Scully, *Modern Architecture and Other Essays*, selected and with introduction by Neil Levine (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003).
- <sup>30</sup> Swaffield, *Theory in Landscape Architecture*; Ian Thompson, editor, *Rethinking Landscape: a critical reader* (Abingdon UK: Routledge, 2009); Marc Treib, editor, *Modern Landscape Architecture: A critical review* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1993); Michael Spens, editor, *Transforming Landscape* (London: Academy Editions, 1996); James Corner, editor, *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999); Waldheim, *The Landscape Urbanism Reader*.
- <sup>31</sup> John Dixon Hunt, *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000); John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994); Leatherbarrow, *Topographical Stories*; Treib, *Settings and Stray Paths*.
- <sup>32</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'The Arts' (1971), in *Alvar Aalto: Volume II 1963-1970*, edited by Karl Fleig (Zurich: Éditions d'Architecture Artémis, 1971), p.12.
- <sup>33</sup> David Leatherbarrow, 'Topographical Premises', *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol. 57, No. 3, 'Landscape and Architecture', Feb. 2004, pp.70-73.
- <sup>34</sup> The research concepts and terminology of this and the following section's discussions are taken and adapted from Groat and Wang, *Architectural Research Methods*, pp.21-43.
- <sup>35</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.240-41.
- <sup>36</sup> Berrizbeitia and Pollak, *Inside Outside*; Carol J. Burns and Andrea Kahn, editors, *Site Matters: Design Concepts, Histories, and Strategies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005); Philip Goad, 'New Land, New Language: Shifting Grounds in Australian Attitudes to Landscape, Architecture, and Modernism', in Marc Treib, editor, *The Architecture of Landscape, 1940-1960* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); David Leatherbarrow, *Uncommon Ground: Architecture, Technology and Topography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); Elizabeth Meyer, 'Site Citations: The Grounds of Modern Landscape Architecture', in Burns and

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Kahn, *Site Matters*; Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands: Nordic Building* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996); Treib, *The Architecture of Landscape, 1940-1960*.

<sup>37</sup> Note for example the absence of nature and landscape in writings collected in Hays, *Architecture Theory since 1968*; also Mallgrave, *Architectural Theory: Volume 1*.

<sup>38</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.71.

<sup>39</sup> Grant Hildebrand, *The Wright Space: Pattern and Meaning in Frank Lloyd Wright's Houses* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991).

<sup>40</sup> Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*.

<sup>41</sup> Kate Nesbitt, Introduction, in Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, p.20.

<sup>42</sup> See Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000); Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society* (London: Flamingo, 1983 /1976). See also Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg and Meaghan Morris, editors, *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> Treib, 'Must Landscapes Mean?', p.110.

<sup>44</sup> John Dixon Hunt, 'The Dialogue of Modern Landscape Architecture with its Past', in Treib, *Modern Landscape Architecture*, p.134.

<sup>45</sup> Hunt, 'The Dialogue of Modern Landscape Architecture', p.135.

<sup>46</sup> See for example John Dixon Hunt, *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000); also John Dixon Hunt, *The Afterlife of Gardens* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004).

<sup>47</sup> Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*, revised edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979/1962), p.1.

<sup>48</sup> Vincent Scully, *Architecture: The Natural and the Manmade* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1991).

<sup>49</sup> Scully, *Architecture: The Natural and the Manmade*, p.xii.

<sup>50</sup> Scully, *Architecture: The Natural and the Manmade*, p.1.

<sup>51</sup> Scully, *Architecture: The Natural and the Manmade*, p.221.

<sup>52</sup> Scully, *Architecture: The Natural and the Manmade*, p.345.

<sup>53</sup> Scully, *Architecture: The Natural and the Manmade*, p.346.

<sup>54</sup> Han Lorzing, *The Nature of Landscape: A personal quest* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2001); Chapter 2, 'Words and Meanings'. See also John Brinckerhoff Jackson, 'The Word Itself', in *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), pp.1-8.

<sup>55</sup> Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe, *The Landscape of Man: Shaping the Environment from Prehistory to the Present Day* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987 /1975); Tom Turner, *Garden History: Philosophy and Design 2000 BC-2000 AD* (London and New York: Spon, 2005).

<sup>56</sup> John Macarthur, *The Picturesque: Architecture, Disgust and Other Irregularities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>57</sup> Corner, *Recovering Landscape*; James Corner and Alex S. MacLean, *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996); Elizabeth Meyer, 'Site Citations: The Grounds of Modern Landscape Architecture', in Burns and Kahn, *Site Matters*.

## Chapter 3 The 1998 Aalto centenary

### Landscape emerges as a critical discourse for architecture

#### 3.0 Chapter 3 Introduction

##### **3.0.1 Alvar Aalto centenary and evolving historical opinion on landscape**

Alvar Aalto, born in 1898, practised architecture, largely in his native Finland, from before 1920 through to the 1970s, with hundreds of built and unbuilt projects to his name, including 76 house projects.<sup>1</sup> He also put forward his thoughts on a range of architectural topics in articles and public addresses over the same time. This long period of work has enabled historians to follow the development of various themes in Aalto's work: its stylistic development; typologies of city, town, and housing planning; traditions and precedents; humanism; compositional modes; technology and materials; and his enduring affinity with nature. A closer reading of the literature suggests that historical opinion on Aalto evolved over the three decades from 1975. Historical writing on landscape-related topics in Aalto's work and thinking is reviewed in this chapter, in four (occasionally overlapping) stages, relative to the 1998 centenary of his birth, as outlined below.

In what may be described as the *pre-centenary* stage, 1975-1995, historians such as Vincent Scully, George Baird, and Göran Schildt presented Aalto as the eccentric master architect, with an affinity for nature and landform, working in a style described as 'organic', and with interests in humanism, the Mediterranean, Mannerism, ruins, and Nordic vernacular. Publication of Aalto's essays, speeches and assorted writings at this time also offered new and authoritative material for historical reflection.

During a period of *pre-centenary revision*, between 1982 and 1996, writers such as Demetri Porphyrios, Malcolm Quantrill, Juhani Pallasmaa, and Richard Weston not only noted earlier historical topics but also involved postmodern themes such as heterotopia, place, regionalism and environmentalism to revise

and augment historical opinion on Aalto and to recognize new complexities and contemporary relevance in Aalto's work.

Celebration of the *centenary* of Aalto's birth prompted historians to re-appraise Aalto's legacy. Leading historians, including Pallasmaa, Weston, Marc Treib, William J. R. Curtis, and Kenneth Frampton, adopted and refined the idea of landscape, amongst other themes—nature and culture, phenomenology, civic and mythic dimensions, and civic ideals—to reinterpret Aalto at the millennium.

From 1999 to 2008, *post-centenary* Aalto writing appeared to seek finer affinities in the relationships between the human, the architectural, and the natural worlds. Wilfred Wang considered Aalto's 'universality'; Pallasmaa developed a concept of Aalto's work as an architecture of 'weak image'; Sarah Menin and Flora Samuel's reading of Aalto presented the Muuratsalo house as a psychological retreat; architect Shigeru Ban's experience of Aalto's buildings in their contexts propelled him to find his own sense of style and materials.

A reading of these four phases of historical writing reveals an evolving historical perspective on Aalto's involvement with landscape, where historians perceive by turns Aalto's affinity with nature and earth, through a more complex engagement with nature, to the connection of landscape and human ideals, and, most recently, a view of a subtle synthesis of relationships between nature and the human, as a legacy of Aalto's architecture.

### **3.1 Landscape in pre-centenary writing**

#### **3.1.1 Aalto's words and works**

Aalto wrote articles and spoke on architecture, in Finland and internationally, from before the 1920s until the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> He enjoyed reading and wrote numerous journal articles in the 1920s and 1930s, despite an apparent dyslexia or 'reading blindness';<sup>3</sup> however, from the 1930s he preferred to present his ideas in speeches, addresses, and interviews. Selections of Aalto's 'own words' and

sketches, edited by his friend Swedish writer Göran Schildt, have provided historians and the general public with access to Aalto's lifetime of philosophies and opinions on subjects such as the creative process, landscape in Finland, postwar reconstruction, humanism, rationalism, architecture in Italy, urbanism and public housing.<sup>4</sup>

Aalto's buildings are documented in the three-volume set of collected works edited by Karl Fleig; the first two were published in Aalto's lifetime (1963 and 1971) including notes by Aalto, and with photographs selected by Aalto; the third volume (1978) was edited by Fleig and Elissa Aalto.<sup>5</sup> A *catalogue raisonné* of Aalto's architectural projects was produced by Schildt in 1994, further extending historical awareness and general knowledge of the scope of Aalto's work in architecture, urbanism, design and art.<sup>6</sup>

### **3.1.2 Scully: solid forms, not space**

Landscape appears to have been an uncommon topic for architectural criticism in the 1960s.<sup>7</sup> Vincent Scully, in *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods* (1962) recognized the centrality of landscape in the development of the Classical Greek sacred precinct.<sup>8</sup> In a later work, Scully diagnosed architecture's fundamental, perhaps universal, task of mediating between humanity and nature:

The way human beings see themselves in relation to nature is fundamental to all cultures; thus the first fact of architecture is the natural world, the second is the relationship of human structures to the topography of the world, and the third is the relationship of all these structures to each other.<sup>9</sup>

In 1961 Scully observed a particular approach to landscape in Aalto's site strategies: he related the site planning of Aalto's Munkkiniemi apartments (1951-55) (near his own house of 1934-35) to that of the Greek *temenos*, describing the apartment blocks not in spatial terms, but rather as objects encompassed by the eye, connecting the viewer to the landscape. Scully analyses Munkkiniemi: 'there

is no spatial module—Aalto stresses the fact that the building solids, not the spatial voids, are the positives in the design. Space . . . is simply what is left over between them.<sup>10</sup> Scully identifies Aalto's strategy as consistent not with orthodox Modernism but with Classical Greek architecture: built objects are organized on the site, sensitive to the greater landform and the viewer's eye. Aalto himself wrote of siting strategies for the Finnish landscape as early as 1925, setting out his aesthetic ideal of architectural harmony with the physical forms of the natural world:

The landscapes we meet outside towns no longer consist of untouched nature anywhere; they are a combination of human efforts and the original environment . . . 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.<sup>11</sup>

Aalto's avoidance of the abstract aesthetics of 'space' set him apart from International Style Modernism, from which he distanced himself from the early 1930s, recommending nature and biology, and humankind's connection to nature, as a preferred source of formal inspiration.<sup>12</sup> Curtis argues that Aalto followed a transitional course 'towards a "bio-technical" version of modernity'.<sup>13</sup>

### **3.1.3 Giedion: the irrational and organic Aalto**

Historian Sigfried Giedion, in *Space, Time and Architecture*, diagnosed two distinct attitudes towards nature in Modernist architecture, 'the one toward the rational and geometrical, the other toward the irrational and the organic: two different ways of dealing with or of mastering the environment.'<sup>14</sup> Giedion located Aalto in the 'irrational and organic' category, identifying themes including space, the forest, and human nature in Aalto's work.<sup>15</sup> Like Wright—whose whole career, wrote Giedion, 'was an endeavour to express himself in what he called "organic architecture", whatever that may be'<sup>16</sup>—Aalto is projected by

Giedion as having a profound sense of nature and organic form.<sup>17</sup> Aalto is also associated, in somewhat mythical terms, with sculptor Hans Arp:

It has been said of Hans [Arp], whose art is close to that of Aalto, that his shapes and forms never even momentarily slipped into modishness, but instead were deeply rooted in the eternal verities of mankind. This can also be said of Aalto.<sup>18</sup>

Aalto, in Giedion's estimate, merged inside and outside space, relating buildings to nature,<sup>19</sup> and natural form to built form, as in the Villa Mairea, where 'the forest seems to enter the house and find its concomitant echo in the slender wooden poles employed there.'<sup>20</sup> Giedion makes no mention of the Muuratsalo house in his account of Aalto.

Giedion also positions Aalto as understanding universal human nature, as 'the type of architect who can take regional features and translate them into a universal language without losing their individual flavour.'<sup>21</sup> Giedion links Aalto's unusually broad appeal to the thematic universality of his work:

Each line [of Aalto's] tells of his close contact with human destiny. This may be one of the reasons why his architecture encounters less difficulty in overcoming the resistance of the common man than that of others of his contemporaries.<sup>22</sup>

Giedion observes Aalto's empathy with the natural world at the same time as he notices Aalto's unusual empathy for and appeal to 'the common man'—the ideal and everyday visitor who experiences Aalto's 'irrational' architecture, apparently without 'resistance'.

#### **3.1.4 Baird: ruins and balustrades**

George Baird, writing in *Alvar Aalto* (1971), selects three indicative Aalto themes—ruins, balustrades, and politics—'to take three rather particular soundings of Aalto's as yet unexplored depth.'<sup>23</sup> Considering the theme of ruins,

Baird argues that Aalto's buildings after the Paimio Sanatorium (1929-33) '*give the impression of having been aged in advance . . . are metaphors of ruins*',<sup>24</sup> evident in Aalto's preference for brick and stone rather than concrete and steel in his buildings after the sanatorium project. Baird notes the vulnerability to time of early Modernist architecture: '[the buildings] were often enough compared to boats; it turned out that it was the kind of care customarily extended to boats that they required for themselves.'<sup>25</sup> Aalto appears to have adopted a conception of building *with* time which 'seems almost deliberately intended to save his work from time's painful ravages.'<sup>26</sup> Baird also observes that Aalto's time-friendly buildings are not softened or complemented by plant materials (as in Wright's organic architecture) but are rather overrun by 'extraordinary outgrowths of planting' at odds with the built form;<sup>27</sup> 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 mankind had already been conceded in Aalto's works at their inception.<sup>28</sup>

The presence of overgrown vegetation, both inside and out of many of Aalto's buildings, seems to add to the perception of a 'ruined' quality in his work.

Reflecting on the significance of a visitor's experience of the door-handles, railings and balustrades of Aalto's buildings, Baird notes both haptic and spatial qualities in the railings, which 'become not just forms to touch with the hand, or even to follow with the hand, but also forms simply to pause by or lean against.'<sup>29</sup> The balustrades of his public buildings appear to have both symbolic and functional attributes of what might be described as 'refuge': the stair landings are also platforms offering enclosure, as well as the option of what might be termed 'prospect', places, in Baird's words, 'to see from and to be seen upon'.<sup>30</sup>

Each landing, behind its balustrade, is made into a potent enclosing and disclosing space, a space which is both haven and promontory, both shelter and stage. This is the basic human image of Aaltoesque

space—the space of the balustrade—and it is characteristic of every Aalto stair.<sup>31</sup>

The ‘haven’ of the landing is a safe harbour, a place of shelter; the ‘promontory’ forms a lookout: these haven-and-promontory landings may be read as architectural elements illustrating what Jay Appleton termed ‘prospect-refuge symbolism’—a theoretical notion of environmental aesthetics referred to throughout the present study.<sup>32</sup> This balustrade space is identified as ‘the basic human image of Aaltoesque space’; that is, a key concept in Aalto’s architecture: its harmonious combination of complementary qualities of ‘prospect’ and ‘refuge’ may be contributing factors in its aesthetic significance.

Baird’s reading of ruins and balustrades presents some of the complexities of Aalto’s architecture: ruins and greenery as practical and metaphorical strategies for dealing with time; and balustrades, railings and landings as spatial metaphors of bodily experience of architecture, simultaneously providing havens for refuge and promontories for prospect, providing deeply satisfying human experiences in public buildings.

### **3.1.5 Schildt: *Sketches, Own Words*, and a biography**

Soon after Aalto’s death in 1976, his ideas and work were celebrated in commemorative editions of leading architectural journals: in France in *Architecture d’Aujourd’hui*; in Finland in *Arkkitehti*; in Britain in *Architectural Review*; in the US in *Progressive Architecture*; and in *Architecture Australia*. Over the subsequent few years, further documentation and critical assessments of Aalto’s work emerged. From Helsinki a major retrospective exhibition of Aalto’s design, architecture and planning including glassware, lights, furniture, prototypes, drawings, models and paintings, toured internationally from 1978, with Ruusovuori and Pallasma’s catalogue illustrating numerous Aalto themes, including nature, culture and landscape.<sup>33</sup>

In 1978 Schildt edited and published *Alvar Aalto Sketches*, a selection of Aalto's essays, speeches and travel notebook sketches.<sup>34</sup> This volume, revised and expanded, was published in 1997 as *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, as discussed earlier in this chapter.<sup>35</sup> Between 1984 and 1989 the three volumes of Schildt's definitive biography of Aalto were also published.<sup>36</sup> Schildt elaborates the patterns of Aalto's life (such as Aalto's early years in Jyväskylä, the loss of his mother when he was eight, his father's work as a surveyor in the Finnish forest, and the large white drawing table in the father's office) and reflects on their formative effect on the young Aalto. Schildt reveals the influence of Aalto's wives, Aino Marsio, then Elsa (known as Elissa) Mäkinen, on his life and work, particularly the traumatic effect of Aino's death in 1949. He describes Aalto's friendship with Frank Lloyd Wright, and the influence of Wright's work on his architecture; and he shows the bitterness of the ageing Aalto at his rejection by younger Finnish architects in the 1960s. The content of Schildt's biography has recently been re-published for a popular audience in a single (unillustrated) volume as *Alvar Aalto: His Life* (2007).<sup>37</sup>

Schildt also edited an eleven-volume set, published by Garland in New York (1994) of Aalto's architectural drawings from the period 1917-39, offering access to a significant volume of archival material, including extensive drawings and detailed documentation of Aalto's own house in Munkkiniemi and the Villa Mairea.<sup>38</sup> Schildt's work in disseminating Aalto's ideas by publication of both words and buildings has performed a valuable service for architectural history, forming a platform of knowledge and a reference point for recent historical work on Aalto, as well as for the present study.

### **3.2 Landscape in pre-centenary revision**

Three landmarks of Aalto scholarship from 1976 to 1996 have helped evolve a contemporary view of Aalto's ideas, and continue to be cited. Porphyrios, in *Sources of Modern Eclecticism* (1982), brought postmodern discourse to Aalto studies.<sup>39</sup> Malcolm Quantrill in *Alvar Aalto: a critical study* (1983) located Aalto

both in Scandinavian architectural tradition and in a tradition of European urbanism.<sup>40</sup> Weston, in his monograph *Alvar Aalto* (1996), argued for the contemporary relevance of Aalto's work for architectural culture.<sup>41</sup>

### **3.2.1 Porphyrrios: a new discourse**

In 1982 Demetri Porphyrrios, in *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, brought the framework of postmodern discourse, particularly philosopher Michel Foucault's idea of 'heterotopia', to review historical perspectives on Aalto.<sup>42</sup> Porphyrrios also brought his own research findings—for example, Scandinavian typological precedents for the Villa Mairea<sup>43</sup>—into Aalto scholarship. He locates Aalto within at least three discursive streams: the Enlightenment tradition; the discourses of aesthetics; and the discourses of heterotopia.<sup>44</sup> Porphyrrios argues that Aalto's compositional tactics were not by direct reference to nature, but rather by allusion to existing buildings that symbolized nature 'by means of already codified architectural signs', rather than by metaphor or direct mimesis of natural forms.<sup>45</sup> This notion suggests that Aalto used his knowledge of history to develop an architecture linked to precedents in Nordic and European architecture, and Italian Renaissance urbanism.

The concepts and vocabulary of Porphyrrios' work, nearly thirty years after its writing, continue to make demands upon readers, not all of whom concur with his method: in a footnote in his Aalto monograph, Weston challenged Porphyrrios' 'neo-rationalist/Marxian mugging of Aalto'.<sup>46</sup> Porphyrrios selected Aalto not for his 'imperviousness-to-time-appeal' but because his work exposed 'the prejudices, myths and enacted expiatory strategies of the middle years of twentieth century industrialized society.'<sup>47</sup> Porphyrrios' comments on Aalto's 'valorization of nature' are referred to further in Chapter 6 of the present study.

### 3.2.2 Quantrill: urbanism and nature

Malcolm Quantrill, in *Alvar Aalto: A Critical Study* (1983), uses historical knowledge of Western architecture, and Finnish architecture in particular,<sup>48</sup> along with his personal acquaintance with Aalto, and his extended experience of Aalto's work, to locate Aalto's work in a Scandinavian architectural tradition, and a European urban tradition encompassing the Mannerism of Michelangelo and Borromini.<sup>49</sup> Quantrill observes a rarely noted affinity with nature common to Aalto and Borromini,<sup>50</sup> claiming that 'the architects of both the High Gothic and Baroque embodied the vocabulary of the natural landscape into their structures.'<sup>51</sup> Quantrill notes that for Aalto '[t]he importance of Nature as our guide and teacher, our natural resource for inspiration, remained as one of his recurring themes.'<sup>52</sup>

### 3.2.3 Approaching the centenary: guidebook themes

Michael Trencher's *The Alvar Aalto Guide* (1995) indicates certain preoccupations of Aalto scholarship during the period leading up to the centenary.<sup>53</sup> Trencher organizes key factors of Aalto's designs into seven categories: Aalto and nature; Aalto, culture and society; Aalto and modern art; Aalto's 1930s transformation of modernism; Aalto's postwar reassessment; Aalto's organic modernism; and Aalto and technology. Trencher regards the 'respectful' relationship between Aalto's work and its users as a significant causal element in the appeal of his architecture:

Aalto's buildings are a great validation of the potential inherent in architecture for a symbiotic, healthy and respectful relationship between the built environment and the people who inhabit it. This viability is one of the major contributing factors to Aalto's enduring reputation and one that cannot be drawn, photographed or understood from texts.<sup>54</sup>

The 'enduring reputation' of Aalto's buildings—which, the reader is reminded, should be experienced to be fully comprehended—appears thus to be related to

Aalto's empathy for humankind and his understanding of nature. Trencher notes that Aalto was considerably aggrieved in his later years by a broadening chasm 'between his culturally sensitive and artful architecture, harmonious with man and nature, and the hardening formalism and technocratic direction of postwar modernism'.<sup>55</sup>

### **3.2.4 Weston: nature and culture**

Richard Weston in *Alvar Aalto* (1996) considered the contemporary relevance of Aalto's work for architectural culture. He engages Aalto scholarship with still-current themes such as: sense of place, local identity within global culture, the need for culture and architecture to reconnect with nature, architectural adaptation to local conditions, and Aalto's work as precedent for an 'ecological' architecture.<sup>56</sup> On the theme of nature, Weston describes a duality in Aalto's metaphoric strategies, of a reciprocity between architecture and nature:

Throughout Aalto's work we find a double movement: from nature to architecture; and from architecture to nature . . . natural materials and motifs are gradually turned into architecture, while architecture is invaded by nature in the form of stone, wood and plants.<sup>57</sup>

Weston's notion seems drawn from the idea of metamorphosis, an idea embedded in Western culture, traceable to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with its central theme of transformation: 'Now I am ready to tell how bodies are changed / Into different bodies.'<sup>58</sup>

### **3.2.5 Prelude to centenary: the topic of landscape**

Cultural celebrations marking the occasion of the birth or death centenary of a major cultural figure provide an opportunity for historians to re-assess that artist's work, estimate his or her legacy, and adjudicate on their relevance to contemporary thought or practice. Developments in thinking or praxis in related fields can also throw new light onto obscure aspects of a body of work. An

impending celebration offers writers lead-time for critical analysis and reflection, and the chance to engage with contemporary cultural ideas—as defined, for example, by Kate Nesbitt’s paradigms: phenomenology, the sublime, linguistics, feminism, etc.<sup>59</sup>—in order to re-assess the work and ideas of a major artist.

The topic of landscape can offer the opportunity for fresh insight into the work and ideas of a major architect, as shown by Caroline Constant, in the essay ‘From the Virgilian dream to Chandigarh’, written for the 1987 Le Corbusier centennial.<sup>60</sup> Constant showed the architect in a new light by exploring landscape themes in selected projects: his mother’s house on Lake Geneva (1925); the surreal rooftop garden of the de Beistegui apartment in Paris (1931); the fusion of architecture and landscape at Ronchamp (1950-54); and the influence of Mughal garden architecture and presence of the Indian landscape in the design for the Governor’s Palace at Chandigarh (1951-65).

Constant points out that the domains of architecture and landscape, which were integrated only late in the career of Le Corbusier, when his architecture unified the polarities of a ‘dual interpretation of nature, as original condition and emblem of rational order’, were similarly ‘fused’ earlier, in the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright and Alvar Aalto.<sup>61</sup> Constant uses nature as a theme to link the work of three major architectural figures, indicating the value of nature as a general historical theme, and the particular potential of landscape as a critical lens, through which to review a body of work or a single project, and by example recommending landscape as an appropriate discourse for architectural reflection.

### **3.3 Centenary and Landscape**

#### **3.3.1 Aalto centenary writing**

Alvar Aalto was convinced of the capacity of the art of architecture to articulate humankind's ancient relationship with nature. He wrote in 1971 that, ‘for millennia, art has not been able to disengage itself from the nature-bound human environment, and neither will it ever be able to do so.’<sup>62</sup> When Aalto died in 1976,

the term ‘landscape’ had limited architectural currency, and little prominence as an architectural topic, and was not widely regarded as an independent discipline or discourse; Constant’s 1987 essay was a rare example of a historian using the lens of landscape to re-assess an architect’s work. However, by 1998, landscape was emerging as an independent field: landscape ideas, terms and concepts appeared in centenary historical writing on Aalto’s legacy and the relevance of his architecture and ideas.

To mark the occasion of the Aalto birth centenary of 1998, a diversity of material appeared<sup>63</sup>—publications, exhibitions and seminars (including survey and specialist exhibitions in Helsinki, and an exhibition at the New York Museum of Modern Art<sup>64</sup>), commemorative coins and banknotes, wine bottlings, a play, even a two-volume comic-book Aalto biography.<sup>65</sup>

In a range of centenary essays by leading historians, landscape began to emerge as a significant theme for presenting Aalto to a new generation of readers: Curtis discussed Aalto’s ‘mythic landscapes’;<sup>66</sup> Frampton framed Aalto as a ‘designer of landscapes’;<sup>67</sup> Pallasmaa recalled Aalto’s concept of ‘synthetic landscape’ and framed his architecture as ‘a product of earth’;<sup>68</sup> and Marc Treib, a landscape historian, situated landscape and the architectural site as central to ‘Aalto’s nature’.<sup>69</sup> These evaluations signaled a broadening use of landscape as a framework for thinking about Aalto’s architecture.

A partial overview of writing on Aalto was made by Treib in his essay ‘Alvar Aalto at 100’, where he assessed selected literature on Aalto published 1986–1995.<sup>70</sup> Treib omits work from before 1986—Porphyrios, Quantrill, and others—as well as centenary publications, concentrating largely on Schildt’s work. Treib finds that the work of Schildt and others portrays Aalto as an individualistic Finn with ‘a concern for the specific place and its inhabitants’, although Schildt had not suggested ‘any reappraisal of either the man or the work.’<sup>71</sup>

Yet the discourse of landscape had long been present in Aalto's consciousness, as shown in his unpublished 1924 article 'The hilltop town', where his awareness of landscape and its urban potential was prompted by the experience of a Mantegna fresco painting:

The baptistery of Santa Maria del Eremitane in the small town of Padua has some frescoes by Mantegna; in one of them the landscape predominates. In the first place, it contains something we might call a synthetic landscape. This is the architect's vision of the landscape, a small hint to our present-day urban planners on how they should approach their task. Moreover, it is a brilliant analysis of the earth's crust.<sup>72</sup>

Pallasmaa takes up Aalto's idea of 'synthetic landscape' in his centenary essay;<sup>73</sup> the young Aalto, however, had seen and absorbed the connection between landscape and architecture, and was already, nearly seventy-five years earlier, developing his own 'architect's vision of the landscape'.

An overview of Aalto centenary writing indicates a general awakening by historians to the potential for landscape ideas to illuminate architectural discourse. A review of the literature can present a sense of this dawning realization; sections of the works cited below receive closer readings in later chapters of the present study.

### **3.3.2 Curtis and Frampton: from survey to essay**

Curtis and Frampton both published survey histories of modern architecture in the 1980s, touching on themes of landscape and site in conjunction with Aalto.<sup>74</sup> In the second (1987) edition of *Modern Architecture since 1900*, Curtis observed a trend in architecture and art around 1960 toward ambiguity and complexity in spatial and cultural contexts; this tendency included especially the work of Aalto, whose 'one huge imaginative structure' incorporated a shift from 'pre-war

mechanistic analogies to ones concerning complex geological or biological orders'.<sup>75</sup>

Frampton, in *Modern Architecture: a critical history*, considered historical and contemporary contexts of Aalto's work, emphasizing his 'anti-mechanistic attitude', especially his 'concern for the natural modification of the environment and for the intrinsic nature of the site.'<sup>76</sup> Aalto, he wrote, had a 'consistently organic approach.'<sup>77</sup> Frampton points also to Aalto's 'resolve to serve the common man',<sup>78</sup> through constant attention to 'the creation of environments which would be conducive to human well-being'.<sup>79</sup> To create such environments, Aalto formulated a site planning principle, evident in public buildings and houses, 'wherein a given building is inevitably separated into two distinct elements and the space between is articulated as a space of human appearance.'<sup>80</sup>

In this last, astute, observation Frampton anticipates his focus in 1998 (discussed below) on more broadly conceived environments, comprising building, site, and landscape, rather than considering the building as discrete sculptural object. In subsequent essays, both Curtis and Frampton gave a noticeable prominence to themes of nature and landscape.

### **3.3.3 Frampton: Aalto as a designer of landscapes**

In the 1991 essay 'In Search of the Modern Landscape', Frampton reviewed relationships between architectural and landscape practice.<sup>81</sup> Frampton omits Aalto from his discussion of landscape in the work of selected Modernist architects (Hannes Meyer, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra, Luis Barragan), Modernist masters of landscape design (Christopher Tunnard, Garrett Eckbo, Dan Kiley, Roberto Burle Marx, Jens Jensen), and contemporary landscape practitioners (Georges Descombes, Dimitrios Pikionis). Frampton discusses landscape in the development of 'progressive' architectural form, reviews Modernist garden design, and looks briefly at 'recent topographical transformations' where formal relationships are imprecise, despite the physical clarity of landform.<sup>82</sup>

Aesthetic and ecological aspects of landscape were conjoined in Frampton's concept of 'resistance', which he had earlier put forward as a cultural imperative for architecture.<sup>83</sup> Frampton argued, concluding the 'Modern Landscape' essay: 'To write of the modern landscape as though it were nothing more than a cultural discourse would be to trivialize values that are essential to our survival.'<sup>84</sup> His proposal offers to propel landscape from obscurity to relevance and urgency.

In his 1998 centenary essay 'The Legacy of Aalto', Frampton argues that the values and imperatives associated with landscape are aesthetic, cultural and biological. He describes the value of landscape for Aalto:

Aalto's buildings were either landscapes in themselves, [or] they extended into the surroundings in such a way as to transform the pre-existing ground . . . his buildings were constituted as topographic structures rather than as gratuitous sculptural gestures.<sup>85</sup>

Frampton observes that Aalto placed great emphasis on modifying the landscape, following a strategy likened to 'building the site'.<sup>86</sup> Frampton also makes the significant claim (as noted in Chapter 1) that '[a]ll of Aalto's sites were built in this topographical sense, and his achievements as an architect cannot be separated at any stage of his career from his capacity as a designer of landscapes.'<sup>87</sup> Thus the importance of Aalto—as a theoretician and practitioner of an architecture of transformative relationships with the earth—is held up as relevant to twenty-first century thinking and practice.

### **3.3.4 Curtis: mythic landscapes**

In *Modern Architecture since 1900*, Curtis had observed 'Aalto's concern for buildings as intermediaries between human life and the natural landscape',<sup>88</sup> and noted Aalto's interest in both intellectual and sensual aspects of ancient Greek architecture, particularly the platform element (given exalted, even spiritual, status by Jørn Utzon).<sup>89</sup>

In his 1998 centenary essay 'Paysages Mythiques / Mythic Landscapes' Curtis conscripts landscape for a kind of 'mythmaking' on Aalto's behalf; he claims that Aalto was able to 'transcend his time and place, even to touch upon a certain universality in both the medium of architecture and the human condition.'<sup>90</sup>

Through his synthesis of local and exotic, historical and contemporary sources, Aalto 'invented a new world with its [own] language.'<sup>91</sup> This invented world, Curtis argues, 'was animated by natural energies which he perceived in a mythopoetic way, for their psychic as well as their physical qualities.'<sup>92</sup>

Classical Greek architecture and ideals, along with Greek attitudes to built landscape, form the basis for Curtis' argument. Curtis relates Aalto's awareness of the human figure on levelled ground—a sensitivity which 'governed all the levels of his buildings from stairs, railings, benches and shelves, up to the larger moves of platforms, precincts, processional routes and landscape levels'—to the Greek topographic element of the platform, with its civic and cultural presence, as well as with a 'basic sense of being human in the world.'<sup>93</sup> Curtis combines landscape and antiquity to present a 'mythic' aspect to Aalto, citing Rex Martienssen's formulation on the significance, in Greek and other cultures, of level ground: 'A horizontal plane, or a series of horizontal planes, is the first essential in any system of formal arrangement intended to embrace the activities of organized or collective life.'<sup>94</sup>

Considering architecture at a yet more archaic level, Curtis links Aalto's interest in landscape to 'the origins of architecture in the forms of the land.'<sup>95</sup> As evidence for Curtis' 'myth' of architectural beginnings, he cites Aalto's elision of material form in the Finnish Technical Institute at Otaniemi (1949-62), as though identifying strata of architectural history: 'it marks the transition from platforms in earth, through levels in stone, to a transparent modern theatre in glass and metal.'<sup>96</sup>

The ‘mythic’ aspects of Aalto discerned by Curtis are linked not to organic ideas, nor to concepts of nature, but to the topography, slopes, levels and other physical significances of landscape, to argue that in the forms of the land lies the potential for the expression and location of the forms and myths of architecture.

### **3.3.5 Pallasmaa: logic of the image; fragile architecture**

In his Aalto centenary essay ‘Logic of the Image’, Finnish phenomenologist Juhani Pallasmaa portrays Aalto as an artist and a ‘genius’ whose ‘masterpieces seem to maintain their secret and poetic freshness.’<sup>97</sup> He maintains the secrecy and enigmatic nature of Aalto’s work, adding that the subtleties of his buildings ‘have to be experienced live and encountered with one’s body in the actuality of their context, scale and materials.’<sup>98</sup>

Pallasmaa’s presentation of Aalto as an architect of landscape is both straightforward and dramatic; he proposes that Aalto’s architecture ‘is a product of earth; his buildings echo the soil and the terrain.’<sup>99</sup> Pallasmaa cites a number of Aalto’s landscape strategies, including: a fusion of terrain and building in terraces and vegetation (Maison Louis Carré, Bazoches, France, 1955-59); a building profile which echoes site topography (Riola Church, Bologna, 1966-80); building as image of a mountain or gigantic rock formation (House of Culture, Helsinki, 1955); and ‘projecting a contrast to the existing landscape ([as in] the enclosed Pompeian courtyard of his summer house in the uninhabited Finnish lake landscape).’<sup>100</sup>

Pallasmaa, informed by phenomenology, uses the landscape idea as a platform to hypothesize an architecture of ambience and relatedness, which embodies contextual and perceptual ambiguity, over clarity and singularity, following Gianni Vattimo’s notions of ‘weak ontology’ and ‘fragile thought’.<sup>101</sup> Pallasmaa at one point proposes an architecture of ‘weak image’, different to the prevailing architecture of ‘strong image’; the ambient quality and the multiple constituent parts of landscape as context contribute to this notion:

Whereas the architecture of strong image aspires to impress and control through the authority of singular image and the logically consistent articulation of form, the architecture of weak image is contextual and responsive, and aims at a distinct atmosphere instead of the coherence of form.<sup>102</sup>

This architecture of ‘weak image’ is exemplified in the sensory ambience of the Japanese garden, an ‘exquisite architecture without a singular *gestalt* or structure’;<sup>103</sup> he notes that Aalto ‘transformed this architecture of landscape and nature into the constructed world of architecture.’<sup>104</sup> Pallasmaa comprehends the ambiguities of Aalto through the ‘architecture of landscape and nature’, sensing the metamorphic possibilities of architecture in Aalto’s landscape strategies, and using landscape to identify and articulate otherwise inexplicable poetic qualities in Aalto’s work.

### **3.3.6 Treib: Aalto’s nature**

Marc Treib, who had published articles on gardens and Modernist landscape design since 1979,<sup>105</sup> contributed the essay ‘Aalto’s Nature’ to the catalogue of the 1998 New York Museum of Modern Art Aalto centenary exhibition.<sup>106</sup> Treib reviews Aalto’s architecture from a landscape historian’s perspective, observing the childhood influence of the remote Finnish landscape, rather than ‘domestic space’, on Aalto’s architecture:

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.<sup>107</sup>

Treib sees the landscape, especially the ‘sublime forest’ of Finland, as a key source of Aalto’s architecture: the Villa Mairea ‘retains an inextricable affinity with its landscape.’<sup>108</sup> Treib’s skill in perceiving elements and patterns in both

nature and architecture allows a comprehension of Aalto's creative ability to transform landscape into architecture:

the interiors of several notable Aalto buildings themselves appear as interior landscapes, fields in which the column and the balcony replace the tree and the rocky ledge.<sup>109</sup>

Treib categorizes Aalto's non-urban buildings into groups of concave or convex composition and 'constructed architectural landscapes':<sup>110</sup>

The concave schemes reiterated the contours of fissures or valleys. The convex schemes completed or reinforced rising landforms. And for those sites that lacked potent natural features Aalto constructed his own architectural landscapes.<sup>111</sup>

Treib's landscape knowledge enables him to perceive existing landscape patterns; from this basis he can hypothesize how natural geometry and space appear to underlie Aalto's architecture, and how Aalto made buildings as artificial landscapes. Landscape knowledge, applied to architecture, discloses Aalto's skill in rhyming built form with landform, and in his synthesis of architectural form.

### **3.4 Post-centenary: landscape and Aalto's legacy**

Although the centenary upsurge of historical interest in Aalto has generally subsided since 1998, Aalto remains at the centre of an academic and publishing organization in Finland. The Alvar Aalto Foundation in Helsinki and the Alvar Aalto Museum in Jyväskylä<sup>112</sup> currently manage the Aalto archive and a number of Aalto buildings (including the Aalto house and studio in Helsinki, the Villa Mairea, the Muuratsalo house, and the 1933 Viipuri [now Vyborg, Russia] Library), and continue to publish Aalto's work,<sup>113</sup> while the Alvar Aalto Academy organizes architectural research, publishing, lectures and symposiums.<sup>114</sup>

Finnish authors have recently written about Aalto: among these, Jiri and Sirkka-Liisa Jetsonen have written on Aalto houses, apartments and summer houses;<sup>115</sup>

the Alvar Aalto Museum has published a book of Aalto's unbuilt projects;<sup>116</sup> and Louna Lahti has edited a series of interviews presenting a personal view of Aalto.<sup>117</sup>

Outside of Finland, interest in Aalto's work was revived in a 2007 exhibition in London, 'Alvar Aalto Through the Eyes of Shigeru Ban', curated by Japanese architect Shigeru Ban, presenting a selection of Ban's work and cardboard constructions in the context of Aalto's buildings and ideas.<sup>118</sup>

Since the centenary, historians and other writers have written books and articles on Aalto, some referring to landscape aspects directly, or in passing. Pallasmaa continued his interest in landscape within a contemporary architecture of 'fragile' form. Wilfried Wang's concern was with aspects of landscape and human universality in Aalto's architecture. Sarah Menin and Flora Samuel produced *Nature and Space: Aalto and Le Corbusier* (2003), considering psychological aspects of nature in the creative and personal lives of the two architects;<sup>119</sup> Menin and Samuel preceded and followed this book with articles on the topic of the architect's retreat close to nature.<sup>120</sup>

#### **3.4.1 After 1998: Wang and Pallasmaa**

After the centenary, Wilfried Wang, in a 1999 article in the Finnish magazine *ptah*, emphasized Aalto's ability to make an architecture that communicated to its users through its affinity with human traditions and continuities, the 'absorbed phenomena' of the natural world:

There are other treasures of experiences that are less literally tied to architectural experiences, such as absorbed phenomena from nature, from the animal kingdom, from landscape, from vegetation, from the world of minerals. Buildings can evoke the recall of such parallel phenomena.<sup>121</sup>

These ‘absorbed’ experiences are ancient and inherited, non-architectural aspects of human nature which humans inherit from formative ancestral encounters with a world before buildings.<sup>122</sup>

In the 2001 essay ‘Hapticity and Time’, Pallasmaa continued to pursue the notion of a haptic architecture to counter the perceived dominance of visual experience; this ‘fragile’ architecture might engage, like the garden, with ‘time, change, and fragile image’.<sup>123</sup> Pallasmaa argues that, despite the formality of some garden designs, ‘[t]he tradition of landscape and garden architecture can provide an inspiration for an architecture liberated from the constraints of geometric and strong image.’<sup>124</sup> He notes that Aalto adopted a ‘philosophy of compliance’ rather than one of formal arrogance, which allowed him to make an architecture capable of evoking ‘pleasurable haptic experience.’<sup>125</sup> The aesthetic pleasure of experiencing Aalto’s architecture appears to have a significant component of landscape experience at its base; Pallasmaa testifies to such a base for Aalto’s creative ability: ‘Alvar Aalto transformed this architecture of landscape and nature into the constructed world of architecture.’<sup>126</sup> Pallasmaa’s observation of Aalto’s creative strategies continues a theme evident to historians from Baird and Quantrill through to the twenty-first century.

### **3.4.2 Samuel and Menin: Aalto’s primitive hut**

Flora Samuel and Sarah Menin, who had collaborated in 2003 on *Nature and Space: Aalto and Le Corbusier*<sup>127</sup> (noted above, and discussed further in Chapter 4), published an article in 2006 on psychological aspects of ‘the primitive’ in architecture.<sup>128</sup> Following their idea that ‘a house could somehow reflect and affirm the inner life of its owner by allowing him to bask in his own thoughts and dreams in an undisturbed communion with the past’,<sup>129</sup> Samuel and Menin consider three private retreats—Aalto’s Muuratsalo house, Le Corbusier’s Cabanon at Cap Martin in France, and psychologist Carl Jung’s tower at Bollingen in Switzerland (built 1920s – 1950s)—as places ‘of recuperation within an unspoilt environment.’<sup>130</sup>

While the 2003 book dealt with notions of the self, following psychologist Donald Winnicott's ideas, Samuel and Menin in 2006 probe archetypes of setting and form, to see the retreats as connecting with archaic human elements. Samuel and Menin contend that at Muuratsalo Aalto went below the surface of the everyday, investing his architecture with 'the invitation to the metaphysical realm, using the whole form of the building to trigger the psycho-physical associations, and invite experience of the elemental, mystical realm.'<sup>131</sup> Samuel and Menin see symbolic meaning in the landscape settings of the three retreats:

The tower, the 'Play house' and the Cabanon are sited within trees and above purifying water. The archetypal significance of these elements would have been fully apparent to the three men, and cannot be underestimated.<sup>132</sup>

Aalto himself had written in 1940, in his Asplund eulogy, of architecture's non-verbal, psychological dimension: '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.'<sup>133</sup> Samuel and Menin point out the close proximity of nature and the human psyche as a theme of Aalto's life, and the serious significance of the Muuratsalo house in this regard:

[Aalto] was in his deepest period of psychological collapse and total disorientation following his wife's premature death in 1949 . . . he groped his way out of the blackness through the design of Muuratsalo, with the help of a young assistant whom he married.<sup>134</sup>

The 'blackness' of Aalto's state at that time was, according to Samuel and Menin, real, yet denied, and seems to underlie the idea of ruin often observed in the Muuratsalo house: 'Aalto's need to deny death at the conscious level led to the creation of a retreat imbued with the presence of that very reality he denied. Ruin, overgrowth, and decay were inherent in his creative idea'.<sup>135</sup> The psychological dimension of the Muuratsalo house is also evident in Aalto's own thoughts; introducing the then-new house in 1953, Aalto refers to the influence of one of his

‘truly close friends’, psychologist Yrjö Hirn, ‘a serious man [who] treated his theory of play with a deep seriousness.’<sup>136</sup>

Not only do Samuel and Menin explore the symbolism of water and forest, but they also use a psychological lens to investigate deeper archaic and nature-related elements in Aalto’s architecture and creative process, linking with Aalto’s own contemporaneous thinking. With the validity of nature and landscape established as a discursive underpinning, Samuel and Menin are able to develop further significant insights into Aalto’s architecture.

### **3.5 Towards a landscape perspective**

The four phases of thinking about Aalto’s architecture outlined in this chapter may be seen to reflect an evolution in opinion on landscape in Aalto’s work. Publication of a selection of Aalto’s ‘own words’ in 1978 revealed (or confirmed) Aalto’s longstanding, deep-rooted interest in social ideals and landscape. Historians acknowledged Aalto’s nearly inexplicable affinity with people, nature, and even time. The development of more circumspect discourses of history, urbanism and environment in the ‘postmodern’ 1980s saw Aalto recognized as an architect of complex means. Re-engaged thought on nature, culture, the city, even heterotopia, enabled a recognition of the intellectual richness of Aalto’s work.

However, it was not until the 1998 centenary that landscape (the word and its concepts) was widely recognized by Aalto scholars. While landscape was developing its own discursive bases, historians were adapting landscape as a means to expand the scope and depth of what might be said about Aalto and his legacy. Frampton’s watershed notion of Aalto as a ‘designer of landscapes’ confirmed Aalto’s legacy as landscape-based, and defined landscape as a new central concern for thinking about architectural aesthetics.

Since that time landscape has become a more complex and self-aware field of history and theory, while site and landscape have become areas of historical and

theoretical revision for architecture. Aalto remains alive, yet elusive, into the twenty-first century, and the formal and psychological complexities of his work—which, as historians remind their readers, has to be experienced to be ‘understood’—continue to be better understood against the rich diversity of nature, perceived as landscape.

## CHAPTER 3 NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A total of 76 domestic projects by Aalto—from a family villa for the J. H. Aalto family (1912-13) to the Villa Erica near Turin (1970-72)—are included in Part VIII.I ‘Residences, villas, single-family homes’, in *Alvar Aalto: The Complete Catalogue of Architecture, Design and Art*, edited by Göran Schildt (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), pp.177-206.

<sup>2</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa commented in 1998 on the high quantity and variable quality of Aalto’s output: ‘Considering Aalto’s immense production (during his 55 years of professional practice he is estimated to have designed and executed about 500 buildings and urban projects, and the Alvar Aalto Archive contains roughly 200 000 drawings and 20 000 letters), it is self-evident that his tens of masterworks are balanced by hundreds of less exciting projects. This is the human side of any genius.’ Juhani Pallasmaa, ‘Logic of the Image’, *Journal of Architecture*, Winter 1998, v.3, n.4, p.290.

<sup>3</sup> Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Early Years* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> *Alvar Aalto: Sketches*, edited by Göran Schildt, translated by Stuart Wrede (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1978); *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, edited by Göran Schildt, translated by Timothy Bingham (Helsinki: Ottava, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> *Alvar Aalto: Volume I: 1922-1962*, edited by Karl Fleig (Basel: Birkhauser, 1963); *Alvar Aalto: Volume II: 1963-1970*, edited by Karl Fleig (Zurich: Editions d’Architecture Artemis, 1971); *Alvar Aalto: Volume III: Projects and Final Buildings*, edited by Elissa Aalto and Karl Fleig (Basel: Birkhauser, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Complete Catalogue*.

<sup>7</sup> Some exceptions to this generalization include: Sir Peter Shephard, ‘Introduction to *Modern Gardens* (1953)’, in Jan Birksted, editor, *Relating architecture to landscape* (London: Spon, 1999); and Colin Rowe, ‘La Tourette’ (1961), in *The mathematics of the ideal villa and other essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976/1961).

<sup>8</sup> Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*, revised edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979/1962). See Chapter 1 ‘Landscape and Sanctuary’, pp.1-8.

<sup>9</sup> Vincent Scully, ‘Architecture: The Natural and the Manmade’, in *Modern Architecture and Other Essays*, selected and with introductions by Neil Levine (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003), p.282.

<sup>10</sup> Vincent Scully, *Modern Architecture: The Architecture of Democracy* (New York: George Braziller, 1961), pp.37-38.

<sup>11</sup> Alvar Aalto, ‘Architecture in the Landscape of central Finland’ (1925), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, pp.21-22.

<sup>12</sup> Alvar Aalto, ‘Rationalism and Man’ (1935), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.93.

<sup>13</sup> William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, third edition (London: Phaidon, 1996), p.349.

<sup>14</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The growth of a new tradition*, 5th edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967/1941), p.414.

<sup>15</sup> Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, pp.618-65.

<sup>16</sup> Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, p.414.

<sup>17</sup> ‘On another level and by other ways than Wright’s [European architecture] is moving towards the organic. In the northern countries the work of the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto indicates this.’ Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, p.417.

<sup>18</sup> Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, p.665.

<sup>19</sup> Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, pp.663-65.

<sup>20</sup> Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, p.646.

<sup>21</sup> Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, p.665.

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- <sup>22</sup> Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, p.666.
- <sup>23</sup> *Alvar Aalto*, with introduction and notes by George Baird, photographs by Yukio Futagawa (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), p.11.
- <sup>24</sup> Baird, *Alvar Aalto*, p.12.
- <sup>25</sup> Baird, *Alvar Aalto*, p.12.
- <sup>26</sup> Baird, *Alvar Aalto*, p.12.
- <sup>27</sup> Baird, *Alvar Aalto*, p.12.
- <sup>28</sup> Baird, *Alvar Aalto*, p.13.
- <sup>29</sup> Baird, *Alvar Aalto*, p.15.
- <sup>30</sup> Baird, *Alvar Aalto*, p.17.
- <sup>31</sup> Baird, *Alvar Aalto*, p.16.
- <sup>32</sup> Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, revised edition (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1996/1975).
- <sup>33</sup> Aarno Ruusuvuori and Juhani Pallasmaa, editors, *Alvar Aalto 1898-1976* (Helsinki: Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1978).
- <sup>34</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: Sketches*.
- <sup>35</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*.
- <sup>36</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Early Years*; Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Decisive Years* (New York, Rizzoli, 1986); Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Mature Years* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989).
- <sup>37</sup> Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: his life*, translated by Timothy Binham and Nicholas Mayow (Jyväskylä, Finland: Alvar Aalto Museum, 2007).
- <sup>38</sup> Alvar Aalto, *The Architectural Drawings of Alvar Aalto, 1917-1939* (10 volumes), edited by Göran Schildt, with Elina Standertskjöld and Kristiina Paatero (New York: Garland Publishing, in collaboration with the Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1994).
- <sup>39</sup> Demetri Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism: Studies on Alvar Aalto* (London: Academy Editions, 1982).
- <sup>40</sup> Malcolm Quantrill, *Alvar Aalto: a critical study* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1983).
- <sup>41</sup> Richard Weston, *Alvar Aalto* (London: Phaidon, 1996). See also Weston's studies of specific Aalto projects: Richard Weston, *Alvar Aalto: Villa Mairea* (London: Phaidon, 1992); Richard Weston, *Town Hall, Säynätsalo: Alvar Aalto* (London: Phaidon, 1993).
- <sup>42</sup> Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*.
- <sup>43</sup> Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, pp.36-39. Porphyrios notes that in his book there is 'much new historiographic material concerning Alvar Aalto and the context surrounding his architectural production'; *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, p.viii.
- <sup>44</sup> Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, pp.62-63.
- <sup>45</sup> Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, p.55.
- <sup>46</sup> Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, n.88, p.223.
- <sup>47</sup> Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, p.vii.
- <sup>48</sup> See also Malcolm Quantrill, *Finnish Architecture and the Modernist Tradition* (London: E. & F.N. Spon, 1995). For reflections on urbanism (including the idea of the 'urban fragment') see Malcolm Quantrill, *The Environmental Memory: Man and Architecture in the Landscape of Ideas* (New York: Schocken Books 1987); also Malcolm Quantrill, *Plain Modern: the architecture of Brian Mackay-Lyons*, with contributions by Glenn Murcutt and Kenneth Frampton; and project texts by Brian MacKay-Lyons (New York: Princeton Architectural Press; Chicago: Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, 2005).
- <sup>49</sup> Quantrill, *Alvar Aalto: a critical study*.

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- <sup>50</sup> 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, *Alvar Aalto: a critical study*, pp.273-74.
- <sup>51</sup> Quantrill, *Alvar Aalto: a critical study*, p.7.
- <sup>52</sup> Quantrill, *Alvar Aalto: a critical study*, p.7.
- <sup>53</sup> Michael Trencher, *The Alvar Aalto Guide* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), pp.23-35.
- <sup>54</sup> Trencher, *The Alvar Aalto Guide*, p.23.
- <sup>55</sup> Trencher, *The Alvar Aalto Guide*, p.21.
- <sup>56</sup> Weston, *Alvar Aalto*. Weston's nine unnumbered chapter headings comprise: Aalto and Finland; Classical Foundations; Functionalism and Beyond; Dwelling in the Modern World; Nature and Culture; Sense of Place; Individual, Institution, City; The Town Centre and the Academic Campus; Places of Assembly.
- <sup>57</sup> Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, p.104.
- <sup>58</sup> Ted Hughes, 'Creation; Four Ages; Flood; Lycaon', in *Tales from Ovid: Twenty-four passages from the Metamorphoses*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), p.3.
- <sup>59</sup> Kate Nesbitt, 'Introduction', in Kate Nesbitt, editor, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), pp.28-40.
- <sup>60</sup> Caroline Constant, 'From the Virgilian dream to Chandigarh', *Architectural Review* (special Le Corbusier edition), Jan. 1987, pp.66-72.
- <sup>61</sup> Constant, 'From the Virgilian dream to Chandigarh', p.66.
- <sup>62</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'The Arts', in Fleig, *Alvar Aalto: Volume II*, p.12.
- <sup>63</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', p.290.
- <sup>64</sup> *Alvar Aalto: between humanism and materialism*, edited by Peter Reed (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998).
- <sup>65</sup> Jussi Jäppinen and Risto Oikarinen, *Gardens of Fiesole: life-story of Alvar Aalto*, 2 vols, English text by Arja Kantele (Jyväskylä, Finland: Kopijyvä, 1998-2001).
- <sup>66</sup> William J. R. Curtis, 'Alvar Aalto, Paysages Mythiques' / 'Mythic Landscapes', *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, Feb. 1998, pp.4-19.
- <sup>67</sup> Kenneth Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto' (1998), in Kenneth Frampton, *Labour Work and Architecture: Collected Essays on Architecture and Design* (London: Phaidon, 2002), pp.234-53.
- <sup>68</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image'.
- <sup>69</sup> Marc Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', in Reed, *Alvar Aalto: between humanism and materialism*.
- <sup>70</sup> Marc Treib, 'Alvar Aalto at 100', *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 57, No.1, March 1998, pp.59-67.
- <sup>71</sup> Treib, 'Alvar Aalto at 100', p.66.
- <sup>72</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'The Hilltop Town' (1924), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.49. Aalto refers in this essay to the Mantegna frescoes in the Ovetari Chapel, Santa Maria del Eremitane, Padua. Art historian James Beck describes how the chapel was severely damaged by an Allied bomb in 1944. Beck includes an image of Mantegna's *Execution of St James* (c.1455-57); he notes the dramatic painting's most striking feature: 'the vast landscape composed of a distant, constantly rising hill on the left, which is covered with ancient buildings, contrasted on the right by a fragment of an elegant classical structure much in ruin.' See James Beck, *Italian Renaissance Painting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), pp.226-28. This Mantegna painting is not noted in the Aalto literature; yet it is clearly the painting seen by Aalto in the 1920s. Aalto commented after the war that 'The news of the destruction of Mantegna's little chapel in the Chiesa degli Eremitani caused me personal pain.' Alvar Aalto, 'The Trout and the Stream' (1947), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto*

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in his own words, p.107. The painting contained elements of considerable significance for Aalto and his architectural thinking: hills, terraces, ruins, classical fragments, the human presence.

<sup>73</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', p.291.

<sup>74</sup> William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, second edition (Oxford: Phaidon, 1987/1982), Chapter 22 'Alvar Aalto and the Scandinavian Tradition'; Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a critical history*, revised edition (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), Chapter 22 'Alvar Aalto and the Nordic Tradition: National Romanticism and the Doricist sensibility 1895-1957'.

<sup>75</sup> Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, p.302.

<sup>76</sup> Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a critical history*, p.198.

<sup>77</sup> Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a critical history*, p.202.

<sup>78</sup> Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a critical history*, p.201.

<sup>79</sup> Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a critical history*, p.202.

<sup>80</sup> Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a critical history*, p.197.

<sup>81</sup> Kenneth Frampton, 'In Search of the Modern Landscape', in Stuart Wrede and William Howard Adams, editors, *Denatured Visions: Landscape and culture in the twentieth century* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1991).

<sup>82</sup> Frampton, 'In Search of the Modern Landscape', p.43.

<sup>83</sup> Kenneth Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance', in Hal Foster, editor, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture* (Port Townsend, Oregon: Bay Press, 1983).

<sup>84</sup> Frampton, 'In Search of the Modern Landscape', p.61.

<sup>85</sup> Frampton, 'Legacy of Alvar Aalto', p.253.

<sup>86</sup> Frampton, 'Legacy of Alvar Aalto', p.238. Swiss-Italian architect Mario Botta's strategy of 'building the site' is discussed in Francesco Dal Co, *Mario Botta: Architecture 1960-85* (Milan: Electa, 1985), p.17.

<sup>87</sup> Frampton, 'Legacy of Alvar Aalto', p.238.

<sup>88</sup> Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, p.301.

<sup>89</sup> Jørn Utzon, 'Platforms and Plateaus: Ideas of a Danish Architect', *Zodiac* 10, 1965. Utzon reflects on his experience of Monte Alban, Mexico: 'The human regulation or adaptation of the site has resulted in something even stronger than nature and has given it spiritual content.'

<sup>90</sup> Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', p.12.

<sup>91</sup> Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', p.12.

<sup>92</sup> Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', p.12.

<sup>93</sup> Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', p.12.

<sup>94</sup> R. D. Martienssen, *The Idea of Space in Greek Architecture* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1958), p.3.

<sup>95</sup> Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', p.18.

<sup>96</sup> Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', p.18.

<sup>97</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', p.290.

<sup>98</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', p.290.

<sup>99</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', p.291.

<sup>100</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', pp.291-92.

<sup>101</sup> Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

<sup>102</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', pp.297-98.

<sup>103</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', p.298.

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- <sup>104</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', p.298.
- <sup>105</sup> See for example Marc Treib, 'Sources of Significance: The Garden in our Time', in Wrede and Adams, *Denatured Visions*; also Marc Treib, editor, *Modern Landscape Architecture: A critical review* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1993).
- <sup>106</sup> Marc Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', in Reed, *Alvar Aalto: between humanism and materialism*.
- <sup>107</sup> Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', p.48.
- <sup>108</sup> Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', p.54.
- <sup>109</sup> Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', p.48.
- <sup>110</sup> Treib's essay contains four subheadings: 'Constructed Landscape'; 'Tuscany in Central Finland'; 'The Landscape Within'; and 'The Sublime Forest'.
- <sup>111</sup> Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', p.55.
- <sup>112</sup> Website for Alvar Aalto Foundation, Museum and Academy may be found at [www.alvaraalto.fi/](http://www.alvaraalto.fi/)
- <sup>113</sup> The Alvar Aalto Foundation published a series of pamphlet monographs on Aalto buildings, e.g., *Alvar Aalto's Own House and Studio, Helsinki*, edited by Päivi Lukkarinen, Architecture by Alvar Aalto no.10 (Jyväskylä and Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation, 1999).
- <sup>114</sup> The writer attended an Alvar Aalto Academy international conference in August 2008; proceedings published as *Building Designing Thinking: 3<sup>rd</sup> International Alvar Aalto Meeting on Modern Architecture*, August 30-31, 2008, Jyväskylä, Finland, edited by Kari Jormakka and Esa Laaksonen (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Academy/Alvar Aalto Foundation, 2008). The Alvar Aalto Academy also publishes, in English, the architectural magazine *ptah*.
- <sup>115</sup> Sirkkaliisa Jetsonen, *Alvar Aalto Apartments* (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2004); Jari Jetsonen, *Alvar Aalto Houses* (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2005); Jari and Sirkkaliisa Jetsonen, *Finnish Summer Houses* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008).
- <sup>116</sup> Aila Kolehmainen and Esa Laaksonen, editors, *Drawn in Sand: Unrealised visions by Alvar Aalto* (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Museum, 2002).
- <sup>117</sup> *Alvar Aalto, Ex Intimo: Alvar Aalto through the eyes of family, friends & colleagues*, edited by Louna Lahti (Helsinki: Building Information Ltd, 2001).
- <sup>118</sup> *Alvar Aalto Through the Eyes of Shigeru Ban*, edited by Juhani Pallasmaa and Tomoko Sato (London: Black Dog, 2007).
- <sup>119</sup> Sarah Menin and Flora Samuel, *Nature and Space: Aalto and Le Corbusier* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).
- <sup>120</sup> Sarah Menin, 'Fragments from the forest: Aalto's requisitioning of forest place and manner', *Journal of Architecture*, Vol. 6: no. 3: Autumn 2001, pp.279-305; Sarah Menin, 'Retreating to Dwell', in Sarah Menin, editor, *Constructing Place: Mind and Matter* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Flora Samuel and Sarah Menin, 'The modern-day primitive hut? "Self-building" with Jung, Aalto and Le Corbusier', in Jo Odgers, Flora Samuel and Adam Sharr, editors, *Primitive: Original matters in architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).
- <sup>121</sup> Wilfried Wang, 'The contemporary relevance of the work of Alvar Aalto', *ptah*, 1999, n.1-2, p.36.
- <sup>122</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990 /1974); Wilson, *The Domestication of the Human Species*.
- <sup>123</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Hapticity and Time: Notes on Fragile Architecture' (2001), in Juhani Pallasmaa, *Encounters: Architectural Essays*, edited by Peter MacKeith (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2005), p.330.
- <sup>124</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Hapticity and Time', p.330.
- <sup>125</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', p.297.
- <sup>126</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', p.298.

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<sup>127</sup> Sarah Menin and Flora Samuel, *Nature and Space: Aalto and Le Corbusier* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>128</sup> Samuel and Menin, 'The modern-day primitive hut?'

<sup>129</sup> Samuel and Menin, 'The modern-day primitive hut?', p.208.

<sup>130</sup> Samuel and Menin, 'The modern-day primitive hut?', pp.207-08.

<sup>131</sup> Samuel and Menin, 'The modern-day primitive hut?', p.216.

<sup>132</sup> Samuel and Menin, 'The modern-day primitive hut?', p.209.

<sup>133</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'In Memoriam, E. G. Asplund' (1940), in Ruusuvuori and Pallasmaa, *Alvar Aalto 1898-1976*, p.49.

<sup>134</sup> Samuel and Menin, 'The modern-day primitive hut?', p.213.

<sup>135</sup> Samuel and Menin, 'The modern-day primitive hut?', p.213.

<sup>136</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Experimental House at Muuratsalo' (1953), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.234.

## **Chapter 4 Architecture's understanding of landscape**

### **Architecture's understanding of landscape, in terms of nature, landscape and site**

#### **4.0 Chapter 4 Introduction**

Historians of Modernist architecture before 1975 were generally unaccustomed to considering landscape or the architectural site within their discourses. A notable exception was Vincent Scully, who developed an understanding of the Classical Greek temple in its landscape setting,<sup>1</sup> and also perceived landscape as influencing Alvar Aalto's architectural site strategies.<sup>2</sup>

In Chapter 3 it was seen how, at least in Aalto studies, historians have recently adopted landscape as a valuable critical tool for disclosing and unpacking previously obscure aspects of an architect's work. Landscape was instrumental in the evolution of viewpoints on architectural engagement with nature, in centenary reassessments of Aalto's legacy. In this chapter, selected literature on landscape, from Modernist and recent architectural history, is reviewed to establish key issues of architectural attitudes to, and knowledge of, landscape, as the context for closer consideration of landscape themes in Aalto's house architecture.

After World War II, Aalto reacted against International Modernism's general tendency to geometric abstraction, its industrialized methods of production, its stylistic overtones of Fascism, and its rejection of nature, developing a framework of 'humanism' within which to produce his architecture.<sup>3</sup> Yet while the idea of humanism illuminates historical perspectives on Aalto, ideas associated with nature and landscape (as noted in Chapter 3) have yielded substantial insights in the literature over a sustained period of time, and seem to be essential underpinnings for a contemporary understanding of Aalto's achievement.

At a general level, Adrian Forty shows how, over time, architectural theory and practice have been couched 'with'—and occasionally 'against'—historically

evolving concepts of nature.<sup>4</sup> More particularly, Richard Weston sees the human and the natural ultimately brought into harmony in Aalto's architecture:

It was his rare ability to create poetic places out of the everyday, which was born out of an intense concern for the needs of 'the little man' and love of his native landscape, that marks him out as one of the twentieth century's great architects.<sup>5</sup>

Chapter 4 is set out in three parts: the theme of nature is expanded into three nested categories, *nature*, *landscape*, and *site*, representing related bodies of architectural knowledge. In terms of usage, *nature* is a general philosophical category, denoting earthly forces, living things, or the inner essence of things or people; *landscape* is perception and knowledge of defined terrain; and *site* implies a specific locus of architectural intention and action. The three sections present selected views of architecture's understanding of landscape, on the basis of which the Muuratsalo house may be seen and considered through a historical framing of architecture's relation to the natural world.

Architectural knowledge may be seen as embracing or containing elements of landscape knowledge; Aalto's ideas about landscape, set out in words and buildings, are presented as examples of this landscape knowledge. This chapter is not an attempt to valorize landscape: landscape is neither the 'hero' of a historical narrative, nor is landscape necessarily 'beautiful'—although (as considered in Chapters 7 and 8) it may relate to architectural aesthetics. Concepts of nature, landscape and site enable related readings of Aalto: the theme of nature is frequently found in Aalto commentary; Chapter 3 showed how landscape has recently provided opportunities for new insights into Aalto's work; and Aalto showed particular interest in the architectural site, which has also emerged recently as a locus of historical interest. The three terms nature, landscape, and site also appear at different points in Aalto's own writings, presenting a chance to consider how Aalto saw landscape as part of architecture, and architecture as part of the larger world of experience, ideas, and culture; landscape appears to extend the scope of architectural knowledge, and to enrich its discourse.

## **4.1 Nature**

### **4.1.1 Key sources, key events**

Kate Nesbitt, in her 1996 anthology *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, locates nature, landscape and site amongst the themes of her collection of postmodern essays.<sup>6</sup> While the present study is not overtly postmodern, it refers largely to literature published since the mid-1970s, when events significant to the present study coincided: Jay Appleton's book *The Experience of Landscape* was published in 1975;<sup>7</sup> Alvar Aalto died in 1976; and Christian Norberg-Schulz's influential essay on architectural phenomenology, 'The Phenomenon of Place', was published in 1976.<sup>8</sup> Arguments within Nesbitt's theme of 'place' inform parts of this work,<sup>9</sup> although place is not a central concern of the present study; notably, the term place, and ideas of place, are rarely used in Aalto literature.<sup>10</sup>

### **4.1.2 Nesbitt: the human relationship with nature: representation and symbolization**

Nesbitt contends that architectural theory 'addresses the relationship between architecture and nature, as developed through construction of the site.' She adds that '[h]istorically, attitudes have fluctuated from sympathy, harmony, and integration with nature, to hostility and exploitation', and goes on to ask, 'What should the landscape, broadly defined to include urban, suburban, and rural situations, represent of the human place in nature?'<sup>11</sup> Nesbitt sees landscape as 'representing' attitudes to nature; she describes modernism's theoretical rupture with nature in similar terms to Forty, while at the same time maintaining that architecture's task is still to symbolize the human relationship with the natural world:

In the pre-industrial past, the production of meaning in architecture relied upon structured references to and associations with nature. Modern architecture embraced the machine analogy instead of the organic analogy. Although machines are often designed on the basis of natural systems, their use as a formal model prevented architecture from referring directly to nature. This is problematic

because despite technological advances, symbolizing man's position within the natural world remains one of architecture's roles.<sup>12</sup>

Thus architecture is seen as having a role, a task, perhaps an obligation at a greater scale, 'despite technological advances', to represent human connection with the natural world. Nesbitt's anthology contains various references to nature and associated topics: place, site, landscape, phenomenology. Nesbitt's discourse acknowledges not only that architecture has a historically formative dialogue with nature, but also that representing humankind's relationship to nature is an enduring imperative for architectural history, theory and practice.

#### **4.1.3 Keywords and New Keywords: nature and culture**

The notion of 'nature' has been formative for architectural theory, often in association with ideas of 'culture'.<sup>13</sup> Philosopher Raymond Williams in *Keywords* (1976) acknowledges the difficulty of the two terms: he describes nature as 'perhaps the most complex word in the language', while citing culture as 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language'.<sup>14</sup> According to *New Keywords* (a 2005 revision of Williams' lexicon), a degree of doubt and ambiguity has more recently become associated with usages of nature:

there has been more self-consciousness and, in some cases, reticence about the terms 'nature' or 'natural.' Indeed, it may not be too contradictory to claim that, in this respect, 'nature' itself has been denaturalised.<sup>15</sup>

Yet nature seems to continue to exert considerable cultural force: the 'continuing power of the idea of nature . . . haunts and animates the contemporary Western world in countless ways.'<sup>16</sup> Nature is often complemented in the Aalto literature by the notion of culture; Weston uses the duality to reflect that the Muuratsalo house 'presents us with an essentially *civilized* relationship with nature . . . a cultured outpost where architecture and nature can be experienced as one, and each on their own terms.'<sup>17</sup>

Usages and values of the term culture—and indeed the idea of a nature/culture duality—have recently become more hesitant, less clear;<sup>18</sup> in *New Keywords* a theoretical ‘porosity’ is observed between nature and culture: ‘Distinctions between nature and culture now also have a weaker force as a result of the increasing sense that the relations between these are best thought of as porous and permeable.’<sup>19</sup> This theoretical development of the terms culture and nature emphasizes that their usages are complex, contestable, and evolving.

#### **4.1.4 Forty: historical and theoretical usage of Nature**

Nature is discussed as a category of architectural thought by Adrian Forty in *Words and Buildings* (2000), his study of language and modern architecture. Forty’s ‘historical and critical dictionary’ of Modernist criticism is modelled in part on Williams’ *Keywords*.<sup>20</sup>

In the chapter ‘Nature’ Forty reviews the evolution of historical and theoretical ideas connecting architecture and nature, from Leon Battista Alberti to Richard Rogers.<sup>21</sup> Forty recognizes and sketches a complex historiography, whereby the idea of nature evolves, being valorized or rejected, even ignored, at different times in architectural history. Forty’s attention to delineating the stages of this development indicates both the difficulty of the idea of nature, and the enduring presence of nature at the centre of architectural history and theory.

Employing nature as a principal category for organizing thought about architecture, Forty discusses ten consecutive stages of understanding and usage of the term nature in architectural theory:

1. Nature as the source of beauty in architecture
2. The origin of architecture
3. The valorization of architecture: ‘mimesis’, or the imitation of nature
4. Nature invoked to justify artistic license
5. As a political idea: nature as freedom, lack of constraint

6. 'Nature' as a construct of the viewer's perception
7. Art as a 'second nature'
8. Nature as the antidote to 'culture'
9. The rejection of nature
10. Environmentalism: nature as ecosystem, and the critique of capitalism.<sup>22</sup>

Of these ten, three usages seem particularly valuable in illuminating ideas of nature in Aalto's architecture and ideas: (1) nature as the source of beauty in architecture; (7) art as a 'second nature'; and (9) the rejection of nature.

#### **4.1.4.1 Nature (i): nature as the source of beauty in architecture**

Forty distinguishes between writers who say architecture is *like* nature, and those who say architecture *is* nature, a natural product like speech.<sup>23</sup> Alberti used a neo-Platonist argument that art is *like* nature—and follows nature's principles of numerical relations or geometry—in forming his theory of *concinntas*, seeing beauty as a result of harmonious part-to-whole relationships in art, as in nature; yet, while Alberti upheld *concinntas* as an absolute rule of 'Nature', he also argued for human skill and artifice, rather than nature, as the source of beauty, thus making art *different from* nature.<sup>24</sup> This viewpoint was derived by Alberti from Aristotle's proposal that 'generally art completes what nature cannot bring to a finish, and partly imitates her.'<sup>25</sup> This paradox of the art-nature relationship is a context for Aalto's expressed belief that the beauty of architecture lay in its potential to be *like* nature; Aalto wrote, 'the profoundest property of architecture is a variety and growth reminiscent of natural organic growth. I should like to say that in the end this is the only real style in architecture.'<sup>26</sup> Architecture's capacity to be designed following nature's principles may thus be seen as a basis for Aalto's architectural tactics and aesthetics

#### **4.1.4.2 Nature (ii): art as a second nature**

According to Forty, the idea of art as a ‘second nature’ has its basis in the writings of German philosopher, naturalist and poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1842). Goethe’s ideas were central to Aalto’s early learning; Göran Schildt points out, in his essay ‘Between Darwin and Goethe’, that ‘Goethe was almost a contemporary’ for Aalto’s grandfather (a teacher at the forestry institute at Evo in regional Finland): ‘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.’<sup>27</sup> 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.’<sup>28</sup> Menin and Samuel also note that Aalto was influenced by his mother’s interest in Goethe (along with Henrik Ibsen, Jules Verne, and Anatole France).<sup>29</sup>

Forty claims that Goethe invented the idea of ‘art as a second nature’, an idea which meant that art, or architecture as art, could represent nature as a living whole, with the same vital force as nature, and that both the perception and the creation of art were like processes of nature; for Forty, ‘the quality of works of art was that they were the outcome of a living spirit, and the seeing of them engaged the active perception of a living subject.’<sup>30</sup>

#### **4.1.4.3 Nature (iii): rejection of nature**

According to Forty, by the end of the nineteenth century European thought and culture had lost interest in nature, such that, ‘particularly for those architects who espoused the “modern”, nature had nothing to offer.’<sup>31</sup> Forty proposes that European Modernism was prompted ‘to dispense altogether with the natural model of architecture’ on account of theorist Gottfried Semper’s (1803-1879) ideas on the artificiality of architecture:<sup>32</sup> ‘Semper was emphatic that the origins of architecture did not lie in nature. [It was] Semper who cut architecture’s ties

with nature.’<sup>33</sup> Thus architecture could disconnect itself from nature, either turning to technology—in Forty’s view, ‘the single most important idea to replace “nature” in the twentieth century’<sup>34</sup>—or else becoming interested in itself, as expressed in Louis Kahn’s attitude: ‘What man makes, nature cannot make. Nature does not build a house, nature does not make a locomotive, nature does not make a playground. They grow out of a desire to express.’<sup>35</sup>

Thus Modernist architecture’s own history and materials seemed to supply sufficient self-definition that it could ignore nature, or at least see itself as separate from nature. Aalto, although identified with International Modernism by Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson in 1932,<sup>36</sup> rejected Functionalism in the 1930s as a ‘formal front that stands in opposition to a rational view of life and art’.<sup>37</sup> Schildt points out that Aalto could unite apparently irreconcilable opposites, such as technology and nature: ‘In order to understand him one should notice how his conception of the human nevertheless has a root in inhuman technics and in extra-human nature.’<sup>38</sup> This fusion of opposing technical, human, and natural elements was one of Aalto’s strengths, and arguably a point of his difference from International Modernism and its rejection of nature.

#### **4.1.5 Aalto: philosophy and nature**

For Aalto, nature—in the sense of the order and force within biological life—was a philosophical preoccupation. Schildt reflects on the importance and complexity, even the political symbolism, of nature in Aalto’s philosophy:

The central terms [of Aalto’s philosophy] were *nature*, *man*, and *technology*. The first of these is also the vaguest: it has possessed extremely varied meanings at different times and been used in different ways by different people. To Aalto, it primarily meant the complicated system of checks and balances that supports biological life on earth—a system in which all the components affect each other, man being but one component . . . ‘Nature is the symbol of freedom,’ Aalto said . . . He meant that the increased freedom for

which man strives can be achieved only within nature's biological system.<sup>39</sup>

Schildt regards nature as a term at once vague yet essential for Aalto's philosophy, where the natural system symbolizes and supports human freedom, providing a framing principle within which people might live.

Supporting this sense of nature as a philosophical ideal, architect Nils Erik Wickberg, an Aalto ex-employee, testifies to Aalto's achievement of a philosophically informed architecture that held nature in the highest esteem:

Though Aalto, more than his great contemporaries—with the possible exception of Frank Lloyd Wright—stresses the organic, closeness to nature, he is no romantic or dreamer. He integrates his building with the landscape exceptionally sensitively, making skilful use of the total effect of vegetation and architecture. [Aalto] held nature to be the great pattern of organic creation.<sup>40</sup>

#### **4.1.6 Aalto, nature, and master architects**

Aalto was profoundly concerned with nature, which he celebrated in his eulogy for his friend and one-time employer, Swedish architect Erik Gunnar Asplund (1885-1940):

We sat in [the Skandia Cinema's] indigo coloured theatre a few days before it was completed. 'While I was building this I thought of autumn evenings and yellow leaves,' said Asplund . . . I had the impression that this was an architecture where ordinary systems hadn't served as the parameters. Here the point of departure was man, with all the innumerable nuances of his emotional life and nature. This contact with nature, man included, was clearly discernible in all of Asplund's projects . . . one will always find this underlying direct contact with nature.<sup>41</sup>

Weston reflects that Aalto might well have been describing his own approach, as the desire for ‘direct contact with nature’ distinguishes his work after the 1930s.<sup>42</sup> However, ‘the point of departure’ was not directly nature, but either the visitor to Asplund’s fantastically decorated Skandia Cinema, Stockholm (1922-23) (Fig.1), or the architecture itself, whose ‘sky ceiling’—recalling Asplund’s experiences of Mediterranean skies and Greek theatres—mediated experience of nature.<sup>43</sup> As Demetri Porphyrios has argued—and as Aalto himself makes clear in his eulogy—Aalto does not imitate or make reference directly to natural elements, but uses architecture as precedent: he ‘refers to nature by already codified architectural signs.’<sup>44</sup>



**Figure 1** Erik Gunnar Asplund. Skandia Cinema, Stockholm; ceiling now altered.  
Claes Caldenby and Olof Hultin, *Asplund* (New York, Rizzoli, 1985).

Schildt notes Aalto’s respect for Frank Lloyd Wright; Aalto seems to have drawn compositional influences (and competitive inspiration) for the Villa Mairea from images of Wright’s contemporaneous ‘Fallingwater’ house (1934-37), published while he was designing the Villa Mairea in 1937.<sup>45</sup> Ideals involving nature also formed part of the aesthetic framework of Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier: Curtis describes Mies in the 1930s ‘making appeals to a lofty ideal of “nature”’,<sup>46</sup> his 1930s courtyard houses, in dramatic natural settings in Europe and America, linked inside and outside spaces via patios, embodying an ideal ‘to bring Nature,

man and architecture together in a higher Unity.<sup>47</sup> Le Corbusier's 1920s ideal of the new rational house was marginally engaged with nature and its site: in *Vers une Architecture* (1923) he described the new dwelling as a 'machine for living in',<sup>48</sup> whose ideal inhabitant would look out 'past pure white walls to the "essential joys" of light, space and greenery.'<sup>49</sup> Nature in this ideal might be a setting of planar greenery, or a vista seen through a strip window in a white building.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4.1.7 Against the Modernist *tabula rasa*: context and nature

Modernist architecture distanced itself from the natural world, through polemic which required, in Nesbitt's terms, 'an aesthetic *tabula rasa* (of abstraction)', whereby scientific principles overrode earlier ideas of the sublime or the beautiful: 'Positivist emphasis on rationality and function marginalized beauty and the sublime as subjective architectural issues.'<sup>51</sup> This *tabula rasa* was radical and rational, an urban clean slate, achieved, argues Porphyrrios, by abstract strategies such as 'zoning, the city in the park, the free-standing building, the disappearance of the street, and the square, the destruction of the urban block.'<sup>52</sup>

Porphyrrios argues that through this rationalist *tabula rasa*, Modern architecture had created a 'double objectivism', aimed at both 'the mathematical abstraction of the city and . . . the extinction of symbolic meaning.'<sup>53</sup> By World War II Aalto had, in Frampton's terms, 'categorically rejected the technocratic rationalism of the early modern movement as unacceptably reductive.'<sup>54</sup> Aalto seems to have embraced context, urban or non-urban: Curtis observes that 'Aalto's concern for buildings as intermediaries between human life and the natural landscape was explored continuously in the post-war years.'<sup>55</sup> Porphyrrios maintains that Aalto was significant in the 1950s and 1960s precisely because his strategies undermined Modernism's 'double objectivism' of mathematical abstraction and erasure of symbolism.<sup>56</sup> Aalto's ability to perceive and work with both urban and natural contexts distinguishes his alternative to rationalist Modernism's *tabula rasa*, and underpins his work of the 1950s, including the Muuratsalo house.

#### 4.1.8 Aalto's humanism

Peter Reed, in his 1998 essay 'Alvar Aalto and the New Humanism of the Postwar Era' described how, after the 'extraordinary inhumanity' of World War II, Aalto's designs, embodying 'a new humanism', posed an alternative to International functionalism.<sup>57</sup> Reed saw Aalto's humanist architecture as having a goal of harmony, associated with deep feelings and emotions, and predicated on atmosphere, instinct and the subconscious.<sup>58</sup> Aalto's 'humanism' appears to have been compounded from his own experiences, classical antiquity, social ideals, and his sense of nature. Aalto said in 1955, presenting his own work to architects in Vienna, 'What I can provide is a mere hint of humanism': he showed a slide of a Finnish scene of lakes and forests, 'a characteristic landscape in my country', a natural setting that underpinned his intuitions and his humanism.<sup>59</sup> Reed's overview is that Aalto's life-affirming approach included a 'profound and acute understanding of the individual site and circumstance', forming an original architecture that appealed with its 'sensory, visceral and ultimately humane qualities.'<sup>60</sup>

Similarly, Winfried Nerdinger in 1999 saw Aalto's 'human' attitude to architecture as counter to the 'misanthropic' attitudes of both rational Functionalism and the later Deconstructivism: 'Aalto attempted to humanize architecture, to take into account all human activities and functions during the design process, including emotional, historical, and social ones.'<sup>61</sup> Aalto's method, said Nerdinger, was to 'cultivate the spaces' of his buildings in 6B pencil details: this process Aalto understood as 'protecting the people who would spend their time in them. The paradoxical concept of protecting people from architecture is the true legacy of Aalto's humane architecture, his human Modernism.'<sup>62</sup> In this unique view, Aalto's architecture both merges with a (vaguely defined) nature, and ensures a general 'protection from architecture' for the users of his buildings. More recently, in *Alvar Aalto* (2005), a review of Aalto's legacy, Nicholas Ray identified nature and 'the organic' amongst a number of general Aalto themes (function, technology, style, and theoretical underpinnings). Ray assesses Aalto's ambitions for human harmony and wellbeing, positioning nature against

technology: ‘Ultimately the criterion is human rather than ecological—people will be happier if their environment is designed in harmony with nature.’<sup>63</sup> Estimating Aalto’s relevance for the twenty-first century, Ray argues that the ‘organic’ Aalto ‘was not concerned with style, but with human values that transcended styles.’<sup>64</sup> Ray quotes Bruno Zevi (arguing against Geoffrey Scott’s *The Architecture of Humanism*) on the relation between organic concepts and humanism, which appears to be potentially another abstract concept: ‘We can only call architecture organic when it aims at being human before it is humanist.’<sup>65</sup>

Aalto’s humanism, then, appears to be differently defined by different authors: it is apparently rational, yet at times mysterious and instinctual; it has an active, yet vulnerable, humankind at its centre; nature merges with human presence, or else provides a platform for human presence. Aalto profoundly desired, concludes Reed, ‘to create an ethical, life-affirming culture.’<sup>66</sup> Humanism in the Aalto literature is a loosely defined, somewhat homespun, term for categorizing Aalto’s work and attitudes, connected indirectly with nature, landscape and the architectural site.

#### **4.1.9 Aalto and Le Corbusier: nature and space, self and refuge**

Sarah Menin and Flora Samuel compared the personalities and architecture of Alvar Aalto and Le Corbusier, in 2003, in *Nature and Space: Aalto and Le Corbusier* (as discussed briefly in Chapter 3). Menin and Samuel introduce both architects as having lifelong quests for ‘harmony’, and outline the role of childhood emotional traumas and experiences of nature in the respective creative, intellectual and spiritual directions of the two master architects.<sup>67</sup> They describe how Le Corbusier and Aalto ‘sought to restore mankind to the “conditions of nature”, growing their own definitions of nature and applying them to their work, and to some extent to themselves.’<sup>68</sup>

Early experience of nature emerges as a pivotal theme in Le Corbusier’s and Aalto’s lives (along with the theme of the female or mother figure): ‘knowledge

of the processes of nature was to inform everything that they did in later life.<sup>69</sup> Menin and Samuel studied various buildings, including the mid-life retreats built by Le Corbusier and Aalto in elemental, natural locations: ‘At Cap Martin and Muuratsalo, the two men demonstrate their common, deeply-held belief in the need to relate dwelling and nature . . . It was, in essence, the search for metaphysical sustenance for everyday life.’<sup>70</sup> Aalto’s Muuratsalo house and Le Corbusier’s little Cabanon, Cap Martin (1951-52) acted as spiritual retreats or harbours for their creators; nature became the key source of metaphysical sustenance for both men.

Menin and Samuel construct meaning and significance in the architecture through psychological means:

The 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 [Aalto’s] conscious self.<sup>71</sup>

Menin and Samuel identify a sense of harmony with nature as necessary to the development and repair of the (psychologically defined) self, and argue that the way in which the two architects made their retreats ‘is inextricably linked with how they construct “nature” in their own minds and hearts.’<sup>72</sup>

Menin and Samuel use the ideas of psychiatrist D. W. Winnicott to relate nature and space to the psychologically defined, and often troubled, self: Le Corbusier and Aalto were simultaneously ‘working and reworking their inner selves. The two small buildings act, in Winnicott’s terms, as holding environments, a place [*sic*] of individual protection and rebirth.’<sup>73</sup> This sense of psychological refuge adds to an understanding of Aalto; his mother died when he was eight, and he maintained a lifelong interest in psychology, and held psychologist Yrjö Hirn and his ideas in the highest respect (as noted in Chapter 3).<sup>74</sup>

Menin and Samuel interpret the term nature as seen by both Aalto and Le Corbusier as a kind of cosmic order, linking nature with love and death:

Broadly speaking, nature was, for the two men, the environment, the earth, sun, water and stars that make up the cosmos. In its ideal form it was also a system of order (flexible, in Aalto's mind) with divine origins. Nature also stood for a way of working, of creating things that would fit into that wider system. Nature could be accessed through love and the act of making love. Nature could also be terrible, unforgiving and indeed fatal. The cycles of life and death were in her thrall.<sup>75</sup>

Menin and Samuel also link nature with the sacred and the house, claiming that the intention behind Aalto's Church of the Three Crosses, Vuoksenniska (1955-58) and Le Corbusier's Notre Dame du Haut, Ronchamp (1955) was similar—to 'refresh and heal through a submersion in nature'.<sup>76</sup> They examine also how Aalto and Le Corbusier 'approached the design of dwellings, which were, for both men, inherently sacred spaces',<sup>77</sup> adding that 'the two men blurred the boundaries between nature and mystical experience'.<sup>78</sup> Menin and Samuel, like Pallasmaa (as discussed above) observe a 'mystical element' in Aalto especially, through which he perceived nature as a harmonizing force for everyday humankind, against the pressures of industrialization and mechanization.<sup>79</sup>

Menin and Samuel connect central Aalto themes at a personal level: 'Aalto's association of the search for harmony, organicism and love is important, drawing on his key influences of the wisdom of ancient Greece, and his experiences and knowledge of nature.'<sup>80</sup> This reading of Aalto's desire for harmony unifies emotion and knowledge, nature and culture. Menin and Samuel recognize, at Muuratsalo and elsewhere, the value of nature for Aalto (as for his friend Le Corbusier) as a vital inspirational source for creative work and personal fulfilment, as a knowledge base, and as an accommodation, a psychologically harmonious refuge from personal troubles and the industrialized world.

## **4.2 Landscape**

### **4.2.1 Scully: Modern architecture, landscape, humanism**

As noted previously, Vincent Scully was one of the few Modernist historians to write with a developed awareness of landscape. In a 1957 essay inspired by the work of Sigfried Giedion,<sup>81</sup> Scully invoked landscape as the defining contextual element of ‘a new humanism’ in an emerging ‘third phase’ of Modernist architecture.<sup>82</sup> The humanism of Alvar Aalto is not mentioned, although Scully cites the work of Mies van der Rohe (briefly and by contrast, for his immobile, classicizing cubic forms), Wright (as a historical reference point), and Le Corbusier (the principal agent of the third phase).<sup>83</sup> Scully saw in Wright’s Barnsdall House (1920) the compact massiveness of Mayan architecture;<sup>84</sup> Wright’s ‘Fallingwater’ house (1934-37) embodies a compelling river; while at Taliesin West (1938-40), Scully sees the flattened dancing floor of indigenous American culture:

the Mexican dance platform which has been compacted here . . . All the forms have reference to those of Nature, not of man. [The viewer] must move forward, beyond the places of men, until he comes at last to the pure emptiness of the desert and the beckoning hills beyond.’<sup>85</sup>

The Pueblo dancing platform in the arid American southwest stands as the last human place before nature takes command.<sup>86</sup> This idea, of the human dissolving into the landscape, is referred to later in Scully’s essay as ‘the lonely dream of Wright’; human self-knowledge and self-definition can be embodied within the ‘reality’ of natural and manmade landscape space.<sup>87</sup>

### **4.2.2 Frampton: organic and biological**

In his 1985 survey of twentieth-century architecture, Frampton supported and used Colin St John Wilson’s idea of the ‘Other Tradition’,<sup>88</sup> nominating Aalto amongst a select group of designers concerned that architecture should be ‘life-giving rather than repressive.’<sup>89</sup> Frampton positions landscape and programmatic

concerns against abstract geometry: ‘the latent tyranny of the normative orthogonal grid should always be fractured and inflected where the idiosyncrasies of the site or the programme demanded it.’<sup>90</sup> Frampton idealizes that mathematical abstraction might yield to Aalto’s site-aware planning strategies.

Frampton evolves the idea of ‘life-giving’ architecture into various organic/biological notions in his 1998 essay ‘The Legacy of Alvar Aalto’ (noted in Chapter 3), describing Aalto’s architecture as ‘intuitive’, ‘biomorphically inspired’, ‘bio-realist’, and ‘psycho-physiological’.<sup>91</sup> This critical strategy aligns with Aalto’s own use of terms such as ‘biodynamic functions’, ‘biological conditions for human life’, and ‘organic growing shapes’, generally countering ‘zero-degree functionalism’ with a biological realism.<sup>92</sup> For Frampton, the ‘bio-’ aspect of Aalto’s legacy is less to do with biological science than with an approach to manipulating the forms of architecture and landscape alike:

His intuitive, biomorphically inspired approach to environmental design caused him to place an enormous emphasis on the capacity of built form to modify equally both the landscape and the urban fabric.<sup>93</sup>

#### **4.2.3 Curtis: social landscapes**

As noted in Chapter 3, Curtis also took landscape as a key theme of his centenary evaluation of Aalto.<sup>94</sup> Observing the natural and artificial processes that shape landscapes, Curtis notes how Aalto evoked ‘parallels between the Finnish and Mediterranean landscapes, between the glacial ledges and scraped contours of the north, and the terraces, classical ruins and hill-towns of the south’.<sup>95</sup> Curtis regards Aalto’s Säynätsälo Town Hall (1945-52) as typifying ideal public meeting places, conceived as ‘social landscapes’, and ‘linked to the surrounding topography over steps, levels and contours’.<sup>96</sup> (Fig.2.)



**Figure 2** Säynätsalo Town Hall. Southern view, showing turfed stairs into courtyard.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

Curtis claims that a basic Aalto theme is ‘the origins of architecture in the forms of the land’.<sup>97</sup> Through this idea, Curtis reveals how architecture and land can be comprehended together, and shows how Aalto’s synthesis of building and landscape combines archaic (Classical Greek influence), utopian (social idealism of new towns in ancient forests), and visionary aspects, unifying landscape with social and cultural ideals to create ‘social landscapes’. This strategy seems to hold true in both Aalto’s public work and his house architecture.

#### **4.2.4 Treib: landscape and terrain**

In his Aalto centenary essay landscape historian Marc Treib observed strategies of site and built form in combination at the Säynätsalo Town Hall:

Aalto’s treatment of siting might also be termed abstract, since it draws from and ultimately reforms the conditions of the landscape.

The conception of the Säynätsalo Town Hall . . . began with a reference to classical Rome, but its architectural planning began with an astute reading of the terrain. By responding to the sloping hillside and utilizing the common practice of cut-and-fill, Aalto configured the building as a closed square that functions, in effect, as a retaining wall.<sup>98</sup>

Treib reveals both the classical ideals and the original terrain of the Säynätsalo project in outlining the technical substrate of engineering and construction knowledge, which literally ‘underlies’ Aalto’s rooms and levelled terrain (Fig.2).

This landscape-related insight refreshes both a reader’s view and architectural knowledge by re-seeing the building as part of a culturally altered topography; the iconic image of the Säynätsalo grassed stairs acquires a new architectural richness when understood as the bottom corner of a massive retaining wall—that is, as seen through the lens of landscape. Integrating technical and spatial insight, Treib uses landscape to extend and enrich the knowledge of architectural history.

#### **4.2.5 Berrizbeitia and Pollak: ‘reciprocity’ of architecture and landscape**

Architects Anita Berrizbeitia and Linda Pollak, in *Inside Outside* (1999), considered various relationships between contemporary architecture and landscape, as expressed in a number of ‘operations.’<sup>99</sup> One operation, *reciprocity*, is defined against hierarchy—‘an ordering principle through which architecture has historically subjugated landscape’ through conceptual and physical separation of building and landscape/site.<sup>100</sup> Challenging the dominance of architecture over landscape, Berrizbeitia and Pollak discuss selected contemporary projects where compositional reciprocity between architecture and landscape can affect the representational content, experience and significance of a project.<sup>101</sup> Australian historian Philip Goad understands reciprocity in a similarly landscape-related way, describing how some buildings ‘oscillate between topography and architecture, constantly raising the question of reciprocity between object and landscape.’<sup>102</sup>

Berrizbeitia and Pollak argue that the Rem Koolhaas/OMA design of the Villa Dall’Ava, Paris (1984-91) acts as an ‘alibi’, in that the project is framed ‘within conventional frameworks of architectural representation’, while the architect actually ‘pursues his interest in landscape, or what he calls “the unbuilt.”’<sup>103</sup> Within the house design (which, rather than taking a *tabula rasa* approach to site

planning, negotiates the topography of the sloping site) two elements illustrate strategies of ‘reciprocity between object and landscape’: the rooftop lap pool—a landscape element, within the building frame, relating to surrounding suburban pools, and aligned with the distant Eiffel Tower; and the living room, which makes a visual and spatial connection from its terrazzo floor through its open corner, out to the expanse of lawn and the corner of the garden. (Fig.3)



**Figure 3** Rem Koolhaas/OMA, Villa Dall’Ava, Paris. Living room and garden. Anita Berrizbeitia and Linda Pollak, *Inside Outside* (Gloucester, Mass.: Rockport, 1999).

In both elements, the ‘unbuilt’ landscape context is seen to extend and reinforce the significance of conventional program elements (a pool, a living room); the architecture serves as the ‘alibi’ for the designer’s interest in the ‘unbuilt’ landscape. Reviewing this leading contemporary project, Berrizbeitia and Pollak use landscape discourse to open up a wider discussion of representation and significance in house architecture; the complexity of a house design can be re-seen through the lens of landscape.

#### **4.2.6 Forest dreaming: Nordic building, Nordic landscapes**

Alvar Aalto is repeatedly presented as a seminal figure of twentieth-century architectural history, yet with an air of enigma and mystery. Curtis identified ‘a species of “myth”’ at the centre of Aalto’s architecture;<sup>104</sup> Pallasmaa held that

‘even after all the learned scrutiny, his masterpieces seem to maintain their secret and poetic freshness.’<sup>105</sup> Pallasmaa estimated that, of the works of the twentieth-century masters ‘Aalto’s remain unquestionably the most enigmatic’;<sup>106</sup> and Treib concluded that Aalto’s buildings ‘can never be completely fathomed’.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, the notion of myth seems to have been agreeable to Aalto, who wrote, in the essay ‘Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland’ (1925), ‘We northerners, especially the Finns, are very prone to “forest dreaming.”’<sup>108</sup> Treib, in a similar vein, describes Aalto’s body of work as ‘the making of a sublime forest’.<sup>109</sup>

There appears to be an amount of ‘forest dreaming’ in Norwegian historian Christian Norberg-Schulz’s attempts, in *Nightlands: Nordic Building* (1996), to confront unfathomable elements in the architecture of Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland; he reiterates ideas of myth and mystery, and draws on his own understanding of Nordic landform, climate, light and weather to link national architectural tendencies to environment conditions.<sup>110</sup> Norberg-Schulz employs an elusive discourse to consider phenomena such as space and light: ‘northern space is an unsurveyable manifold of places without fixed boundary or clear geometric form.’<sup>111</sup> Nordic light, a phenomenon like fog or twilight, ‘strips things of their true plasticity, subsuming everything within a comprehensive mood’.<sup>112</sup>

Norberg-Schulz also suggests that in the Finnish landscape of lakes and forests, there is a ‘dependence on nature, that is, on the mood of the environment’;<sup>113</sup> he refers to the mythic quality of Nordic geography:

In Finland, things are experienced as possibilities, and the goal is to reveal the hidden. All of these modes have their origin in the mythic geography of the North, which humans must understand through participation in order to obtain a meaningful interaction.<sup>114</sup>

Through ambiguity and indirect description, Norberg-Schulz articulates the mood of Northern space: ‘Nordic built work does not stand as an independent body but opens toward the environment, simultaneously absorbing it within.’<sup>115</sup>

Pallasmaa, aware of this kind of mystification of Aalto, maintains that Aalto's 'secrecy and thematic fusion . . . promises a challenge and inspiration to successive generations of designers and scholars way into the twenty-first century.'<sup>116</sup> He suggests that Aalto's buildings are non-Euclidean constructs, 'images of matter rather than visual constructions or the assemblages of a geometrician.'<sup>117</sup> Pallasmaa even speculates on the idea of a 'creature-image' in Aalto's mature period buildings, which, he proposes (with examples), 'are always some kind of architectural creature instead of abstract compositions.'<sup>118</sup>

Thus, in their own ways, through mythmaking and speculation, historians articulate the 'mystery' of Northern landscapes, and of Aalto, perhaps to explain something of the aesthetic appeal of his work, or even as a mode for identifying and discussing 'irrational' aspects of his architecture.

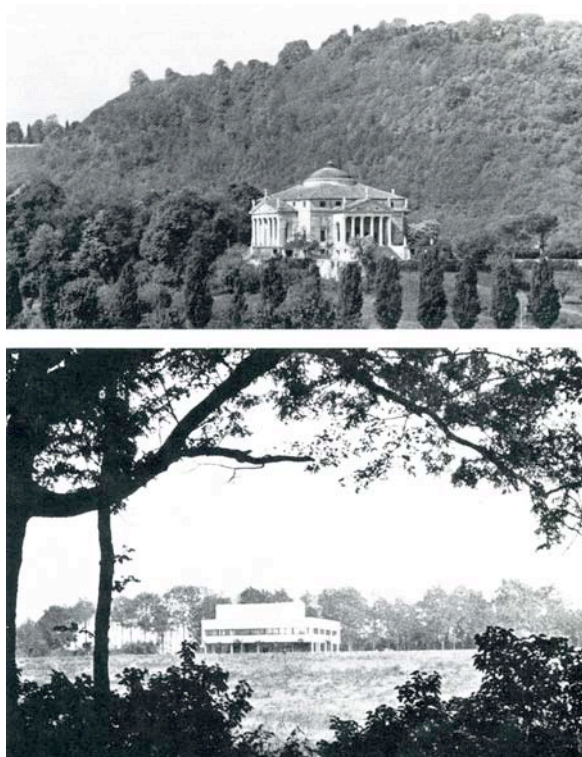
### **4.3 Site**

#### **4.3.0 Importance of the site: the specificity of a given place**

The idea of the architectural site, as it relates to architectural form and composition, may be considered from a range of historical perspectives. Architect Amos Rapoport expressed doubt about the presence of site in architectural discourse in 1969: 'I am not certain that any consistent theory of site as a form determinant has ever been proposed.'<sup>119</sup> And while landscape theorist Simon Swaffield wrote in 2002 of a theoretical understanding involving site (along with region and culture), 'in order that our actions respond sensitively to the richness and variety in the world',<sup>120</sup> in the field of architecture there are yet few books devoted to the topic of the architectural site. In two exceptions to this shortfall, Kevin Lynch and Gary Hack in *Site Planning* (1984) combined theoretical and technical aspects of conceptualizing, evaluating, organizing, and designing with, the architectural site;<sup>121</sup> while David Leatherbarrow in *Uncommon Ground* (2000) investigated site-related concepts ('construction and siting', 'context and construction', 'place and production', 'topography and technology') in considering the role of the site in architectural thinking and production.<sup>122</sup>

#### 4.3.1 Rowe: Le Corbusier, the Ideal Villa, La Tourette, and the site

In his 1947 essay ‘The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa’ Colin Rowe famously compared compositional proportions in Andrea Palladio’s Villa Foscari, the Malcontenta (c. 1550-60) and Le Corbusier’s Villa Stein at Garches (1927).<sup>123</sup> However, the essay opens with Rowe’s observations of site and landscape (including landscape-rich photographs)<sup>124</sup> of two other classic villas: Palladio’s Villa Capra-Rotonda, Vicenza (c.1550) and Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoye, Poissy (1929-31).<sup>125</sup>



**Figure 4** Ideal villas in ideal landscapes.  
Andrea Palladio, Villa Capra-Rotonda, Vicenza (above);  
Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy (below).  
Colin Rowe, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays*  
(Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976).

Rowe cites each architect’s ‘lyrical’ descriptions of the richness of his site and of his house with views in four directions over ideal landscapes (Fig.4). Palladio notes a site ‘as pleasant and delightful as can be found . . . it enjoys from every part most beautiful views’, reflecting—in terms not unlike Aalto’s longing for harmony, and his ideal of ‘an earthly paradise for people’<sup>126</sup>—that for his client

‘the harmonious ordering of his life and his estate will be an analogy of paradise.’<sup>127</sup> Le Corbusier describes his clients’ life on the Villa Savoye site: ‘The site: a vast lawn bulging out in a flattened dome . . . Their domestic life will be part of a Virgilian dream.’<sup>128</sup> Rowe compares the houses and their sites, observing ‘the poignancy of contrast between the disengaged cube and its setting in the *paysage agreste* [cultivated countryside], between geometrical volume and the appearance of unimpaired nature.’<sup>129</sup> Thereafter, Rowe shifts his attention to the significance of proportion, ratio and measure in the designs of the other villas; site and landscape were astutely acknowledged, though not developed, in the essay.

Landscape also features in Rowe’s 1961 critique of Le Corbusier’s Dominican Monastery of La Tourette, Eveux-sur-Arbresle, Lyon (1957-60), where he adopts the methodology of an empirical site visit by ‘the visitor’, possibly to convey the immediacy of experience of an encounter with building and site. In energized prose, Rowe describes the visitor’s sequential perceptions of site and building—of the church walls, the sloping site and the horizon—as perceiving ‘the intersection of an architectonic by a topographical experience.’<sup>130</sup> For Rowe the concept of ‘the dialectic of architecture and site’ as one ‘immediate causation of the building’ is a core idea of the essay<sup>131</sup>—and, in Rowe’s opinion, of La Tourette:

the building . . . is presented as though it were a thesis for discussion; and thus the site inevitably rises to function as counterproposition. There is a statement of presumed universals and a contrary statement of particulars.<sup>132</sup>

Rowe elevates the duality of building and site to the level of dialectic, a conversation about truth, opinion and contradictions, appropriate to a Dominican monastery: ‘An architectural dialectician, the greatest, was to service the requirements of the archsophisticates of dialectic; and there was, therefore, a quite specially appropriate dimension which inhered to the approach.’<sup>133</sup>

The building/site relationship at La Tourette is clearly a matter of historical and theoretical significance; and while Rowe, as in the earlier essay, moves on to

other topics, the building/site relationship remains central in the significance and renown of part of Le Corbusier's oeuvre.

#### **4.3.2 Frampton: cultivating the site**

Frampton considered the site as a broad and wide-ranging principle of architectural thought in his 1981 essay 'Towards a Critical Regionalism', contrasting a concept of 'placelessness' with the idea of a 'cultivation' of the site.<sup>134</sup> Frampton's essay is founded on concerns for culture and civilization, following the writings especially of Paul Ricoeur and Hannah Arendt;<sup>135</sup> he cites particularly Arendt's idea of the 'cantonal attributes' of the Greek *polis*—its democratic and urban structures idealized by Aalto—against the grave phenomena of 'urban placelessness'<sup>136</sup> and the modern 'Megalopolis'.<sup>137</sup>

Landscape and site are implicit in the strategy of what Frampton calls the 'bounded place-form', a necessary precondition for the creation of 'an architecture of resistance.'<sup>138</sup> This sense of landscape foresees the global activity of development implicit in every architectural site strategy:

The bulldozing of an irregular topography into a flat site is clearly a technocratic gesture which aspires to a condition of absolute *placelessness*, whereas the terracing of the same site to receive the stepped form of a building is an engagement in the act of "cultivating" the site.<sup>139</sup>

Interpreting Lefaivre and Tzonis' theory of Critical Regionalism, Frampton indicates that an empathy with the site through an act of working with the site (for example by terracing), rather than physically neutralizing the site, was an integral part of Critical Regionalism.

#### 4.3.3 Cache: topography and the city site: specificity and identity

Architect Bernard Cache in *Earth Moves* (1995) problematizes the location of a selected city—Lausanne, Switzerland—outlining a compound conception of topography, geometry, urban history and planning. Cache considers the influence of site on the location of a city's precincts, and how response to site contributes to the identity of the city.<sup>140</sup> He identifies the paradox of the accessible retreat, which requires the strategic essentials of secure refuge and ease of communication:

Topography is a primary concern in the establishment of cities.

Thucydides had already referred to this problem, stating it in terms of the dilemma that faced the Greek polis: ancient cities had to secure a position of retreat on a defensive site as well as a position of communication on a site that was easily accessible.<sup>141</sup>

Analyzing the relationship between architecture and site at the scale of a city and its topography, Cache also makes a nuanced philosophical argument that site specificity is not the same thing as site identity:

architects can choose to ground their practice in the concept of site. The work of architecture then becomes the expression of the specificity of the site that is to be built upon . . . But this position runs the danger of falling into a mistaken notion of site, equating all too easily the notion of specificity with that of identity.<sup>142</sup>

Cache adds a proviso that 'the identity of a place is not given . . . in no case does the identity of a site preexist, for it is always the outcome of a construction.'<sup>143</sup> He appears to imply that the architect's decision to build with reference to the particular attributes of a site can confer 'identity' on a place.

Site thus appreciated appears to lend itself to theoretical and philosophical reflections on architecture; the inclusion of site within Cache's work qualifies the site as an important area for both architectural theory and history.

#### 4.3.4 Burns and Kahn: Site matters

In the essay 'On Site' (1991) Carol J. Burns observed that the architectural site should be viewed theoretically as a result of human action on the natural world: 'The site is a work, a human or social trace . . . Using nature to convey ideology, the site is a social product.'<sup>144</sup> Burns challenges the tenets of Modernist history as well as its ideology:

The present status of site as a shaping force within architecture is a reaction to the mainstream ideology of modern architecture. Called 'the International Style' or 'functional modernism', the names given to modern architecture betray a concern for universalising issues unrelated—even opposed—to those arising from the specificity of a given place.<sup>145</sup>

Burns sets the inherent specificity of site against a universal Modernism whose name seems to carry with it an unconcern for, even a denial of, the site.

In the introduction to *Site Matters* (2005), their anthology of twelve essays by various writers on the architectural site, Burns and Andrea Kahn observe the absence of site in architectural design theory.<sup>146</sup> Burns and Kahn point to what they see as Modernist architectural history's 'sustained disregard of site-related issues'; they claim that this history 'offers few images, few tools, and few models for capturing the relationship between a project and its locale'; overall, they argue that '[a] close look at the canon in design history shows that it largely excludes tendencies toward site thinking.'<sup>147</sup> Arguing against Modernism's 'isolated, autonomous object', Burns and Kahn counter by supporting the emerging architectural discourse of the site, and including the site in architectural thinking:

site provides a potent locus for the production of knowledge and the redefinition of disciplines . . . Within the more specialized arena of architecture, foregrounding site as a subject of inquiry and a domain of action becomes part of a larger contemporary critique of the isolated, autonomous object in design.<sup>148</sup>

The critical, historical and theoretical strategy of including, even emphasizing, site arguably enhances not only the amount of architectural knowledge, but also the type of knowledge created.

#### **4.3.5 Redfield: the suppressed site: Le Corbusier's houses**

In the essay 'The Suppressed Site' (2005) architect Wendy Redfield investigated location, composition and site relations in two Paris projects by Le Corbusier, arguing that the site has been obscured as a proper theme of architectural historical research.<sup>149</sup> Redfield visited the Atelier Ozenfant (1922-23) and the Maisons La Roche-Jeanneret (1923-25) looking at three categories of site influence: physical, typological, and cultural. She found that the sites were unique and specific; they presented 'an environment of architectural possibilities which could not have emerged in quite the same way anywhere else, or at any other time. They are situational.'<sup>150</sup>

In researching these projects at first hand, Redfield was surprised to observe the interweaving of the houses with their settings; published documentation of the iconic houses had given no hint of their relationship to site:

Nothing prepares one for the adroitly choreographed connections made between these starkly modern buildings and their contexts, for despite more than a half-century of scholarly examination of these works, the influence of site has been largely suppressed or ignored . . . there can be only one explanation for this omission: site has been thought to be irrelevant.<sup>151</sup>

Redfield notes the problem in a caption: 'Plan drawings float on the page, with no reference to even the most immediate site elements of sidewalk, street, and adjacent building; site plans are virtually nonexistent.'<sup>152</sup> Having observed the urban setting and topography of the houses, she likens Le Corbusier's understorey spaces and *pilotis* to the Neoclassical plinths of the Beaux-Arts which mediated between ideal building and real landform: such elements 'deformed to the

vagaries of the site so that buildings could retain their ideality . . . both express the same sentiment with respect to site: it does not matter.<sup>153</sup> For Redfield, site has been marginalized by historians, to the extent that ‘modern architecture has been at least partially misrepresented by dominant historical narratives.’<sup>154</sup> The problem, as put by Redfield, appears to be one of historiography: documentation and publication (including Le Corbusier’s own publications, which ‘rarely addressed specific site conditions and their role in his design process’)<sup>155</sup> of these works and other examples of Modernism has omitted, neglected, negated, and thereby ‘suppressed’ the site.

Redfield sees the *relationship* between a building and its site as the long-overlooked topic, an argument stemming from ‘the simple idea that a building is located in only one spot in the world—and that this site should matter’; the relationship between Le Corbusier’s buildings and their sites is a balance between the universal work and the specific setting.<sup>156</sup> To acknowledge this importance of ‘the dialectic between work and setting’ is to emphasize the relationship between site and building. Before Redfield, Le Corbusier’s houses and villas were promoted (by Le Corbusier and others) as universal, repeatable solutions or prototypes, with context unacknowledged, cropped, or erased; after Redfield, the site matters, historically speaking, and the relationship of site and building inherits new historical significance.

#### **4.3.6 Leatherbarrow: technology and topography**

Early in his book *Uncommon Ground* David Leatherbarrow attests to the importance of the architectural site:

In this book I consider two topics that are central to architectural work: the construction and siting of buildings. Few, I suspect, would doubt their centrality; it is virtually impossible to imagine an architectural setting that is neither built nor located somewhere.<sup>157</sup>

Leatherbarrow considers, to an unusual degree, the architectural site and how it affects the design of selected examples of Modern architecture. He identifies and discusses particular examples in depth: in one section of his book he points out that buildings have backs and fronts, sides, orientations, and entries; the entry, he argues, is not actually 'decided' by the building but rather by its setting, at relative, and even regional, scales:

Every architectural entry is *preconditioned* by the building's site, which extends from the edge of the building itself into its immediate vicinity, and then further into the precinct in which it stands, and finally into the encompassing region, never quite exhausting itself.<sup>158</sup>

Entries thus defined epitomize possible relationships between a building and its site, and allow, even demand, a re-seeing of the influence of a site on built form.

Leatherbarrow considers connections between technology and topography, and reflects on problems of how 'the building's physical body' is affected by consideration of site conditions, in 'many instances when fidelity to the land sustained neglect of modern modes of construction, sustaining practices not only of resistance but retreat.'<sup>159</sup> Thus, in the work of three 'architect-authors'<sup>160</sup> (Richard Neutra, Antonin Raymond and Aris Konstantinidis), awareness of site provokes Leatherbarrow's question: 'how the conflict between technology and topography in late modern architecture was understood and addressed.'<sup>161</sup> His study is a consideration of the ways in which the anatomy of a building can be re-thought by close observation of how the design of a building's levels, walls, ceilings and other physical elements are affected by their setting.

Overall, Leatherbarrow is interested in the relationship between the 'technical objects' of a building and its topographical setting.<sup>162</sup> He wants 'to characterize architectural design as the work of projecting the modification of sites and technical systems with respect to one another'; Leatherbarrow concludes that 'Design in just this sense is what the better architects of the post-war period understood as their task, and what they accomplished in some of their projects.'<sup>163</sup>

His work, he argues ‘puts many cherished notions about the autonomy of the architectural object, and the project, at risk.’<sup>164</sup> His extensive, carefully-worded study maintains focus on the site and provokes a re-seeing of his selected subjects, and, by implication, suggests that close attention to the actuality of building and site, and reflection upon the significance of their relationship, yields considerable historical insight.

#### **4.3.7 Aalto and the site**

Aalto’s work, as discussed above, is often connected with nature, landscape and site. Critics observed that the 1998 centenary saw Aalto’s architecture, ‘without much scrutiny’, described as ‘Finnish, human, democratic, anarchist, sensitive to site, natural, organic, free-form, synthetic, random, and intuitive’.<sup>165</sup> However, landscape and site were adopted as themes for architectural history through the 1990s: in 2003 architect Will Bruder sees site as aesthetically important, part of an ‘integral kinship’ between architecture and landscape; the Muuratsalo house ‘sits both gently on the site... and grows from it with strength . . . this experimental house blurs all normal expectations of architectural and landscape space.’<sup>166</sup> Architectural critique embraces the spatiality of landscape, fusing it with architectural spatiality in praising Aalto’s summer house.

While interested in concepts of the site, historians generally do not pay great critical attention to Aalto’s methods of site selection, nor to the finer tectonic details of building with the site. Alvar and Elissa Aalto’s approach in the early 1950s to selection of the Muuratsalo site is noted in a recent Finnish article: On their trips together to make site visits among the waters and islands of Lake Paijanne, they found a ridge of rock on the island of Muuratsalo, that was wooded with pine trees and sloped steeply down into the lake; adjoining it was an obvious place for a sauna—a low-lying cove on the shore of the lake sheltered by a group of broad-leafed deciduous trees. Looking to the west from the rocks on the shore, the tower of Muurame Church, one of Aalto’s early works, could be made out on the horizon.<sup>167</sup>

The site, from this description, is topographically complex and elevated above a lake, with a protected cove, sheltered by forest, and giving distant views of a tower. Although the outcome of the Aaltos' quest is presented here as self-evident, other accounts (see Chapter 8) indicate that selecting locality and site for the summer house involved lengthy deliberations, including site drawing and mapping. Aalto appears to have (somehow) read the identity of the site and formed an architectural strategy in response to particular site characteristics; an extended account of Aalto's site research processes has yet to be published.

Frampton observes the primacy of the site in Aalto's smaller urban works, such as the Säynätsalo Town Hall where 'the geological metaphor assisted him in establishing the identity of the place through the way in which the profile of the built form extends itself into the site.'<sup>168</sup> Frampton also notes a typical Aalto site planning principle, seen at Säynätsalo and the Villa Mairea: 'a given building is invariably separated into two distinct elements and the space between is articulated as a space of human appearance.'<sup>169</sup> The Muuratsalo courtyard demonstrates both strategies: the courtyard allows the space and living of the house to be extended 'into the site'; and as 'a space of human appearance' between living and bedroom wings, the courtyard also assumes a primary spatial and social significance.

Treib uses an idea similar to Frampton's 'geological metaphor' (see also Chapter 3) in his reflection on Aalto's approach to building with the site:

When the qualities of a site seemed to suggest a particular architectonic direction, Aalto usually emphasized the run of the land. When the qualities of a site were limited, Aalto constructed the landscape—outside the building, inside, or both.<sup>170</sup>

The Muuratsalo house, located on a topographically rich site, appears to have been located relative to water, views, the screen of the forest, the wooded cove, and a natural rock spur. As a result (to follow Treib's hypothesis) the house, though not a constructed landscape (as the Villa Mairea, with its echoes of the

Finnish forest, has been described, by Treib) may prove to contain elements of symbolic landscape. Rather, it is the ‘run of the land’ at Muuratsalo which seems emphasized by the composition of terrace, floor levels, rooflines, views, and other elements, which seem located and designed in closely observed relationships with topography, access and views (as discussed further in Chapter 8) particular to the site.

#### **4.4 Conclusions: Nature, landscape, site**

##### **4.4.0 Nature, landscape, site as architectural knowledge**

The three terms nature, landscape, and site, as revealed in the present chapter, carry with them various histories. Nature is a very complex notion in Western culture, and is a founding concept for architectural theory. Nature has also been an important idea for Aalto and for Aalto historians, who read nature as a key area where Aalto’s work is distinguished from that of his contemporaries, with the exception of Frank Lloyd Wright.

Architectural history since 1998 has used landscape as a central trope to find significance and aesthetic value in Aalto’s work. It continues to be an area for historical, more than theoretical, research into Aalto, and one with potential for interdisciplinary work.

Conception of the architectural site and its specificity has become an area of considerable attention for architectural theory. The site has become a locus for application of new perceptual and conceptual modes (including Leatherbarrow’s topography, and Burns and Kahn’s critical theories) through which new knowledge and definition of disciplines continue to evolve.

##### **4.4.1 Conclusions: the architectural site**

Recent historical attitudes to nature, landscape and site, as related bodies of architectural knowledge, provide a platform for considering landscape-related

architectural themes. The site—a defined portion of ground where the rooms and variously enclosed spaces of the building are set within the spaces and dynamics of the greater world—is a topic of interest for discussing architectural aesthetics.

The site may be seen as the particular part of the world where the architect's ideas are located; the site is both a setting and a subject for design, where relations between inside and outside conditions are articulated in built form. The site is a locus of increasing reflection by architectural historians and theorists; the site is also a significant component of the experience of a work of architecture.

The site is of particular interest as a locus for studying Aalto's work: his site strategies appear to embody his various philosophical and aesthetic principles, and reveal a developed understanding of particular environmental conditions. Treib's observation—that Aalto's design strategies complement the topography and the spatiality of his sites—implies extensive creative consideration of site by the architect, and suggests in turn that first-hand experience of an Aalto project by a critical visitor would benefit from awareness of historical and theoretical knowledge of the site.

The relationship between nature, landscape and site as discourses of architecture—seen from an architectural perspective in this chapter—may be complemented through the following chapter's review of architecture-landscape relationships, as articulated through landscape discourses.

## CHAPTER 4 NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*, revised edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979/1962).

<sup>2</sup> Vincent Scully, *Modern Architecture: The Architecture of Democracy* (New York: George Braziller, 1961), pp.37-38.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Reed, 'Alvar Aalto and the New Humanism of the Postwar Era', in Peter Reed, editor, *Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), p.95.

<sup>4</sup> Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000),

<sup>5</sup> Richard Weston, *Alvar Aalto* (London: Phaidon, 1996), p.227.

<sup>6</sup> Kate Nesbitt, Introduction, in Kate Nesbitt, editor, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), p.20, p.28.

<sup>7</sup> Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape* (Chichester and New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, 'The Phenomenon of Place', in Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, pp.414-28. (Originally *Architectural Association Quarterly* 8, no.4 (1976): 3-10).

<sup>9</sup> See Nesbitt, Chapter 9 'Phenomenology: Of Meaning and Place', in *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, pp.411-53.

<sup>10</sup> Exceptions include Richard Weston, 'Sense of Place', in *Alvar Aalto*; Sarah Menin, 'Retreating to Dwell: Playing and reality at Muuratsalo', in Sarah Menin, editor, *Constructing Place: Mind and Matter* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Nesbitt, Introduction, p.20.

<sup>12</sup> Nesbitt, Introduction, p.48.

<sup>13</sup> Forty, Preface, in *Words and Buildings*.

<sup>14</sup> s.v. 'Nature', 'Culture', in Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society* (London: Flamingo, 1983/1976), p.219, p.87.

<sup>15</sup> Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg and Meaghan Morris, editors, *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), p.238.

<sup>16</sup> Bennett, Grossberg and Morris, *New Keywords*, p.239.

<sup>17</sup> Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, p.121.

<sup>18</sup> 'There is now a good deal of hesitancy over the value of the word culture.' Bennett, Grossberg and Morris, *New Keywords*, p.63.

<sup>19</sup> Bennett, Grossberg and Morris, *New Keywords*, p.68.

<sup>20</sup> Forty, Preface.

<sup>21</sup> Forty, 'Nature', *Words and Buildings*, pp.220-39.

<sup>22</sup> List summarized from Forty, *Words and Buildings*, pp.220-39.

<sup>23</sup> Forty, *Words and Buildings*, p.220.

<sup>24</sup> Forty, *Words and Buildings*, p.220.

<sup>25</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, translated by J. Rykwert, N. Leach, and R. Tavernor (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1988); Aristotle, *The Physics*, Book II, §8. Quoted in Forty, *Words and Buildings*, p.221.

<sup>26</sup> Aarno Ruusuvuori and Juhani Pallasmaa, editors, *Alvar Aalto 1898-1976* (Helsinki: Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1978), p.34.

<sup>27</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Early Years*, p.200.

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- <sup>28</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Early Years*, p.200.
- <sup>29</sup> Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.32.
- <sup>30</sup> Forty, *Words and Buildings*, p.231.
- <sup>31</sup> Forty, *Words and Buildings*, p.236.
- <sup>32</sup> Gottfried Semper, *The Four Elements of Architecture and other Writings*, translated by Harry Francis Mallgrave and Wolfgang Herrmann (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- <sup>33</sup> Forty, *Words and Buildings*, pp.231-33.
- <sup>34</sup> Forty, *Words and Buildings*, p.237.
- <sup>35</sup> Louis Kahn, 1969, quoted in R. S. Wurman, *What Will Be Has Always Been: The Words of Louis I. Kahn* (New York: Access Press and Rizzoli, 1986), p.75.
- <sup>36</sup> Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1932).
- <sup>37</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Rationalism and Man' (1935), in *Alvar Aalto: Sketches*, edited by Göran Schildt, translated by Stuart Wrede (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1978), p.47.
- <sup>38</sup> Schildt, 'Alvar Aalto', in Fleig, *Alvar Aalto: Volume I*, p.16.
- <sup>39</sup> Goran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Mature Years*, pp.269-70.
- <sup>40</sup> Nils Erik Wickberg, 'Alvar Aalto's Idea of Culture', in Ruusuvuori and Pallasmaa, *Alvar Aalto 1898-1976*, p.87.
- <sup>41</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'E. G. Asplund in Memoriam' (1940), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto Sketches*, p.66.
- <sup>42</sup> Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, p.29.
- <sup>43</sup> Elias Cornell, 'The Sky as a Vault . . . : Gunnar Asplund and the articulation of space', in Claes Caldenby and Olof Hultin, *Asplund* (New York, Rizzoli, 1985), pp.24-29.
- <sup>44</sup> Demetri Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism: Studies on Alvar Aalto* (London: Academy Editions, 1982), p.55.
- <sup>45</sup> Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Decisive Years* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986), pp.152-61.
- <sup>46</sup> William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, third edition (London: Phaidon, 1996), p.307.
- <sup>47</sup> Unattributed quote in Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, p.311.
- <sup>48</sup> Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, translated by Frederick Etchells (1931) (New York: Dover, 1986/1923).
- <sup>49</sup> Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, p.171.
- <sup>50</sup> Kenneth Frampton, *Le Corbusier* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), pp.70-79.
- <sup>51</sup> Nesbitt, Introduction, pp.30-31. In a footnote, Nesbitt glosses *tabula rasa*: 'Modernist idea that, to be "of its time," everything in artistic practice has to be original, beyond history, i.e., to start from a "clean slate," or *tabula rasa*'; see n.49, p.68.
- <sup>52</sup> Demetri Porphyrios, 'The Relevance of Classical Architecture' (1989), in Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda*, pp.92-93.
- <sup>53</sup> Porphyrios, 'The Relevance of Classical Architecture', pp.92-93.
- <sup>54</sup> Kenneth Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto' (1998), in *Labour Work and Architecture: Collected Essays on Architecture and Design* (London: Phaidon, 2002), p.253. This is an edited version of the centenary essay 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto: Evolution and Influence', in Reed, *Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism*.
- <sup>55</sup> Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, p.298.
- <sup>56</sup> Porphyrios, 'The Relevance of Classical Architecture', p.93.
- <sup>57</sup> Peter Reed, 'Alvar Aalto and the New Humanism of the Postwar Era', in Reed, *Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism*, p.95.

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- <sup>58</sup> Reed, 'Alvar Aalto and the New Humanism', p.97.
- <sup>59</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Between Humanism and Materialism' (1955), in *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, edited by Göran Schildt, translated by Timothy Binham (Helsinki: Ottava, 1997), p.177.
- <sup>60</sup> Reed, 'Alvar Aalto and the New Humanism', p.113.
- <sup>61</sup> Winfried Nerdinger, 'Alvar Aalto's Human Modernism', in Winfried Nerdinger, editor, *Alvar Aalto: Toward a Human Modernism* (Munich: Prestel, 1999), p.14.
- <sup>62</sup> Nerdinger, 'Alvar Aalto's Human Modernism', p.26.
- <sup>63</sup> Nicholas Ray, *Alvar Aalto* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p.156.
- <sup>64</sup> Ray, *Alvar Aalto*, p.156.
- <sup>65</sup> Bruno Zevi, *Towards an Organic Architecture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1950); Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste* (New York: Norton, 1974/1914); cited in Ray, *Alvar Aalto*, p.156.
- <sup>66</sup> Reed, 'Alvar Aalto and the New Humanism', p.113.
- <sup>67</sup> Sarah Menin and Flora Samuel, *Nature and Space: Aalto and Le Corbusier* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p.11.
- <sup>68</sup> Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.102.
- <sup>69</sup> Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.22.
- <sup>70</sup> Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.102.
- <sup>71</sup> Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.101.
- <sup>72</sup> Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.3.
- <sup>73</sup> Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.102. See D. W. Winnicott, *Home is Where We Start From: Essays by a Psychoanalyst* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1986).
- <sup>74</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Experimental House at Muuratsalo' (1953), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.234.
- <sup>75</sup> Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.161.
- <sup>76</sup> Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.9.
- <sup>77</sup> Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.9.
- <sup>78</sup> Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.9.
- <sup>79</sup> Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.2.
- <sup>80</sup> Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.2.
- <sup>81</sup> Scully acknowledges Giedion's contribution and method: '*Space, Time, and Architecture* has had considerable effect upon us all . . . [its conclusions] cannot be challenged without alternative conclusions being offered at some length.' Vincent Scully, 'Modern Architecture: Toward a Redefinition of Style', in Robert A. M. Stern, Alan Plattus, Peggy Deamer, editors, *[Re]Reading Perspecta* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The MIT Press, 2004), p.70.
- <sup>82</sup> Scully notes three phases of Modern architecture: 'the first . . . the phase of fragmentation, the second the phase of continuity, the third the opening phase of a new humanism'. Scully, 'Modern Architecture: Toward a Redefinition of Style', p.70.
- <sup>83</sup> Scully, 'Modern Architecture: Toward a Redefinition of Style', *passim*.
- <sup>84</sup> Scully, 'Modern Architecture: Toward a Redefinition of Style', p.73.
- <sup>85</sup> Scully, 'Modern Architecture: Toward a Redefinition of Style', p.73.
- <sup>86</sup> See also Vincent Scully, *Pueblo: Mountain, Village, Dance* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975/1972).
- <sup>87</sup> Scully, 'Modern Architecture: Toward a Redefinition of Style', p.75.

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- <sup>88</sup> Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a critical history*, revised edition (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985). See Chapter 22 'Alvar Aalto and the Nordic Tradition: National Romanticism and the Doricist sensibility 1895-1957', pp.192-202.
- <sup>89</sup> Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a critical history*, p.202.
- <sup>90</sup> Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a critical history*, p.202.
- <sup>91</sup> Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto', pp.242-45.
- <sup>92</sup> Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto', pp.236-44.
- <sup>93</sup> Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto', p.238.
- <sup>94</sup> Curtis, 'Alvar Aalto: Paysages Mythiques.'
- <sup>95</sup> Curtis, 'Alvar Aalto, Paysages Mythiques', p.16.
- <sup>96</sup> Curtis, 'Alvar Aalto, Paysages Mythiques', p.16.
- <sup>97</sup> Curtis, 'Alvar Aalto, Paysages Mythiques', p.18.
- <sup>98</sup> Marc Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', in Reed, *Alvar Aalto: between humanism and materialism*, p.60.
- <sup>99</sup> Anita Berrizbeitia and Linda Pollak, *Inside Outside: Between Architecture and Landscape* (Gloucester, Mass.: Rockport, 1999).
- <sup>100</sup> Berrizbeitia and Pollak, *Inside Outside*, p.11. Elizabeth Meyer indicates that Berrizbeitia and Pollak respond to a general problem that architectural discussions of landscape 'are too frequently restricted by a rhetoric of architectural hierarchy and dominance over landscape.' Elizabeth Meyer, Foreword, Berrizbeitia and Pollak, *Inside Outside*, p.9.
- <sup>101</sup> Berrizbeitia and Pollak, *Inside Outside*, p.14. Works cited to illustrate 'reciprocity' include: Querini Stampalia Foundation (Venice, 1959-1963) by Carlo Scarpa; Loyola Law School (Los Angeles, 1981-1984) by Frank Gehry; Villa Dall'Ava (Paris, 1984-1991) by Rem Koolhaas/OMA; School at Morella (Morella, Spain, 1986-1993) by Carme Pinós and Enric Miralles; and Barnes Residence (Nanaimo, British Columbia, 1990-1992) by Patkau Architects.
- <sup>102</sup> Philip Goad, *New Directions in Australian Architecture* (Balmain, NSW: Pesaro Publishing, 2001), p.27.
- <sup>103</sup> Berrizbeitia and Pollak, *Inside Outside*, p.28.
- <sup>104</sup> William J. R. Curtis, 'Alvar Aalto: Paysages Mythiques/Mythic Landscapes', *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, Feb. 1998, p.12.
- <sup>105</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', *Journal of Architecture*, Winter 1998, v.3, n.4, p.290.
- <sup>106</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', p.290.
- <sup>107</sup> Marc Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', in Reed, *Alvar Aalto: between humanism and materialism*, p.64.
- <sup>108</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland' (1925), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.207.
- <sup>109</sup> Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', p.64.
- <sup>110</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands: Nordic Building* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996).
- <sup>111</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands*, p.6.
- <sup>112</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands*, p.193.
- <sup>113</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands*, p.44.
- <sup>114</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands*, p.47.
- <sup>115</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands*, p.197.
- <sup>116</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', p.291.
- <sup>117</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', p.291.
- <sup>118</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', p.294.
- <sup>119</sup> Amos Rapoport, *House Form and Culture* (Inglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p.28.

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- <sup>121</sup> Kevin Lynch and Gary Hack, *Site Planning*, 3rd edition (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984).
- <sup>122</sup> David Leatherbarrow, *Uncommon Ground: Architecture, Technology and Topography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), p.vi.
- <sup>123</sup> Colin Rowe, 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa' (1947), in *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976).
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- <sup>125</sup> Rowe, 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa', pp.2-3.
- <sup>126</sup> Aalto, 'The Architect's Conception for Paradise' (1957), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: Sketches*, pp.157-59.
- <sup>127</sup> Rowe, 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa', p.2.
- <sup>128</sup> Rowe, 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa', p.2. Translation from French by this writer.
- <sup>129</sup> Rowe, 'The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa', p.3. Translation from French by this writer.
- <sup>130</sup> Colin Rowe, 'La Tourette' (1961), in *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa*, p.186. (Originally Colin Rowe, 'Dominican Monastery of La Tourette, Eveux-sur-Arbresle, Lyon', *Architectural Review*, 1961).
- <sup>131</sup> Rowe, 'La Tourette', p.195.
- <sup>132</sup> Rowe, 'La Tourette', p.194.
- <sup>133</sup> Rowe, 'La Tourette', p.194.
- <sup>134</sup> Kenneth Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance', in Hal Foster, editor, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture* (Port Townsend, Oregon: Bay Press, 1983).
- <sup>135</sup> Frampton refers to Paul Ricoeur, 'Universal Civilization and National Cultures' (1961), in *History and Truth*, trans. Chas. A. Kelbley (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1965); also Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).
- <sup>136</sup> Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism', p.24.
- <sup>137</sup> Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism', p.25. For the notion of 'Megalopolis', see Jean Gottmann, *Megalopolis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961).
- <sup>138</sup> Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism', pp.24-25.
- <sup>139</sup> Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism', p.26.
- <sup>140</sup> Bernard Cache, *Earth Moves: The Furnishing of Territories* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).
- <sup>141</sup> Cache, *Earth Moves*, p.6.
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- <sup>147</sup> Burns and Kahn, 'Why Site Matters', pp.xx-xxi.
- <sup>148</sup> Burns and Kahn, 'Why Site Matters', p.xxvii.
- <sup>149</sup> Wendy Redfield, 'The Suppressed Site: Revealing the Influence of Site on Two Purist Works', in Burns and Kahn, *Site Matters*.

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- <sup>150</sup> Redfield, 'The Suppressed Site', p.193.
- <sup>151</sup> Redfield, 'The Suppressed Site', p.186.
- <sup>152</sup> Redfield, 'The Suppressed Site', p.187.
- <sup>153</sup> Redfield, 'The Suppressed Site', p.189.
- <sup>154</sup> Redfield, 'The Suppressed Site', pp.192-93.
- <sup>155</sup> Redfield, 'The Suppressed Site', p.186.
- <sup>156</sup> Redfield, 'The Suppressed Site', p.217.
- <sup>157</sup> Leatherbarrow, *Uncommon Ground*, p.vi.
- <sup>158</sup> Leatherbarrow, *Uncommon Ground*, pp.90-91.
- <sup>159</sup> Leatherbarrow, *Uncommon Ground*, p.279.
- <sup>160</sup> Leatherbarrow, *Uncommon Ground*, p.vii.
- <sup>161</sup> Leatherbarrow, *Uncommon Ground*, p.vii.
- <sup>162</sup> Leatherbarrow, *Uncommon Ground*, pp.282-84.
- <sup>163</sup> Leatherbarrow, *Uncommon Ground*, p.283.
- <sup>164</sup> Leatherbarrow, *Uncommon Ground*, p.viii.
- <sup>165</sup> Kari Jormakka, Jacqueline Gargus, Douglas Graf, *The Use and Abuse of Paper: Essays on Alvar Aalto, Datutop 20* (Tampere: Tampere University of Technology, 1999), p.9.
- <sup>166</sup> Will Bruder, 'The Magic of a Place Discovered', in Catherine Spellman, editor, *Re-envisioning Landscape/Architecture* (Barcelona: Actar, 2003), pp.259-60.
- <sup>167</sup> Markku Komonen, 'Experiments with Materials at the Architect's Own Expense', in *Alvar Aalto: The Brick*, edited by Hanni Sippo (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Museum/ Alvar Aalto Foundation, 2001), p.31.
- <sup>168</sup> Kenneth Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto' (1998), in *Labour Work and Architecture: Collected Essays on Architecture and Design* (London: Phaidon, 2002), p.250.
- <sup>169</sup> Frampton, *Modern Architecture*, p.197.
- <sup>170</sup> Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', p.47.

## **Chapter 5 A landscape view of architecture, in terms of three concepts: landscape, garden and terrace**

### **5.0 Chapter 5 Introduction**

#### **5.0.1 Introduction: the lens of landscape: a landscape view of architecture**

The lens of landscape appears to be a valuable research means for revealing, seeing and reflecting on layers of significance and representation beyond the building-focused discourses of architecture; landscape was a valuable historical frame for considering aspects of Aalto's legacy, as was demonstrated in Chapter 3. The knowledge of landscape is different from that of architecture; its formation, terminology, history, theory, and praxis are not the same as those of architecture, and it can cast new historical light onto various aspects of architecture.

In this chapter, selected concepts and ideas from the history and theory of landscape form a background against which to form an expanded understanding of the house architecture of Alvar Aalto, and in particular his Muuratsalo summer house.

#### **5.0.2 Landscape: key sources**

Architectural theory has numerous anthologies (Ballantyne, Hays, Johnson, Mallgrave, Nesbitt, Ockman, and others), as well as consistently developed bodies of individual theory (Alexander, Eisenman, Norberg-Schulz, Rossi, Venturi, and others); and architectural history has historical surveys (Curtis, Frampton, and others). Landscape, however, regards itself as a field still in formation, in the process of assembling its own consistent and coherent body of both history and theory. 'The story of modern landscape architecture remains to be told', wrote Marc Treib in 1993, reflecting on the challenges of landscape history.<sup>1</sup> Yet, as James Corner pointed out in 1999, there was 'a remarkable resurgence of interest in landscape topics during the past ten years or so.'<sup>2</sup> The landscape collections by Corner, Raxworthy and Blood, Spens, Swaffield, Thompson and Steiner, Treib,

Waldheim, and Thompson's 2009 theory reader, are evidence of an ongoing resurgence of interest.<sup>3</sup>

Corner writes of the broader value and cultural impact of landscape: 'Changing ideas of nature, wilderness, and landscape continue to inform the physical practices of design and building, and these, in turn, further transform and enrich cultural ideas.'<sup>4</sup> In this potential to transform and enrich lies part of the value and interest of landscape for the present study; the emergence of landscape since the 1980s brings to the surface new knowledge and articulates new concepts to refresh scholarship on Aalto in particular, whose work and writings throughout his career showed an interest in the relationship of architecture to landscape and nature, equalled only, amongst the 'Modern masters' of architecture, by that of Frank Lloyd Wright.<sup>5</sup>

Key works for this chapter derive from the fields of geography, architecture and landscape architecture, including writing by Appleton, Berrizbeitia and Pollak, Cosgrove, Hunt, Jackson, Meyer, Norberg-Schulz, Spirn, Swaffield, Treib, Tuan and Vroom. In terms of background, Appleton, Cosgrove, Jackson and Tuan are from the field of geography; Berrizbeitia and Pollak and Norberg-Schulz are architects; while Hunt, Meyer, Spirn, Swaffield, Treib and Vroom are landscape writers (historians and theorists) and practitioners.

### **5.0.3 Key concepts: landscape, garden, and terrace**

A number of themes may be seen to characterize the discourse of landscape, its knowledge and reality, its history and theory, especially as different from architecture. Vroom's lexicon, for example, covers over two hundred key words, including a number of potential value to the present study: aesthetics, amphitheatre, garden, land art, landscape values, patio, picturesque, place, rural, site, square, symbol, topography, wilderness.<sup>6</sup> Selected section titles of Thompson's landscape reader indicate research areas related to the present study: Landscape and Truth; The Picturesque; Biological Theories; Ecological

Perspectives; Use and Beauty; Landscape as Art; Phenomenology.<sup>7</sup> Swaffield covers broader themes in his 2002 landscape reader, including: The Nature of Theory in Landscape Architecture; Form, Meaning and Experience; Society, Language, and the Representation of Landscape; Integrating Site, Place, and Region.<sup>8</sup>

The extent of landscape knowledge, terminology and discourse evident from this list reveals patterns of thought that would appear to enable an investigation of landscape-related aspects of Aalto's architecture quite different from an architecture-based discourse. Two landscape concepts also pertinent to architecture—garden and terrace—form the core of this chapter's investigation of how landscape discourse can expand an understanding of the house architecture of Alvar Aalto, and his Muuratsalo house. These themes appear, from a review of the landscape literature, to be relevant to extending a landscape perspective 'into' architecture. The garden—as a typology of landscape, and as a 'third nature'—is probably the main, central idea of landscape history; the terrace is an essential idea of landscape history, theory and praxis, as well as a recognized architectural topic of theoretical and technical interest.

Landscape historians Steenbergen and Reh propose that the process of landscape research implies 'departing from the romanticized preconception of historic examples in favour of "unearthing" the dynamic and creative thinking process' behind historic examples of landscape architecture.<sup>9</sup> This chapter aims similarly to reveal or unearth the creative thought behind landscape-related elements found especially in Aalto's house architecture.

## **5.1 Landscape: a view of landscape**

### **5.1.1 The word landscape: view or prospect**

It would seem important within an architectural epistemology to set out a sense of the word landscape. The term landscape is not equivalent to the term nature (as

discussed in Chapter 4). A dictionary indicates the following usages of the noun landscape:

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.<sup>10</sup>

The first two definitions describe the actual world, where architecture and landscape share the same space of human perception and experience; common usages such as ‘the Australian landscape’, or ‘Aalto’s affinity for Finnish landscape’ are of this genre. It is also noteworthy, in the context of the present study, that the notion of prospect or view over scenery should appear in a dictionary definition of landscape.

The term landscape in the present study also refers to a particular field of thought and study, a discursive paradigm with its own worldview, theories and methodology; this field is the domain not only of the academic, professional and practical/technical discipline known as ‘landscape architecture’, but also of architectural historians, garden historians, designers, artists, cultural commentators and others.

Appleton in 1997 expressed concern for the future of ‘the Landscape Movement’, a multidisciplinary group joined by a common interest in landscape—‘landscape architects or geographers or environmental psychologists or art historians or even freelance enquirers, unlabeled with any academic or professional designation.’<sup>11</sup>

The breadth and multiplicity of such a movement, Appleton argues, may be both a strength and a weakness, because of multiple interests and diversity of focus. The problem of a diverse and ill-defined field seems to have typified landscape studies up to the 1980s—and this difficulty prompted Appleton’s ‘quest’, as outlined in

*The Experience of Landscape*<sup>12</sup>—but clarification of landscape as a discipline would appear to be progressing, as this chapter should reveal.<sup>13</sup>

For much of the twentieth century landscape theory was neither well developed, nor was landscape widely used by critics or historians in describing or explaining Modernist architecture.<sup>14</sup> Landscape has emerged during the 1990s both as a sub-field of architecture and as an independent field, practice and profession (as discussed in Chapter 3). In 1999 Corner, noting the recently-expanding scope of ‘the landscape project’, described ‘the apparent recovery of landscape, or its reappearance in the cultural sphere after years of relative neglect and indifference’; he regards landscape as ‘an ongoing project, an enterprising venture that enriches the cultural world through creative effort and imagination.’<sup>15</sup>

### **5.1.2 Landscape ontology**

Appleton sees landscape as ‘a kind of backcloth to the whole stage of human activity’, a natural or manmade setting to be viewed, experienced, inhabited, interpreted, painted, and studied, scientifically or aesthetically.<sup>16</sup> Jackson describes landscape as a viewable entity, ‘a portion of land which the eye can comprehend at a glance’;<sup>17</sup> Corner regards landscape as a significant cultural idea, but different to ‘land’ or ‘environment: ‘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.’<sup>18</sup>

Landscape in these usages is (like architecture) spatial, visual and experiential, but also (unlike architecture) has, by definition, both cultural and natural dimensions; landscape thinking may potentially extend and enrich contemporary understanding of architecture.<sup>19</sup> Landscape history includes park and garden design, the medieval enclosed garden, the sublime and the picturesque, landscape painting, landscape in literature, ecological design, and landscape aesthetics, also overlapping with the disciplines of civil engineering, geography and planning.<sup>20</sup>

Distinguished landscape and garden historian John Dixon Hunt has bemoaned the marginalisation of landscape discourse, while noting the field's lack of interest in its own history and theory, and inattention to its core intellectual business: 'it is also arguable that the inadequacies of landscape architecture's historical grasp have also contrived that it fail to attend to essential *ideas* of garden and landscape.'<sup>21</sup>

Jackson, Cosgrove, and Spirn have variously commented on the etymology and usages of the term landscape.<sup>22</sup> Han Lorzing in *The Nature of Landscape: A personal quest* (2001) pursues meanings and origins of European words for landscape: landskab (Danish), landschap (Dutch), Landschaft (German), paysage (French), paesaggio (Italian), landskap (Swedish and Norwegian), and maisema (Finnish).<sup>23</sup> Lorzing distinguishes an etymology that fuses 'visual' and 'territorial' aspects of landscape; he also notes that the term originated in the art world, '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.'<sup>24</sup> Both the word and the ontology of landscape are expansive and complex, and are embraced by diverse disciplines and individuals.

### **5.1.3 Landscape and nature: the human presence**

Ann Whiston Spirn, in *The Language of Landscape*, describes landscape as an entity shaped by various primary authorities: nature, history, art, economics, power; she asks about 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?'<sup>25</sup> 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. Marc Treib observes in his 1998 Aalto essay that '[s]ince 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.'<sup>26</sup>

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.<sup>27</sup>

This inclusive definition suggests interplay between the natural and the man-made, developing over time. Spirn also suggests that landscape practice faces a dual framing of nature: 'Landscape architects must confront nature as observable phenomena and Nature as an idea'.<sup>28</sup> Nature in landscape discourse appears to have both a phenomenological and an intellectual mode.

Elizabeth Meyer likens landscape theory to feminism; her view of landscape is as a thing of the senses and experience, of situational contingencies, of the form and meaning of a given unique site contributing to the form and meaning of a design project:

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.<sup>29</sup>

Landscape in these perspectives seems to require, or at least recognize, human presence, along with that of nature, as a given in both theoretical or creative

activity and the actual material composition of a landscape. Landscape seems to be viewed as a construct by these leading landscape thinkers.

#### **5.1.4 Landscape: survival or construct**

Jay Appleton defines landscape in *The Symbolism of Habitat* (1990), and locates perception as the central activity of 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.<sup>30</sup>

Appleton’s Darwinian observation links perception and adaptation, putting an evolutionary argument; Appleton sees landscape, at least partly, as a biological setting of life and death, where visual perception of environment is utterly crucial to survival of the organism.

Meanwhile, geographer Denis Cosgrove proposes a differently framed 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.’<sup>31</sup> Cosgrove’s landscape is not a biological setting for active seeing, but rather a ‘way of seeing’, a construct for conceptualization, study and argument; by contrast, Appleton’s landscape is something to see and sense, a functional place for experience, perception and biological survival. This difference or polarity between what may be seen as Appleton’s ‘biological’ standpoint, and Cosgrove’s ‘cultural’ point of view is a defining watershed of the present study.

### **5.1.5 Cosgrove: landscape as an ideological concept**

Cosgrove has written on various ways of seeing and understanding contemporary and historical landscapes, articulating an anthropocentric and ideological version of landscape, engaged with social theory:

it is in the origins of landscape as a way of seeing the world that we discover its links to broader historical structures and processes and are able to locate landscape study within a progressive debate about society and culture.<sup>32</sup>

Cosgrove challenges Appleton's approach, arguing that landscape is not 'merely' the world we see, but is rather a way of seeing the world 'mediated through subjective human experience',<sup>33</sup> rather than individual or universal pleasure or satisfaction in a landscape setting, Cosgrove observes 'the tension between individual enjoyment of the external scene and the collective making of that scene'.<sup>34</sup> In this view, informed by social sciences and economics rather than life sciences, landscape 'represents a way in which certain classes of people have signified themselves and their world through their imagined relationship with nature'.<sup>35</sup>

While nature is still a part of this idea of landscape, Cosgrove is interested in different things to Appleton, and acts as a counter to the functional aspects of Appleton's landscape argument. His formations, while interesting and valuable, appear to be of limited use to the present study's interest in architectural aesthetic preference.

### **5.1.6 J. B. Jackson: everyday landscapes**

Another version of 'human geography' holds that landscape is the everyday made environment, an attitude established and maintained in the writing of American geographer John Brinckerhoff (J. B.) Jackson (1909-1996), who, as Treib reflects, 'never saw the place without its people'.<sup>36</sup> Jackson's magazine *Landscape* (founded in 1951) continues to provide a forum for discourse on American

vernacular landscape, architecture and streetscape. Jackson's followers continue to write on everyday and ordinary landscapes, on rural, urban, industrial and small-town settings for human habitation; these thinkers take little interest in either contemporary architecture or landscape design, nor in the 'unspoilt' natural world (or 'wilderness'), promoting instead the democratic values and aesthetics of everyday streets, buildings, roadsides and places, where nature is re-formed by human action.<sup>37</sup> The jacket blurb to one collection of Jackson's essays, rather than referring to nature or landscape, praises instead 'his passion for vernacular culture, his insights into a style of life that blurs the boundaries between work and leisure, between middle and working classes, and between public and private spaces.'<sup>38</sup>

Jackson describes landscape not as a natural feature of the environment, but rather 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.'<sup>39</sup> Jackson was interested in visual and social values of the landscape; he regarded the landscape in part, writes Treib, 'as a repository of memory'.<sup>40</sup> Jackson also maintained the human presence as central to his version of the aesthetics 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.<sup>41</sup>

Jackson's socially framed ideas of landscape—concerned with nature as it is populated and formed, particularly in North America, by communities and individuals—continue to influence contemporary thinking about landscape in geography and architecture—as Robert Venturi writes, on 'the significance of the American everyday/generic landscape.'<sup>42</sup>

### **5.1.7 Laurie Olin: nature, feelings, the everyday, and the landscape architect**

American landscape architect Laurie Olin, who has worked with international architects, including Peter Eisenman,<sup>43</sup> raises essential questions in a 1993 essay: ‘What is nature? What is art? What is landscape architecture?’<sup>44</sup> He observes nature as a living entity with numerous aspects: the cosmos, the physical universe; nature as a force; nature as the intrinsic character of people, things and places; natural phenomena—geological, climatic, biological, human—as celebrated in the arts; and the idea of human nature. Olin sees himself as ‘highly qualified to discuss [nature] in terms of experience, feelings, and spirit.’<sup>45</sup>

Olin also observes a paradox of landscape aesthetics: ‘I am deeply interested in aspects of the environment that might be termed “ordinary” or “common” and the role they play in the creation of landscape works that are exemplary or uncommon.’<sup>46</sup> He is interested in the provocative role of beauty and the depiction of nature, both embodied in the highest levels of landscape design:

One thing that nearly everyone who has ever seen and discussed the work of [André] Le Nôtre, [Capability] Brown, or [Frederick Law] Olmsted has mentioned has been nature and the expression (in nonverbal ways) by these designers of views about the nature of Nature.<sup>47</sup>

Olin’s thinking bridges an ontological gap between ordinary landscapes and the exemplary works of landscape history; his consideration of ““ordinary” or “common”” perceptions of landscape highlights an underlying theme in both Aalto’s and Appleton’s aesthetic sensibilities. For Aalto the everyday person in the street, ‘the little man’, was the ideal user and perceiver of his architecture;<sup>48</sup> while the biological strand in Appleton’s theory (discussed further in Chapter 7) implies that landscape preference operates at a general, inherited (rather than individual) level.<sup>49</sup> Ideas of everyday perceptions and ‘everyday landscapes’ involve popular, perhaps universal, appeal, and are important for grounding an argument related to Appleton’s ideas of inherited aesthetic preference.

## **5.2 Garden**

### **5.2.1 Garden as a landscape type**

John Dixon Hunt describes and partly defines garden in *Greater Perfections* (2000):

A garden will normally be out of doors, a relatively small space of ground (relative, usually, to accompanying buildings or topographical surroundings). The specific area of the garden will be deliberately related through various means to the locality in which it is set: by the invocation of indigenous plant materials, by various modes of representation or other forms of reference (including association) to that larger territory, and by drawing out the character of its site (the *genius loci*) . . . In its combination of natural and cultural materials, the garden occupies a unique place among the arts, and it has been held in high esteem by all the great civilizations of which it has been a privileged form of expression.<sup>50</sup>

In landscape architecture and in landscape history and theory, the garden is both a fundamental concept and type, combining, in Hunt's words, 'natural and cultural materials'. As Richard Weston reveals, in the chapter titled 'Nature and Culture' in *Alvar Aalto* (1996), Aalto is renowned for merging, transposing, synthesizing, even cross-transforming, elements of nature and culture in his architectural strategies.<sup>51</sup>

Spirn outlines ontological aspects of the garden, noting that, in gardens, metaphors are real things, not merely ideas, and points to Wright's built landscape at Taliesin to argue that the source of metaphor is also the metaphor:

Gardens, however, are different from buildings in one respect: they embody both real *and* idealized nature. Landscape features may be representations of the world, but they are also the world itself, physical reality and idea together, the source of metaphor and metaphor... the round mound may be an abstraction of a hill but it is also a hill, not merely a representation. The fusion of the real and the

ideal in Wright's landscapes contributes to their aesthetic and symbolic power.<sup>52</sup>

Architects Charles W. Moore, William J. Mitchell and William Turnbull, Jr attest to the longstanding need for humans 'to dwell, to inhabit some piece of our world.'<sup>53</sup> In *The Poetics of Gardens* (1988) Moore, Mitchell and Turnbull maintain that human beings 'have fought and died to define, defend, and sometimes extend our domains.'<sup>54</sup> This defence of the dwelling-place has been celebrated at times with gardens, 'where the streams and trees and flowers of the fields, and the rocks of the mountains, have been collected, or remembered, and ordered into an extension of ourselves onto the face of the earth.'<sup>55</sup> The garden is thus an extension of the domestic human and their dwelling into the natural world.

Aalto included the garden within his architectural worldview in his 'From doorstep to living room' essay (1926);<sup>56</sup> Aalto's houses (as discussed further in Chapter 6) incorporate landscape elements—patios, courtyards, walls, vegetation, pools, fireplaces and fences—in their compositions. At the Muuratsalo house in particular, the landscape concept of garden includes outdoor elements as compositional items, in a different kind of historical narrative to that of architecture; within a landscape framework, the aesthetics of Aalto's house architecture may be freshly considered.

### **5.2.2 Ideas of garden: place, memory, theatre**

Meto J. Vroom sees the garden variously as an icon or a metaphor, a place, a work of art, a theatre, a memory place.<sup>57</sup> His comments on the garden—and also the patio or courtyard,<sup>58</sup> which 'provides a private and sheltered space' in densely built urban settings—apply also to Aalto's house architecture, and particularly the Muuratsalo house, conveying a sense of the landscape tactics that seem to partly underlie its aesthetic effect.

Vroom sees the garden as a balanced, overtly dualistic human place reminding of ‘wilderness’:

Gardens demonstrate how people experience the relationship between nature and culture. They represent the shifting balance over time between wilderness and human control, from safe places in the midst of a hostile nature—order in chaos—to controlled nature.<sup>59</sup>

The garden is essentially a private place, ‘enclosed by hedges, fences, or walls’; the garden may be related to its setting by a contrived opening: ‘separation from the outside world requires a place of entry, a threshold, whether real or implicit.’<sup>60</sup> Aalto’s fences, walls and gateways embody this aspect of the garden. Vroom also considers the garden as theatre:

Historic and modern gardens can both serve as stages for social activities, for play-acting. [Elizabeth Barlow Rogers notes that] “Not only were dramatic astonishment and theatrical perspective effectively used in the layout of Italian Baroque gardens, but many of the gardens of this period also contained outdoor theatres with a grassy stage [and] hedges for wings.”<sup>61</sup>

Spirn is also quoted by Vroom on the link between garden and theatre: ‘Theatre is both flight from reality and concentration of reality; in that paradox lies a particular parallel between theatre and garden.’<sup>62</sup> Given Aalto’s reputed interest in theatrics,<sup>63</sup> this aspect of garden as drama relates also to his affection for auditoria and amphitheatres, from civic to institutional to domestic scale.

It appears that Aalto’s courtyard space strategically extends the human domain out into nature, as does a garden; this gains the aesthetic benefit of the garden, at relatively little cost, and also embeds the house—and the garden or courtyard—in further layers of cultural and aesthetic richness, as discussed further in Chapter 8.

### 5.2.3 Appleton: *Hortus conclusus* as foraging-ground

Jay Appleton, in a 1993 article, perceives the relationship between house and landscape from a landscape point of view; he describes the houses where humans live as the ancient ‘nesting-places of our own species’, and sees the landscape beyond as equivalent to ‘the primeval foraging-ground, that outer zone of our habitat with which we enjoy an equally important if quite different relationship.’<sup>64</sup> Appleton’s analysis seems particularly apt for the Muuratsalo house-courtyard composition, especially in the light of Aalto’s ‘Doorstep’ essay,<sup>65</sup> with its proposed inversions of inside and outside conditions (as discussed briefly in the previous chapter).

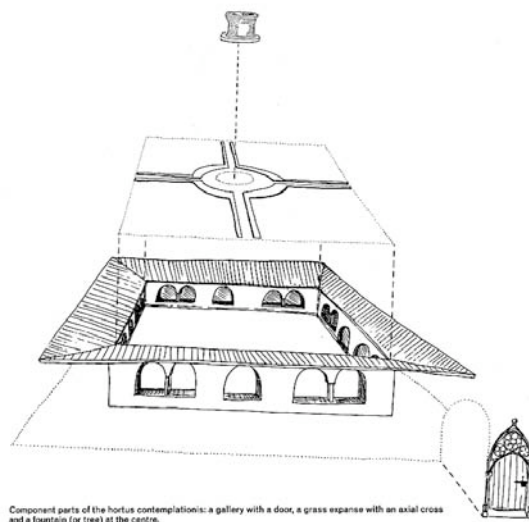
Appleton recognizes that an overlap of inside-outside conditions may be realized in the landscape type of the enclosed garden, set between the indoor rooms of the house and the ‘foraging-ground’ beyond the enclosing walls:<sup>66</sup>

In land-use terms the usual device for toning down the immediacy of the interface between indoors and outdoors is the garden. The medieval *hortus conclusus* discharged this role exactly. As *hortus*, ‘garden’, it belonged to the foraging-ground . . . As *conclusus* it shared the property of ‘enclosure’ with the nesting-place. Screened from prying eyes it provided a little theatre of privacy into which the domesticity of the house could overflow without conceding its protected status.<sup>67</sup>

In this presentation of the enclosed garden as a balanced duality, the *hortus* (garden) has an outward link, towards the prospect of the view and the natural world; meanwhile, as *conclusus* (enclosed), the garden is a refuge, ‘a little theatre of privacy’, secure ‘from prying eyes’: the *hortus conclusus* appears to balance prospect and refuge, and provides pleasure and delight.

#### 5.2.4 Aben and de Wit: *Hortus conclusus* and *axis mundi*

Dutch landscape historians Rob Aben and Saskia de Wit, in *The Enclosed Garden: History and Development of the Hortus Conclusus and its Reintroduction into the Present-day Urban Landscape* (1999), unpack the idea of the medieval *hortus conclusus*, tracing its presence into modern and contemporary architecture and landscape—the ‘urban landscape’ of their subtitle. Aben and de Wit categorize the original European *hortus conclusus* into three types:<sup>68</sup> *hortus ludi* (garden of play), *hortus catalogi* (collection garden), and *hortus contemplationis* (garden of contemplation), following the aesthetic ideals of Thomas Aquinas—summed up as perfection, proportion, and clarity.<sup>69</sup> Of the three types, the *hortus contemplationis*, the garden of contemplation, seems most appropriate to relate to Aalto’s Muuratsalo house.



**Figure 5** The medieval garden of contemplation, the *hortus contemplationis*. Rob Aben and Saskia de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1999).

The garden of contemplation had a program of spiritual reflection and spatial abstraction, depicting the Universe with God at the centre, as realized in the plan of the medieval monastery garden (Fig.5). The monastic garden’s proportionally ordered square space, embodying control of nature and creation of order, was surrounded by a gallery, had the sky for its ceiling, and had a point representing the *axis mundi* at the centre: ‘to make the unfathomableness of space workable, space had to be experienced from a point at the centre.’<sup>70</sup> This central point is

found in monastery gardens across Europe, as well as in town centres in Italy: the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius in Michelangelo's Campidoglio in Rome; the eccentric focus of the landscape-like scalloped form of the Campo of Siena; and the humble but vital well in the small-town version of Monteriggioni in Tuscany.<sup>71</sup> A condensation of these types is to be found in the fire-pit at the centre of the brick-paved square courtyard of Aalto's Muuratsalo house.

This contained and centralized model of existential space is commented on by Christian Norberg-Schulz, who points out in *Existence, Space and Architecture* (1971) that the vertical was considered the sacred dimension of space: the *axis mundi* was the imaginary world axis, running through the centre of the earth, representing for the subjective individual the centre of the world, as well as the place where sky and earth meet. The fire-pit also stands as the navel of the world, as a correlate of the Greek *omphalos*: 'The ancient Greeks placed the 'navel' of the world (*omphalos*) in Delphi, while the Romans considered their Capitol as *caput mundi* [the head of the world].'<sup>72</sup> These concepts trace a thread of ideas back into history, through Mannerist and vernacular urbanism, to classical Rome, ancient Greece, and probably earlier, to the architecture of the earth-goddess of the archaic Mediterranean.<sup>73</sup>

### **5.2.5 The enclosed garden: resolving dualities?**

The enclosed garden may be understood, from the above, as potentially containing a resolution of 'opposite' conditions; Leatherbarrow uses the term 'fusion of opposites' to describe Le Corbusier's synthesis of conventional opposites: 'spirit/matter, sun/moon, day/night, man/woman, reason/intuition, action/rest. Fusion results in balance, equilibrium, harmony.'<sup>74</sup> Concepts of harmony, and a fusion of opposites were also amongst Aalto's ideals; he looked to society, nature, history and civilization, and at a deeply personal level, seeking, in Menin and Samuel's words, 'an image of exactly what he could not be himself, but strove to construct—harmony in human life.'<sup>75</sup>

Aben and de Wit introduce their book with the notion of the *hortus conclusus* as a both/and duality:

“enclosed” and “garden” would seem to be primarily in opposition. The garden *gathers* the landscape around it (garden) and at the same time shuts itself off from it (enclosed). The enclosed garden is as broad as the landscape in that it incorporates the expansiveness of the sky, and as contained as a building. Thus it is an intermediary between man and landscape. It is both inside and outside, landscape and architecture, endless and finite.<sup>76</sup>

Aalto had specifically mentioned the idea of ‘the hall as an open-air space’ in his ‘From Doorstep to Living Room’ essay in 1926;<sup>77</sup> British historian Stephen Groak had noted in 1978 that ‘Aalto had specific interests early in his career which he evolved and explored over a period of half a century.’<sup>78</sup> Aalto’s interests, set out in his ‘Doorstep’ essay, were to do with putting the indoors outdoors, and with integrating, conflating or blurring inside and outside, sky and ceiling, and, ultimately, landscape and architecture.

Aben and de Wit summarize the enclosed garden as ‘condensed space’, describing the *hortus conclusus* of Aalto’s Säynätsalo Town Hall in terms that recall features of the Muuratsalo house:

The vertical endlessness of the sky is emphasized by intensifying the containment of the space. The walls are palpably present and show their solidity . . . Perforations in the envelope, such as recesses and doors, can strengthen the containment by showing the thickness of the walls.<sup>79</sup>

This simultaneous experience—a ‘both-and’ of inside and outside, of room and garden, of artificial and natural, of landscape and architecture—creates a powerful aesthetic experience, apparently anticipated by Aalto himself in 1926. The view of Aalto’s buildings as ‘gardens’ is not a usual view; however, if the Muuratsalo

courtyard is seen as a *hortus conclusus*, an insight such as that of Menin and Samuel takes on new significance:

Central to Aalto's and Le Corbusier's architectural challenge (the questioning of the very conception and meaning of space) is a determination to allow nature to defy the boundaries of building. They encouraged vegetative growth to engulf their human interventions in the environment . . . For this reason [Aalto] drew light, sun and greenery into the heart of interior space'<sup>80</sup>

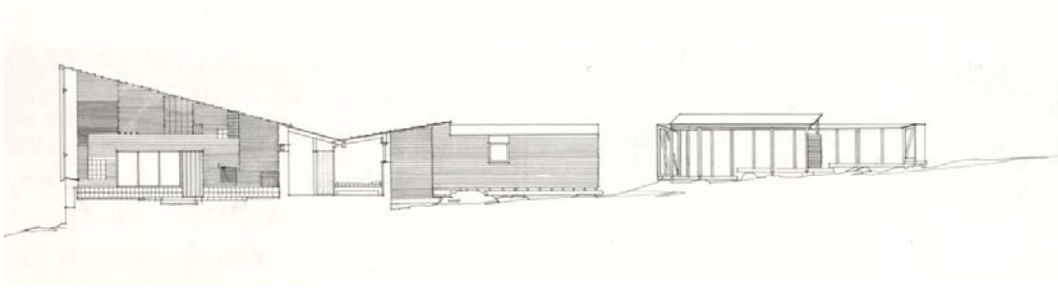
The vines of the Muuratsalo courtyard overgrow the pergola and the brick walls, like the flowers and greenery of the Fra Angelico painting. Attention was drawn in Chapter 3 to Weston's description of Aalto's metaphoric 'double movement' between architecture and nature, where 'natural materials and motifs are gradually turned into architecture, while architecture is invaded by nature in the form of stone, wood and plants.'<sup>81</sup>

Muuratsalo takes on added significance when seen from a landscape point of view, and understood through the landscape idea of the *hortus conclusus*. Constructs and typologies of landscape such as the garden offer new ways to see and consider Aalto's house architecture, and the Muuratsalo house in particular.

### **5.3 Terrace**

#### **5.3.1 A basic concept of artificial landscape**

Aalto's Muuratsalo house is situated on a sloping site with a slight natural flattening near or beneath the courtyard (Fig.6). The courtyard or patio can be seen as a terrace: 'a level paved area or platform next to a building'.<sup>82</sup>



**Figure 6** Muuratsalo. Section, looking north. Drawing by Alvar Aalto.  
(Drawing courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

The terrace is a basic concept of artificial landscape, with ancient roots in horticulture; terraces are often built in steeply sloping locations where stone is plentiful, or where water requires control (rice paddies, vineyards, orchards).<sup>83</sup> The terrace has also been viewed as a necessary condition for dwelling and civic habitation, a *sine qua non* for civil conduct and decorum; David Leatherbarrow, in his essay 'Leveling the Land', emphasizes civic, defensive, and even mythic roles of artificially levelled terrain:

leveled land is the first and most fundamental act of topographical construction . . . every terrain that has been transformed into a terrace serves as the physical and conceptual foundation for the accommodation and enactment of a broad range of topographical purposes, from the most mundane to the most elevated.<sup>84</sup>

Aalto's paved courtyard, an element of artificial landscape central to the house's conception, exemplifies the act of transforming terrain into terrace. Aalto creates the terrace as an architectural landscape element which is both urban and domestic: both a civic square transplanted to an island hillside, and an enclosed garden between domestic and landscape space. Aalto's levelled terrace forms, in Aben and de Wit's words, 'an intermediary between man and landscape'.<sup>85</sup>

### **5.3.2 Hertzberger: terrace and house, space and place**

Architect Herman Hertzberger in *Space and the Architect* (2000), expresses a functional view of landscape, as 'a structure shaped by man for the purposes of survival and so constructed as to offer the maximum living space and thus the

optimum conditions for existence for all its occupants.<sup>86</sup> He describes the terrace in similarly strategic terms:

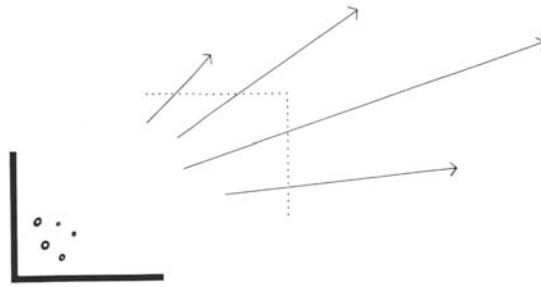
Wherever the surface is rolling or sloping man does all he can to make it flat, meaning horizontal, by laying out terraces in steps . . . Terracing is a means of defining territory and also provides clarity of organization and views.<sup>87</sup>

In Hertzberger's construct, the enabling of survival, organization and views are interwoven and ancient human necessities: strategic advantage and security are central to continued human existence in both the natural and manmade worlds.

Earlier in the same book, Hertzberger uses a similar theme of human necessity to consider domestic space as an embodiment of the tension between the dual concepts of place and space.<sup>88</sup> While the issue of relationship between place and space is not part of this thesis—the place/space duality is discussed at length by Yi-Fu Tuan in *Space and Place*, while Gaston Bachelard considers domestic space in *The Poetics of Space*<sup>89</sup>—it is nonetheless useful to note Hertzberger's opinion on the strategic spatiality of the house:

Place makes us think primarily of restricted dimensions, a play area, balcony, study niche, parts of the house or house-like parts, born of articulation, large enough to contain several persons and small enough to provide the necessary 'cover' . . . Space is longing, an expectation of possibilities, outside, on a journey, dynamic and open, away. Place is pause, inside, redemption, home, at rest . . . We need both as basic elements of architecture: views to the front and cover behind.<sup>90</sup>

Hertzberger refers to a general mental and emotional tension between place and space, between a 'necessary' protective role, and a desire to flee outward and beyond—the 'centripetal attraction' of place on one hand, and the 'centrifugal desire' of space on the other.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, Hertzberger's diagram of these reciprocal concepts uncannily resembles the *parti* diagram that might be drawn to represent Aalto's Muuratsalo house (Fig. 7).



**Figure 7** Herman Hertzberger, diagram, 'Space is a longing'.  
Herman Hertzberger, *Space and the Architect* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2000).

While Hertzberger does not mention Appleton or his theory (and cites Aalto only once),<sup>92</sup> his notion of 'views to the front and cover behind' seems to not only encapsulate Appleton's duality of prospect and refuge, but it also describes the spatial essence of the Muuratsalo house. The diagram's heavily drawn L in one corner may indicate the enclosing potential of domestic shelter, while the dotted L in the opposite corner might be read as denoting Aalto's 'ruined' courtyard wall, with the ambiguous courtyard space held in tension between the two angles. The centrifugal arrows seem to represent looking or walking out from the courtyard space, in two directions.

Hertzberger's diagram, indicating partly enclosed space and views or movement out into the landscape, illustrates a dual idea resembling Appleton's prospect-refuge theory; it also enhances spatial understanding of the Muuratsalo house. This graphic summary represents two key spatial principles of the present study.

### 5.3.3 Pure, harmonious, civilized landscapes

The terrace may be seen as an in-between landscape element mediating between house and garden: in the Italian Renaissance the terraces of the Villa Medici, Villa Gamberaia, or the Villa d'Este expanded the domestic space of the villa and extended the dominant vista over the landscape;<sup>93</sup> at the same time, claims Vroom, 'they symbolised power and human dominance over nature.'<sup>94</sup> Alvar Aalto, the surveyor's son, was acutely conscious of both natural and artificial

levels; Schildt notes the influence of surveying on Aalto's sense of contours and levels:

The organic, non-geometrical perception of space that [Aalto] attained in the late 1930s was clearly connected with his experience of the northern forest, just as the wavy lines which characterized his architectural idiom were obviously related to the winding shorelines and meandering terrain contours on the maps of his father the surveyor.<sup>95</sup>

In a 1925 article the young Aalto set down in writing his ideals for a harmonious 'civilized landscape' lodged in his consciousness following his honeymoon voyage to Italy; those ideals are also transposed in his imagination into the very lake setting in Central Finland where he would build his 1953 summer house:

There are many examples of pure, harmonious, civilized landscapes in the world; one finds real gems in Italy and southern Europe . . . As the steamboat glides across Lake Päijänne . . . I while away the time by making corrections in my mind to the buildings we pass.<sup>96</sup>

Aalto had the town squares of northern Italy as inspiration for planning new towns—again using motifs that would appear in the Muuratsalo house:

Sometimes I would make the church stand out as a more dominating element among the houses by building a little colonnaded square in front of it or raising its spire. (The open square, surrounded by architecture, is one of the most powerful rhythmic accents available in hilly country.)<sup>97</sup>

Aalto also had a strong, simple site planning strategy for the location of his imagined buildings:

One more point. Buildings in Central Finland should be placed as high on hill slopes as is practicable.

All of these details are fairly innocuous weapons of the imagination, but some such regard for nature is probably needed if genuine, civilized landscaping is to gain a foothold in this country.<sup>98</sup>

The building with the flattened open square before it, set on a hill slope, was to materialize more than a quarter of a century later at Muuratsalo.<sup>99</sup> The terrace of Muuratsalo appears to fulfil a basic cultural necessity; Leatherbarrow points out that ‘platform construction was, in some societies, accorded political significance, on the premise that site building prefigures city building, or sets the stage for public life.’<sup>100</sup>

#### **5.3.4 An ideal place: the elevated sheltered terrace**

Australian geographer Brian J. Hudson has written on landscape in geographical journals, generally supporting Appleton’s prospect-refuge theory. Hudson argues that the communication of knowledge was an important social activity in ancient hunting and gathering societies:

Some anthropologists lay great stress on the importance of hunting in the evolution of human intelligence and behaviour, including language, culture, and social organization . . . it is unnecessary to stress hunting as much as Appleton does, however, as a plausible version of his argument can be made without this.<sup>101</sup>

Hudson speculates that while some knowledge may only be gathered in the field, the communication of ideas needed more stable venues: for passing on knowledge, tribal elders might select ‘places which commanded good views of the environment that provided their livelihoods, and that also offered security and comfort, places with the characteristics of prospect and refuge.’<sup>102</sup> The elevated, sheltered terrace was ideal for such activity, offering visual dominance and ‘a clear field of vision secure in the protection of shade, shelter and, occasionally, concealment, or with such a refuge readily at hand.’<sup>103</sup> Aalto’s terrace appears to offer just such outlook and shelter. Hudson, quoting biologist Valerius Geist,

commends such places as ‘excellent spots’ for development of survival- and culture-enhancing skills, including ‘excellent memory recall, ability to communicate symbolically, excellent powers of observation and conceptualisation, and the ability to socialise at the intellectual level.’<sup>104</sup>

Hudson reflects that such terraces could have inspired Horace’s ‘groves of Academus’, from which ‘the cloister, the arbour and the pergola may be seen as direct descendants, all possessing the favoured qualities of prospect and refuge.’<sup>105</sup> Recalling these archaic terraces, Hudson argues that through Appleton’s work ‘landscape designers are now becoming consciously aware of the fundamental principles which they have often intuitively applied in the past.’<sup>106</sup>

Steenbergen and Reh, in the introductory chapter to *Architecture and Landscape*—subtitled ‘The Garden as an Architectonic Laboratory’—analyze the urban landscape as a layered sequence of processes, forms and transformations, built up over time: ‘Agricultural landscape is a result of cultivation processes carried out on the natural landscape. Likewise, the urban landscape is a result of civil engineering processes on both the natural and farming landscape.’<sup>107</sup>

Instead of claiming that landscape has sparse theory, Steenbergen and Reh outline a theoretical basis for landscape thought based on Vitruvius—for whom ‘it was the human figure in particular that harboured the secret codes of natural order and beauty’. Steenbergen and Reh interpret that the very idea of the architectural plan, reflecting *humanitas*, achieved cosmographic significance, as ‘a metric diagram in which the hidden order of nature was made evident.’<sup>108</sup> Vroom points out that the fifteenth-century Renaissance humanists met and discussed ideas at the villas of Cosimo de’ Medici around Florence; the Villa Medici at Fiesole is of particular interest for the present study.

### 5.3.5 The Villa Medici

Steenbergen and Reh describe the innovative evolution of both architecture and landscape in Michelozzo's mid-fifteenth century Villa Medici at Fiesole, one of the first Tuscan villas where 'the cultural ideal of country life was separated from the traditional context of farm and *castello* and evolved into an independent architectural form.'<sup>109</sup> Landscape historian Tom Turner has described the Villa Medici's 'hillside site and gracious terraces, as Alberti recommended in his treatise of 1452.'<sup>110</sup> Turner complements the theoretical aspect with the rural, pointing to the importance of the Medici family's agricultural background in their high regard for the garden: 'Their legacy included not only scholarship, the fine arts and building, but also garden-making. Their interest in the latter, it has been suggested, derived from their never-forgotten rural background.'<sup>111</sup>

Steenbergen and Reh identify that the elements of the terrace and the pergola 'still occupy key positions in the architectural effect of the villa's interaction with the landscape'; the Villa Medici is 'one of the first and clearest examples of the new way of thinking about nature, geometry and space in the quattrocento. It is an observatory in the complex web of nature.'<sup>112</sup> The square-plan house's *piano nobile* opens through a tall arched portico (reminiscent of the portico of Fra Angelico's *Annunciation*) onto the extended terrace of the 'closed garden' extending west, and looking south over the valley of the Arno; the view of Brunelleschi's cathedral dome in Florence, seen from the terrace and loggia, combine to form an *integrazione scenica*.<sup>113</sup>

Parallels may be drawn here to aspects of the composition of Aalto's Muuratsalo house: both houses have an innovative square plan; the terrace of the Villa Medici correlates to the Muuratsalo courtyard; the loggia correlates with the screen of the stepped opening of the western wall; the view of the spire of Aalto's Muurame church corresponds to the view of Brunelleschi's Duomo: thus elements of the 'architectonic laboratory' of the Villa Medici may be seen to correspond to the Experimental House at Muuratsalo.<sup>114</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright had stayed at Fiesole for an important year of his life in 1910 and had drawn up plans for a 'honeymoon

cottage' for himself and Mamah Cheney, with whom he had travelled to Italy, and with whom he shared Taliesin until 1914. Wright's unbuilt plan was—like the Muuratsalo house—an L on two sides of a rectangular courtyard surrounded by high walls, on a site hypothesized by historian Neil Levine as lying adjacent to the Villa Medici.<sup>115</sup>

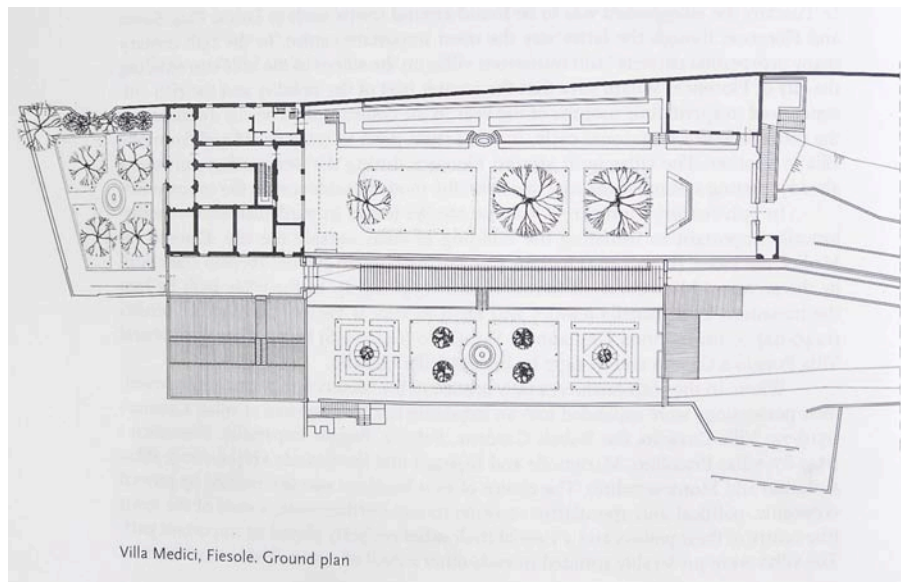
It is interesting to speculate that Aalto may have been influenced by the 'architectonic laboratory' of the Villa Medici; in his 1924 essay 'The Hilltop Town' he mentions Cagnes, Bergamo, and Fiesole amongst the 'gems of urban planning [which] can thank the hills on which their pavements are laid for their beauty.'<sup>116</sup> Aalto praises the magical appeal of the Italian hill towns: 'Whoever . . . has but once experienced that feeling of perfection . . . will be left with a strange bacillus forever circulating in his veins, and the disease caused by it is incurable.'<sup>117</sup>

Neil Levine points out that Wright saw in Fiesole in 1910 'the pervasive and "harmonious" interaction between man and nature, as evidenced by the remains of a culture with roots deep in Antiquity and the Middle Ages.'<sup>118</sup> Levine claims that the experiences of that year were influential for Wright: 'His work after 1910 reveals a quest for a more profound synthesis of architecture and nature'.<sup>119</sup> A 'quest' for an ideal harmony between man and nature, achieved in the Italian hilltop towns, appears to have also characterized Aalto's approach to making a honeymoon retreat for himself and his new wife Elissa, decades later. Aalto had written of the civilized beauty of the hilltop towns:

We shall not go any further into the reasons that made people settle on these hills in ancient times. They are common knowledge and so natural that there is no need to repeat them here. But aesthetic value arose as a by-product, just like the beautiful lines that mark human civilization in Mantegna's frescoes.<sup>120</sup>

While the idea is not suggested in the literature, the Villa Medici might be seen in some respects as a prototype of the Muuratsalo house: the principal elements—the

square house looking onto a geometric courtyard, the sight lines through a loggia to church and town, the elevated terrace extending the house into space, the idea of the retreat away from city life and into the *vita rustica*—have a similarity, while the influence of Italy on Aalto’s thinking generally appears to underlie the Muuratsalo house. Steenbergen and Reh’s landscape analysis of the Villa Medici looks beyond the forms of the house architecture, into ideas of terrace, loggia and views, and prompts a new way of reading Aalto’s ideas and their historical interpretation, along with a re-seeing of urban and landscape factors in the aesthetic appeal of the Muuratsalo house.



**Figure 8** Villa Medici, Fiesole. Ground plan.  
Clemens Steenbergen and Wouter Reh, *Architecture and Landscape* (Basel: Birkhauser, 2003).

## **5.4 Overview: the lens of landscape**

### **5.4.1 The lens of landscape**

Steenbergen and Reh quote an academic’s complaint that the Modernist avant-garde failed to pass on to their successors the body of classical and other architectural knowledge which they themselves had absorbed:

The first generation of important fashionable names such as Le Corbusier, Wright and Aalto has been taught classicism in one form

or another. They have learnt about it, they've gone on further but haven't taught it to us anymore.<sup>121</sup>

This argument could be extended to apply to ideas of urbanism and landscape integrated, but hidden, within the work of the same generation of architects; in the face of this intergenerational obscurity, the lens of landscape appears to be a valuable research tool for revealing, and reflecting on, areas of significance beyond the scope of the more building-focused discourses of architecture.

John Dixon Hunt has noted that garden history and garden theory are not central discourses of landscape or architectural research: 'Gardens have never been as marginal to human existence as they are when they appear on the map of academic study.'<sup>122</sup> Bernard Tschumi has also noted what he calls the 'strange fate' of gardens in the history of urbanism: 'Gardens have a strange fate. Their history has almost always anticipated the history of cities. The orchard grid of man's earliest agricultural achievements preceded the layout of the first military cities.'<sup>123</sup>

Garden and terrace are typical of landscape concepts through which the discourse of landscape provides a more developed view of architecture. This chapter, and the present study, exemplify the use of landscape to research architecture, bringing new material to Aalto scholarship, and perhaps substantiating Frampton's claim that Aalto's 'achievements as an architect cannot be separated at any stage of his career from his capacity as a designer of landscapes.'<sup>124</sup> Landscape discourse brings its knowledge, its historical and theoretical concepts, and its terminology to architecture, allowing historical research to 'unearth' new aspects of the creative work and thought of a major twentieth-century architect.<sup>125</sup>

#### **5.4.2 Conclusion**

In Chapters 4 and 5 two complementary bodies of recent architectural historical writing—selected architectural concepts of landscape, and landscape concepts

relevant to architecture—were discussed, providing a backdrop against which to consider landscape as an aspect of Aalto's house architecture.

The next chapter discusses Alvar Aalto as architect and architectural philosopher, through five areas of interest: his life experience; selected house designs; the role of landscape in his thinking; his aesthetic frameworks; and atavistic or biological factors in his work. The landscape knowledge noted and linked with architecture in the previous two chapters arguably enables an improved understanding of Aalto's work and thought generally, and of the appeal of his house architecture in particular.

## CHAPTER 5 NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Marc Treib, 'Introduction', in Marc Treib, editor, *Modern Landscape Architecture: A critical review* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1993), p.viii. Frampton expresses a similar view: 'Surprising as it may seem, there is to date no decent account of the history of twentieth-century landscape design'; see Kenneth Frampton, 'In Search of the Modern Landscape', in Stuart Wrede and William Howard Adams, editors, *Denatured Visions: Landscape and culture in the twentieth century* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1991), p.42.

<sup>2</sup> James Corner, 'Preface', in James Corner, editor, *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), p.ix.

<sup>33</sup> Corner, *Recovering Landscape*; Julian Raxworthy and Jessica Blood, editors, *The Mesh Book: Landscape/Infrastructure* (Melbourne: RMIT University Press, 2004); Michael Spens, editor, *Transforming Landscape* (London: Academy Editions, 1996); Simon Swaffield, editor, *Theory in Landscape Architecture: A Reader* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); George F. Thompson and Frederick R. Steiner, editors, *Ecological Design and Planning* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1997); Ian Thompson, editor, *Rethinking Landscape: a critical reader* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2009); Marc Treib, editor, *Modern Landscape Architecture: A critical review* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1993); Stuart Wrede and William Howard Adams, editors, *Denatured Visions: Landscape and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Corner, 'Introduction: Recovering Landscape', p.7.

<sup>5</sup> Very little work seems to have been done on the topic of relationships and influences between Aalto and Wright; Schildt observed some of their personal and professional exchanges; see Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Mature Years* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), p.102.

<sup>6</sup> Meto J. Vroom, *Lexicon of garden and landscape architecture* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Ian Thompson, editor, *Rethinking Landscape: a critical reader* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Simon Swaffield, Introduction, in Swaffield, *Theory in Landscape Architecture*, pp.1-6.

<sup>9</sup> Clemens Steenbergen and Wouter Reh, *Architecture and Landscape: The Design Experiment of the Great European Gardens and Landscapes*, revised and expanded edition (Basel: Birkhauser, 2003), p.11.

<sup>10</sup> s.v. 'landscape', *The Macquarie Dictionary*, 3rd edition.

<sup>11</sup> Jay Appleton, 'The Integrity of the Landscape Movement', in Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi, editors, *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p.199.

<sup>12</sup> Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, revised edition (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1996/1975), pp.4-21.

<sup>13</sup> Appleton, 'The Integrity of the Landscape Movement', pp.189-91.

<sup>14</sup> Marc Treib, 'Nature Recalled', in Corner, *Recovering Landscape*, pp.29-30.

<sup>15</sup> James Corner, 'Introduction: Recovering Landscape as a Critical Cultural Practice', in Corner, *Recovering Landscape*, p.1.

<sup>16</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.2.

<sup>17</sup> J. B. Jackson, 'The Word', in John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*, edited by Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p.299.

<sup>18</sup> James Corner, Preface, in Corner, *Recovering Landscape*, p.ix.

<sup>19</sup> See for example: Anita Berrizbeitia and Linda Pollak, *Inside Outside: Between Architecture and Landscape* (Gloucester, Mass.: Rockport, 1999); Meto J. Vroom, *Lexicon of garden and landscape architecture* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006); Charles Waldheim, 'Landscape as Urbanism', in Charles

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Waldheim, editor, *The Landscape Urbanism Reader* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> s.v. 'landscape style', in Vroom, *Lexicon*, pp.183-87.

<sup>21</sup> John Dixon Hunt, 'The Dialogue of Modern Landscape Architecture with its Past', in Treib, *Modern Landscape Architecture*, p.135.

<sup>22</sup> John Brinckerhoff Jackson, 'The Word Itself', and 'Concluding with Landscapes', in *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Denis Cosgrove, Chapter 1 'The idea of landscape', *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1984), pp.13-38; Anne Whiston Spirn, *The Language of Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp.16-17.

<sup>23</sup> Han Lorzing, *The Nature of Landscape: A personal quest* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2001), p.27.

<sup>24</sup> Lorzing, *The Nature of Landscape*, p.35.

<sup>25</sup> Spirn, *The Language of Landscape*, p.244.

<sup>26</sup> Marc Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', in *Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism*, edited by Peter Reed (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), p.47.

<sup>27</sup> Anne Whiston Spirn, 'Seeing and Making the Landscape Whole', *Progressive Architecture*, Feb. 1993, p.92.

<sup>28</sup> Spirn, 'Seeing and Making the Landscape Whole', p.93.

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth K. Meyer, 'Landscape Architecture as Modern *Other* and Post Modern *Ground*', in Harriet Edquist and Vanessa Bird, editors, *The Culture of Landscape Architecture* (Melbourne: Edge Publishing, 1994), pp.30-31.

<sup>30</sup> Jay Appleton, *The Symbolism of Habitat: an interpretation of landscape in the arts* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, pp.13-14.

<sup>32</sup> Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, p.15.

<sup>33</sup> Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, p.13.

<sup>34</sup> Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, pp.13-14.

<sup>35</sup> Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, p.15.

<sup>36</sup> Marc Treib, 'The Measure of Wisdom: John Brinckerhoff Jackson' (1996), in *Settings and Stray Paths: Writings on Landscapes and Gardens* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p.187.

<sup>37</sup> Don Meinig, editor, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Groth and Bressi, *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*.

<sup>38</sup> John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>39</sup> Jackson, 'The Word Itself', p.8.

<sup>40</sup> Treib, 'The Measure of Wisdom', p.189. Treib refers to J. B. Jackson, 'The Necessity for Ruins', in *The Necessity for Ruins, and other topics* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).

<sup>41</sup> John Brinckerhoff Jackson, Preface, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, p.xii.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, *Architecture as Signs and Systems for a Mannerist Time* (Harvard: Belknap Press, 2004), p.36. See also Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.47.

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed account of Laurie Olin's longtime collaboration with Peter Eisenman, see *Fertilizers: Olin/Eisenman*, edited by Julia Czerniak (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2006). See also David Leatherbarrow, Chapter 3 'Design Freedom and the Laws of Nature', *Topographical Stories: Studies in Landscape and Architecture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

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- <sup>44</sup> See Laurie Olin, 'Landscape Design and Nature', in Thompson and Steiner, *Ecological Design and Planning*.
- <sup>45</sup> Olin, 'Landscape Design and Nature', p.118.
- <sup>46</sup> Olin, 'Landscape Design and Nature', p.118.
- <sup>47</sup> Olin, 'Landscape Design and Nature', p.118.
- <sup>48</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'The Enemies of Good Architecture', RIBA Annual Discourse, 1957, in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.206.
- <sup>49</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.240-41.
- <sup>50</sup> Hunt continues the definition into the fourth dimension of time: gardens '*are at best ever-changing . . . but at worst they are destined for dilapidation and ruin from their very inception.*' [Original in italics.] John Dixon Hunt, *Greater Perfections: The Practice of Garden Theory* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), pp.14-15.
- <sup>51</sup> Richard Weston, *Alvar Aalto* (London: Phaidon, 1996), p.104.
- <sup>52</sup> Anne Whiston Spirn, 'Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect of Landscape', in *Frank Lloyd Wright: Designs for an American Landscape 1922-1932*, David G. De Long, general editor (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), pp.157-58.
- <sup>53</sup> Charles W. Moore, William J. Mitchell, and William Turnbull, Jr, Preface, *The Poetics of Gardens* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1988).
- <sup>54</sup> Moore, Mitchell and Turnbull, Preface.
- <sup>55</sup> Moore, Mitchell and Turnbull, Preface.
- <sup>56</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'From doorstep to living room' (1926), in *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, edited by Göran Schildt, translated by Timothy Binham (Helsinki: Ottava, 1997), pp.49-55.
- <sup>57</sup> s.v. 'Garden', Vroom, *Lexicon*, pp.135-39.
- <sup>58</sup> s.v. 'Patio, Court-yard', Vroom, *Lexicon*, p.236.
- <sup>59</sup> s.v. 'Garden', Vroom, *Lexicon*, p.135.
- <sup>60</sup> s.v. 'Garden', Vroom, *Lexicon*, p.137.
- <sup>61</sup> s.v. 'Garden', Vroom, *Lexicon*, pp.137-38. Vroom cites Elizabeth Barlow Rogers, *Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), p.179.
- <sup>62</sup> s.v. 'garden', Vroom, *Lexicon*, p.138. Ann Whiston Spirn, 'Texts, Landscapes and Life' (Copenhagen: Arkitektensvorlag, 1994).
- <sup>63</sup> Kristian Gullichsen, 'Villa Mairea', in *Alvar Aalto: Points of Contact*, edited by Pirkko Tuukkanen-Beckers (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Museum, 1994), pp.65-66.
- <sup>64</sup> Jay Appleton, 'Landscape and architecture', in Ben Farmer and Hentie Louw, editors, *Companion to Contemporary Architectural Thought* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), p.74.
- <sup>65</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'From doorstep to living room' (1926), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*.
- <sup>66</sup> See also 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).
- <sup>67</sup> Appleton, 'Landscape and architecture', p.75.
- <sup>68</sup> The *hortus contemplationis* (garden of contemplation) had a regular square plan embodying control and order, featured a gallery, had a sky ceiling, and represented the *axis mundi* at its centre. The *hortus ludi* (garden of play), was a garden of pleasure and spectacle for knights, ladies, and courtly life, and was a social space for games and play, emphasizing brightness and beauty; the *hortus catalogi* (collection garden), was a depiction of paradise emphasizing measure, order and proportion, a collection of plant species arranged in an orthogonal grid, a botanical inventory rationally organized for the information and enrichment of wealthy, educated citizens. Aben and de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden*, pp.37-59.

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- <sup>69</sup> According to Aben and de Wit, Thomas Aquinas said, 'Three things are necessary for beauty: first, integrity or perfection, for things that are lacking in something are for this reason ugly; also due proportion or consonance; and again, clarity, for we call things beautiful when they are brightly coloured'. Aben and de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden*, p.47.
- <sup>70</sup> Aben and de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden*, p.48.
- <sup>71</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1980), p.151, p.13, p.167.
- <sup>72</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture* (New York: Praeger, 1971), p.19.
- <sup>73</sup> Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*, revised edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979/1962), pp.9-11.
- <sup>74</sup> David Leatherbarrow, 'Leveling the Land', in Corner, *Recovering Landscape*, p.180.
- <sup>75</sup> Menin and Samuel add: 'Aalto looked to the ancients for enlightenment on this, as much to his own experience of the ecological system of the backwoods.' Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.46.
- <sup>76</sup> Aben and de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden*, p.10.
- <sup>77</sup> Aalto, 'From doorstep to living room', p.53.
- <sup>78</sup> Steven Groak, 'Notes on Responding to Aalto's Buildings', in David Dunster, editor, *Architectural Monographs 4: Alvar Aalto* (London: Academy Editions, 1978), p.97.
- <sup>79</sup> Aben and de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden*, p.210.
- <sup>80</sup> Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.3.
- <sup>81</sup> Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, p.104.
- <sup>82</sup> 'terrace noun a level paved area or platform next to a building; a patio or veranda; each of a series of flat areas made on a slope, used for cultivation. Geology a natural horizontal shelflike formation, such as a raised beach.' s.v. 'terrace', Oxford American Dictionary, Apple Computer.
- <sup>83</sup> s.v. 'Terrace', Meto J. Vroom, *Lexicon of garden and landscape architecture* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006), pp.320-323. See also Christopher Alexander, et al., 'Terraced slopes', in *A Pattern Language: Towns, buildings, construction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.791; also Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-Pedigreed Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1964).
- <sup>84</sup> Leatherbarrow, 'Leveling the Land', p.170.
- <sup>85</sup> Aben and de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden*, p.10.
- <sup>86</sup> Herman Hertzberger, *Space and the Architect: Lessons in Architecture 2* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2000), p.249.
- <sup>87</sup> Hertzberger, *Space and the Architect*, pp.249-50.
- <sup>88</sup> Hertzberger, *Space and the Architect*, pp.24-25.
- <sup>89</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).
- <sup>90</sup> Hertzberger, *Space and the Architect*, pp.24-25.
- <sup>91</sup> Hertzberger, *Space and the Architect*, p.24.
- <sup>92</sup> Hertzberger, *Space and the Architect*, p.280.
- <sup>93</sup> Geoffrey and Susan Jellicoe, *The Landscape of Man: Shaping the Environment from Prehistory to the Present Day* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975).
- <sup>94</sup> s.v. 'Terrace', Vroom, *Lexicon*, p.322.
- <sup>95</sup> Göran Schildt, introductory note to Alvar Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland' (1925), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.22.
- <sup>96</sup> Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland', p.22.
- <sup>97</sup> Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland', p.22.

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- <sup>98</sup> Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland', p.22.
- <sup>99</sup> Aalto sets out (and illustrates with a regular, gridded church square) a neo-classical vision of cultural rebirth in Jyväskylä, based on the notion that 'One of the surest criteria that enables us to evaluate the culture of a modern town is its market square . . . trading in a small but comprehensively organized market . . . could give rise to the phenomenon of culture.' Alvar Aalto, 'Urban Culture' (1925), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, pp.19-20.
- <sup>100</sup> Leatherbarrow, 'Leveling the Land', p.171.
- <sup>101</sup> Brian Hudson, 'Hunting or a sheltered life: prospects and refuges revisited', *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 22, 1992, p.55.
- <sup>102</sup> Hudson, 'Hunting or a sheltered life', p.56.
- <sup>103</sup> Hudson, 'Hunting or a sheltered life', p.56.
- <sup>104</sup> Hudson, 'Hunting or a sheltered life', p.56; quote is from Valerius Geist, *Life Strategies, Human Evolution, Environmental Design: Toward a Biological Theory of Health* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1978), p.312.
- <sup>105</sup> Hudson, 'Hunting or a sheltered life', p.56.
- <sup>106</sup> Hudson, 'Hunting or a sheltered life', p.57.
- <sup>107</sup> Clemens Steenbergen and Wouter Reh, *Architecture and Landscape: The Design Experiment of the Great European Gardens and Landscapes* (Munich: Prestel, 1996), p.13.
- <sup>108</sup> Steenbergen and Reh, *Architecture and Landscape*, p.41.
- <sup>109</sup> Steenbergen and Reh, *Architecture and Landscape*, p.59.
- <sup>110</sup> Tom Turner, *Garden History: Philosophy and Design 2000 BC-2000 AD* (London and New York: Spon, 2005), p.155.
- <sup>111</sup> Turner, *Garden History*, p.138.
- <sup>112</sup> Steenbergen and Reh, *Architecture and Landscape*, p.61.
- <sup>113</sup> Steenbergen and Reh, *Architecture and Landscape*, p.57.
- <sup>114</sup> Treib observes enclosed garden motifs in the composition of Aalto's Muurame Church (1926-29), visible from the Muuratsalo courtyard (Fig.33, Chapter 8). Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', p.51.
- <sup>115</sup> Neil Levine, *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp.66-71.
- <sup>116</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'The Hilltop Town' (1924), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.49.
- <sup>117</sup> Aalto, 'The Hilltop Town', p.49.
- <sup>118</sup> Levine, *Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright*, p.68.
- <sup>119</sup> Levine, *Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright*, p.xvii.
- <sup>120</sup> Aalto, 'The Hilltop Town', p.49.
- <sup>121</sup> Steenbergen and Reh, *Architecture and Landscape*, p.11. The academic quoted is Thomas Schumacher.
- <sup>122</sup> Hunt, *Greater Perfections*, p.216.
- <sup>123</sup> Bernard Tschumi, 'The Pleasure of Architecture: Fragment 2: Gardens of Pleasure' (1990), in *Questions of Space: Lectures on Architecture* (London: AA Publications, 1995).
- <sup>124</sup> Kenneth Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto' (1998), in *Labour Work and Architecture: Collected Essays on Architecture and Design* (London: Phaidon, 2002), p.238.
- <sup>125</sup> Steenbergen and Reh note: 'the actual purpose of research on landscape architecture [is a process which] implies departing from the romanticized preconception of historic examples in favour of "unearthing" the dynamic and creative thinking process that lay behind them.' Steenbergen and Reh, *Architecture and Landscape*, p.11.

## **Chapter 6 Aalto**

### **Alvar Aalto: biography, house, landscape, aesthetics, atavism**

#### **6.0 Chapter 6 Introduction**

##### **6.0.1 Early childhood**

Alvar Aalto was born in 1898 in Kuortane, a village in central Finland, between Seinäjoki and Jyväskylä, and had decided to become an architect at an early age.<sup>1</sup> In 1903 the Aalto family moved to Jyväskylä, to a house on a terraced site, in a collection of dwellings described by Göran Schildt as ‘an architectural complex with rich variation, in harmony with the terrain, closed around the two-part yard . . . a prototype for Aalto’s future architecture.’<sup>2</sup> Schildt comments further on the forms this childhood environment may have helped engender: ‘How often he returned to the theme of the closed yard or piazza, building masses adapted to the sloping terrain, stepped facades, oblique roofs, wooden panels and free organic composition.’<sup>3</sup>

When Alvar was eight, his mother caught meningitis and suddenly died at home; ‘the loss was a shock which he would remember all his life,’ claims Schildt (with little further elaboration on the effects of this loss).<sup>4</sup> Aalto’s childhood trauma may have been somewhat cushioned by the proximity of nature and the psychological refuge of the Finnish forest. Sarah Menin proposes that ‘[i]n his bereaved childhood state the forest may have offered a refuge . . . This could be the roots of what might be called his nature-dependency.’<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter Aalto is introduced as architect and architectural philosopher, under five headings—life experience, house architecture, landscape, aesthetics, and atavistic and biological influences—to argue that landscape knowledge enables an understanding of the appeal of Aalto’s house architecture. These selected aspects of Aalto’s work offer a platform for an understanding of the design of the Muuratsalo house, and something of the appeal of his house architecture.

### 6.0.2 House architecture and landscape

Aalto designed relatively few single-family houses, and built less. The limited number of Aalto's designs for single-family houses mark his house architecture as a rarefied and potentially rewarding area for study. Aalto's domestic designs were highly informed situations of architectural refuge and experimentation, expressing social ideals and embodying various landscape themes.

In this chapter, an early house project and three renowned built houses indicate interests and directions of Aalto's house architecture: the *Aitta* 'merry-go-round' project house (1928); the Aalto family house, Munkkiniemi (1934-36); the Villa Mairea, Noormarkku (1937-39); and the Muuratsalo summer house (1953).

Aalto's houses were often overtly experimental, testing and demonstrating materials, landscape strategies, social theories and artistic ideals, and assembling ideas from many sources. Finnish vernacular architecture, notably the Karelian homestead, appears to underlie certain aspects of his architectural strategies.

Aalto's interest in landscape was a recurring aspect of the experimental nature of his house architecture, where siting, building form and composition, artificial landscape elements, connections between inside and outside, and even specific architectural elements reflect a persistent interest in connection with the natural world through architecture.

Aalto's knowledge of the Finnish landscape, and his keenness for the Italian hill town as a model for building with landscape, are evident in his writings and travel sketches, and in historical opinion. Experiments with historical, classical, vernacular, urban, and landscape ideas appear to mingle and coexist in his compositions. Aalto's aesthetics seem to have derived from sources in landscape and architecture: he found beauty in his own personal experiences; in Finnish, vernacular, classical and historical architecture; and in both natural and artificial landscape. His aesthetic ideals were set within an ethical framework of humanist ideals, a social and artistic vision for the benefit of his everyday client and user,

‘the little man in the street’. These ideals appear in writings and speeches made through his career, and in historical commentary.

Aalto’s life experiences—of personal loss in childhood, and of finding psychological security in the Finnish forest; his travels in the 1920s; and his private life in the 1930s and the 1950s—act as background to selected house designs. The Muuratsalo house was built at an important juncture in Aalto’s personal life; deep-seated emotions may be reflected in the conception and composition of the house.

Associated with landscape, certain atavistic and biological themes are also evident in Aalto’s work. A sense of universal human longing for harmony can be found in his approach to nature-related design strategies; Aalto’s atavism and biological interests extend his ideas from architecture towards the realm of landscape theory and symbolism.

This selective framing of fragments of Aalto’s life, work and ideas acts as a resource and backcloth to a closer reading of his Muuratsalo house. This framing of Aalto and the Muuratsalo house may be connected with Appleton’s landscape ideas, notably his prospect-refuge theory, so that preference for the house can be discussed in detail, and bring landscape perspectives to consideration of the appeal of Aalto’s house architecture.

## **6.1 Aalto’s life experience**

### **6.1.1 Finnish landscape and Aalto’s childhood**

The pleasure or displeasure that people may feel in experiencing particular landscape types has been explained as universal human behaviour inherited from archaic hunter-gatherer experience of landscape.<sup>6</sup> Many of Alvar Aalto’s influential childhood experiences—hunting, surveying, drawing, stories—had ties to landscape;<sup>7</sup> much centennial literature on Aalto (as discussed in Chapter 3) cites landscape as a central theme or metaphor, to explain his difference from

other Modernists and his influence on contemporary architectural practice, and to argue his continuing relevance to architectural history and theory.

Experience of the lakes, hills and forests of the Finnish landscape, gained through accompanying his father on his travels and drawing work as a railway surveyor, and the large white drawing table in his father's office, were part of Aalto's childhood, and appear to have been integral to his work and thought.<sup>8</sup> Malcolm Quantrill (elaborating Schildt's biography) also observes that Aalto's experience of the white table and the Finnish winter landscape underlie his awareness and sensitive use of whiteness and light throughout his work.<sup>9</sup> 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.'<sup>10</sup>

Menin and Samuel mention that 'the area in which Aalto traipsed as a youngster . . . is still relatively rich in wildlife, with elks [*sic*], wolf, wolverine, lynx, and the occasional bear'; they cite the formative influence of Aalto's childhood hunting experiences, and note his hunting and fishing skills: 'he was a keen hunter and fisherman, able to poach salmon, trout, whitefish, pike, char and perch.'<sup>11</sup>

Architect Jørn Utzon, a sailor and hunter from childhood, has likened an architect's awareness of amenable sites and propitious landscapes to a hunter's sense of survival in the natural world: 'It's close to being a hunter, knowing what the birds do when it rains, because they have a sense for the best places.'<sup>12</sup>

Architecture at the highest levels has an apparent connection to ancient and enduring human senses and intuitions, developed in a shared prehistoric hunter-gatherer existence—the common human condition until no more than ten thousand years ago.<sup>13</sup>

The 'proximity to nature', of fundamental importance to Aalto in the siting, program and organization of the whole Muuratsalo complex,<sup>14</sup> is a linking idea

between the atavism of Aalto and Appleton (as mentioned in the previous section) and effectively invites the use of landscape discourse—whether architectural, landscape, or geographical—to provide terms and ideas for investigating the phenomena which frame preference for Aalto’s house architecture.

## **6.2 Aalto’s house architecture**

### **6.2.1 Aalto’s house architecture: eating, sleeping, working, playing**

The body of work described in the present work as Aalto’s house architecture (otherwise referred to as Aalto’s houses, domestic architecture, house designs, domestic designs, etc.) has not to date been the subject of a major historical study. Recent publications from Japan and Finland include images and drawings of selected houses, plus commentary on location, chronology, and essential facts,<sup>15</sup> in addition, Weston and Pallasmaa have written monographs on the Villa Mairea,<sup>16</sup> however, a major historical overview of themes, philosophies and patterns of ideas in Aalto’s single-family houses, built and unbuilt, is yet to be written.

In this section, two selected themes—landscape, and the house as experiment—are observed in four Aalto houses, from different stages of his working life: the *Aitta* ‘Merry-Go-Round’ house project (1927); the Aalto family house in Helsinki (1935); the Villa Mairea, Noormarkku (1937-39); and the Muuratsalo summer house (otherwise known as the Experimental House, even ‘laboratory house’) (1953). The theme of landscape is involved in the program and composition of each house, while ideas of architectural experiment (involving work, and gathering) are traced in the houses.

Aalto in 1930 defined a house by four essential program components: ‘A home is an area that forms a sheltered space for eating, sleeping, working, and playing. These biodynamic forms must form the basis for the internal divisions of a home, not obsolete axes and standard rooms.’<sup>17</sup> These four elements, including ‘working and playing’, are found in the houses considered in what follows. The connection

of this shelter to the outside was a further imperative in Aalto's ideal design of 'the perfect setting for the free individual'.<sup>18</sup> Aalto added that 'every home must be technically planned so as to include an accessible outdoor area, and to correspond biologically to nature, to which man was accustomed before the advent of cities.'<sup>19</sup> Aalto's justification is both modern and atavistic, looking back to pre-urban human beginnings as the basis for ideals.<sup>20</sup>

While it is not made clear what 'to correspond biologically to nature' might actually mean in architectural terms, it is apparent that Aalto recognized enduring ancient behaviours in modern people. Yet such ironic combinations of ancient and modern, of work and play, and inside and outside living places were normative in Aalto's imagination, as is shown in his house architecture, and in commentary on his compositional methods.

### **6.2.2 The single-family house: architectural ideals and significances**

Aalto designed relatively few single-family houses, compared to Wright or Le Corbusier. Commenting on the Villa Mairea, Aalto maintained, 'I am not particularly interested in the design of private houses except where there is an opportunity for experiment, which, who knows, may later on be of some use in creating large groups of buildings.'<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, Finnish architect Markku Lahti observes that, for Aalto, 'The notion of a good life and residential architecture always interested him.'<sup>22</sup> Not all writers hold the Aalto houses as masterpieces: Stephen Groak commented in 1978 that Aalto had limited interest in the single-family house: 'it must be admitted that this type does seem the weakest area of his work—his houses do not begin to compare, for instance, with those of Frank Lloyd Wright or Le Corbusier, except in his impressive control of their public domain.'<sup>23</sup>

For Lahti, the Villa Mairea and the Muuratsalo house share common factors: 'experimentation and "play", the latter in the serious and positive sense of the word.'<sup>24</sup> He notes their different identities: the Muuratsalo house relates to 'archaic nature', while in the Villa Mairea the emphasis is on 'culture as a trace of

man.’<sup>25</sup> Louna Lahti describes Aalto as ‘an idealist who always emphasized the importance of creating better living conditions and flats for everyone’; yet she adds by contrast, ‘he was always a realist, who said, “Architecture cannot save the world, but it can set a good example.”’<sup>26</sup> Aalto said, in his 1957 lecture ‘The Artist’s Conception for Paradise’, ‘Each house, each product of architecture that is worthwhile as a symbol is an endeavour to show that we want to build an earthly paradise for people.’<sup>27</sup> For Aalto, the house relates to nature, and to culture; the house sets the good example; and the house is a optimistic emblem of a built paradise on earth.

In *Genius Loci* (1981) Christian Norberg-Schulz pointed to the historical significance of house architecture: ‘modern architecture took the dwelling as its point of departure’; the Villa Mairea typified the idea of the house as an architectural experiment, as a prototype for wider theoretical development.<sup>28</sup> Norberg-Schulz held that Aalto’s circumstantially-aware modernist buildings were essentially ‘romantic’, and thus were ‘able to free modern architecture from the “cosmic” abstractions of early European modernism.’<sup>29</sup> Norberg-Schulz also saw, in the innovations of both Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright’s houses, a certain ‘hunger for reality’.<sup>30</sup> Menin and Samuel similarly observe that ‘The problem of dwelling, addressed by both [Le Corbusier and Aalto], was for Le Corbusier the deep and real reason for the problems of his time.’<sup>31</sup>

The Aalto houses prompt consideration of Aalto’s view of the single-family dwelling as a locus of inside-outside relations, between shelter and landscape, and as a place of experiment, where the work and play of architectural design overlap, and where that ‘earthly paradise’ is dreamt, and attempted.

### **6.2.3 Finnish vernacular architecture**

The vernacular architecture of Finland was, to Aalto, of more than just ethnographic or historical interest. In Karelian rural vernacular architecture, Aalto wrote in 1941, ‘we may find values with a direct, almost utilitarian link to the

present.’<sup>32</sup> Writing on Aalto’s Helsinki house, Louna Lahti remarks that the rustic boundary fence ‘alludes to old Finnish architectural traditions’;<sup>33</sup> Aalto’s friend Gustav Strengell described the Helsinki house as ‘the modern Niemilä farmstead’, a comment Aalto considered ‘the finest criticism he ever received of his home.’<sup>34</sup>

The piecemeal growth of the Finnish vernacular farmstead around a central courtyard was discussed in 1978 by British architect Ranulph Glanville,<sup>35</sup> who also likened the gradual, additive building process to the agglutinative constructions found in Finnish grammar.<sup>36</sup> Glanville argues that Aalto’s attitude to style and composition can be understood as lying within the traditions of Finland’s vernacular architecture.<sup>37</sup> Glanville refers to aspects of the construction and spatial organization of the vernacular farmstead: to courtyards which are effectively ‘complete’ at each stage, yet with room for growth; to ‘the transferable axis, which together with a replicative plan rhythm intends growth’; and to box-like room spaces housing separate functions, ‘allowing the addition of new boxes for new functions’.<sup>38</sup>

This tendency to provide a box for each new element or function as needed, Glanville points out, is ‘the idea behind Porphyrios’ interpretation of Aalto’s spatial conception as ‘heterotopic’, rather than the ‘homotopic’ conception of the other modern masters.’<sup>39</sup> This process, he adds, ‘is what happens, building by building, room by room, and . . . function by function’, in the farm architecture as in the language, where small blocks are added to form a whole.<sup>40</sup> The Aalto family home in Helsinki may also be said to be additively composed of similar sized ‘boxes’—with a quite different, ‘heterotopic’ office box, for a different set of functions, added directly beside it. The resulting ell creates, by definition and at little extra cost, a courtyard, a benefit which surely underlies part of the appeal of the additive method for vernacular construction.

Glanville also relates that the Finnish language has an extensive vocabulary for space and place, and case endings that express the nuances of inside and outside space, less in the naming of places than ‘in the ways of relating to places . . .

distinguishing at a basic level between being within the space of something, or outside that space.<sup>41</sup> Glanville finds the traditional Finnish farm architecture to be ‘of great beauty and sophistication’, and relevant to an understanding of modern Finnish architecture.<sup>42</sup>

Aalto, in his essay ‘Karelian Architecture’ (1941), praised the organic compositional flexibility of the farmhouse:

In a way the Karelian house is a building that begins with a single small cell, or dispersed, embryonic shacks—shelters for people or animals—and grows, figuratively speaking, year by year. ‘The great Karelian house’ is comparable to a biological cluster of cells: the possibility of a larger and more complete structure always remains open.<sup>43</sup>

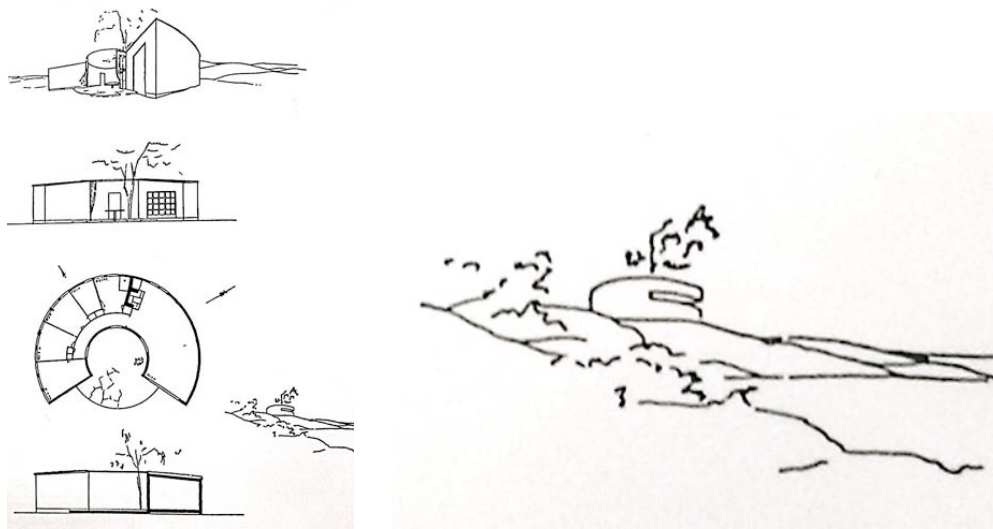
The idea of ‘embryonic shacks’ is reminiscent of the outbuildings of the Muuratsalo house, where the herd of small sheds lines the hillside path eastward from the house. The importance of vernacular farm buildings for Aalto’s thinking was noted by Treib, who also observes that these ‘agricultural compounds’ were ‘commonly . . . horizontal, following the line of the terrain’, thus offering limited inspiration to Aalto, who sought the greater impact of building monumentally, and on hilly country.<sup>44</sup>

Finnish rural vernacular architecture offered Aalto a local precedent and a compositional mode tested and known by his fellow Finns. He wrote that its aesthetic offered comfort, flexibility, a vital formal language (especially of roofs) that made, as Aalto noted, ‘a contact with nature that has remained fresh, a kind of struggle for survival’,<sup>45</sup> plus biological overtones, and a connectedness to site, topography and nature. Aalto wrote, showing awareness of his own skills and leanings: ‘The Karelian village at its best makes instinctive use of topography, views and other terrain features . . . This is, in the best sense, planning adapted to Finnish nature.’<sup>46</sup> There was also an element of common sense, and the common man: everyday rural Finns had built the houses from forest logs and little else, for

centuries.<sup>47</sup> The Finnish vernacular farmhouse opens a window into a sophisticated aesthetic that clearly appealed to Aalto, one that also offers a further means to understand both the ideas, and potentially the appeal, of his house architecture.

#### 6.2.4 *Aitta*: a natural solution

The 1928 *Aitta* magazine ‘Merry-Go-Round’ house, a competition entry, was described by Schildt as a ‘summer villa’, resembling ‘a flat round cheese with the rooms huddled in a circle around an open inner courtyard’.<sup>48</sup> Aalto’s drawings (Fig.9a) show a circular building with a flat, stone-paved courtyard containing a tree, overlooked by small windows, and with its 250° circular geometry completed by a curtain rod and curtain.



**Figure 9** *Aitta* courtyard house. **9a.** Competition drawings. **9b.** Enlarged view.  
(Drawings courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

In two sketches in Aalto’s competition entry, the summer house is located high on a hilly site; in one, the proposed villa looks like a helmet monitoring a lake view from a wooded hill (Fig.9b), much like the Muuratsalo house in numerous photographs (e.g., Fig.30). Aalto wrote in notes appended to the drawings that, ‘[t]he entry of sunlight into the rooms, the view and protection from the wind

suggested the round form for the building . . . The author was not looking for originality or unusual effects, but for a natural solution.<sup>49</sup>

The image of a monitoring helmet also combines security and outlook, the complementary factors of Appleton's prospect-refuge theory. Marc Treib notes that, despite its minute scale, the *Aitta* courtyard house 'embodied many of the ideas proposed in Aalto's early articles, and its diagram would inform many of his designs for years to come.'<sup>50</sup> The illustration also contains the Muuratsalo elements of harbour, forest, and hillside proximity to still water.<sup>51</sup> A similar sketch (Fig.10), drawn from a similar angle, also denuded of greenery, depicts the Muuratsalo house as a dramatic wedge overlooking an uncannily similar lakeside landscape.<sup>52</sup>



**Figure 10** Muuratsalo. Perspective view from water. Sketch by Alvar Aalto.  
(Drawings courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

It is possible (though not mentioned in the literature) that the *Aitta* drawings (above) indicate that Aalto may have had the Muuratsalo site in his mind for decades before building the summer house.

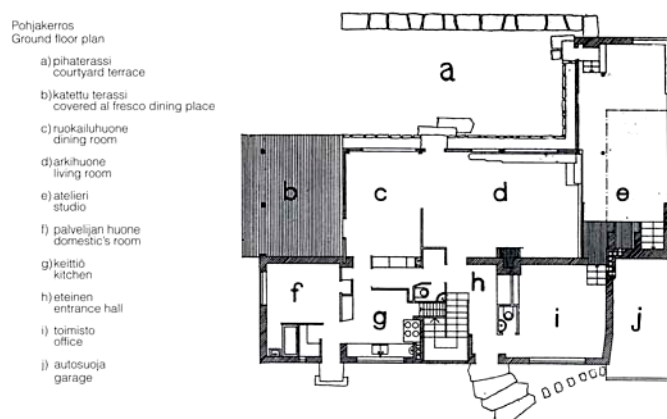
### **6.2.5 Aalto House, Helsinki: home and office**

In 1934-36 Alvar and Aino Aalto built a house on a block of land falling south to open land, in the prosperous Helsinki suburb of Munkkiniemi. The house, Aalto's first project in Helsinki, was built for family living and also contained the Aaltos'

professional office.<sup>53</sup> Louna Lahti remarks that planning and construction of this house was significant, and ‘assumed a key position for Aalto’s planning principles and view of living.’<sup>54</sup>

A white-painted brick wall encloses the garden from the street along the northern boundary; a rustic timber fence defines southern and western boundaries. The ground floor houses kitchen, dining, and lounge rooms, and architectural office rooms; family bedrooms, lounge and a terrace are upstairs. The house plan is assembled of squarish rooms, settled around south-facing indoor and outdoor gathering places, with the rectangle of the office wing beside (Fig.11). A courtyard is developed between the two wings, partly paved, with a low stone wall, flower gardens, lawn and ornamental square pond. Weston describes the house scheme as ‘developed using a two-storey L-shaped volume, from which [Aalto] managed to carve a surprisingly complex building.’<sup>55</sup> The architects’ office abuts the living room, up two steps, behind a large sliding door/petition.

Schildt observes that work was essential to the program of the house, an imperative reflected in the plan where the ‘intermingling of living and working facilities demonstrates Aalto’s attitude to the integration of art and everyday life, and gives expression to his view of work as the meaning of life for the harmonious human being.’<sup>56</sup>



**Figure 11** Aalto House, Helsinki. Ground floor plan.  
(Drawings courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

Markku Lahti also remarks that in the house, ‘working and living are joined effortlessly to each other.’<sup>57</sup> However, plans and photographs of the Munkkiniemi house seem to suggest that the dwelling and the office, rather than ‘intermingling’ or ‘integrating’, may be more like separate buildings, of different styles, jammed beside each other, on different floor levels, under different roofs (Fig. 11). The office is a long, thin, tall, intense volume, axially aligned north-south, with a structurally daring corner window looking beyond to the southwest as much as into the garden. The room is inwardly focused on professional activity, with high windows to the east, and a reflex angle ceiling (predating the ceilings in the bedroom wing at Muuratsalo); a narrow upper balcony accessed by a steep stair is perched, extraordinarily, on top of the fireplace.<sup>58</sup> The ‘family home’, by comparison, is relatively loosely assembled around south-facing domestic rooms with seats and open fires, places for relaxation and outlook over the paved courtyard and generous garden (Fig. 12).



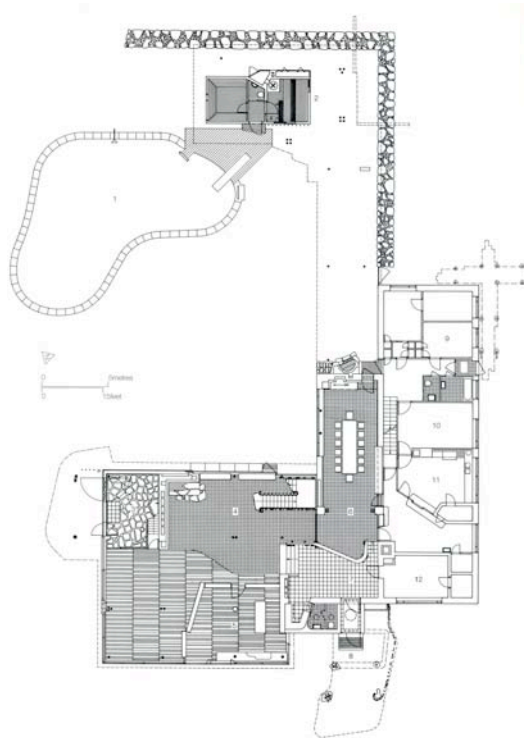
**Figure 12** Aalto house, Helsinki. Garden (south) view. Studio to far left.  
(Photograph courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

Aspects of the house—for example the L-plan, the juxtaposed elements, the vertical external timber, the valley roof, the courtyard, the central sunny room, the inside/outside connection, the debt to Finnish vernacular architecture—seem to

foreshadow later architectural explorations in the Villa Mairea and the Muuratsalo house.

#### 6.2.6 Villa Mairea: icon of modernity

Aalto's Villa Mairea, Noormarkku (1937-39) is described by Pallasmaa as 'surely one of the most charged residential icons of modernity'.<sup>59</sup> Schildt describes Aalto's philosophy as symbolizing 'a way of life that is both industrially based and Nature-oriented'.<sup>60</sup> Embodying this philosophy, the Villa Mairea 'alludes constantly, and strikingly, to man's relationship with the nature around him, with its column-like pine trunks and rolling terrain'.<sup>61</sup> Forest and landform, both real and artificial, are central symbols in the house design, evaluated by Schildt as 'undisputedly the crowning achievement in the young Aalto's architectural oeuvre'.<sup>62</sup>



**Figure 13** Villa Mairea, Noormarkku. Ground floor plan.  
(Drawing courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

The house, a fulltime country residence, was conceived by Aalto and his young, wealthy, socially progressive, art-loving clients, Harry and Maire Gullichsen, as an ‘experimental house’.<sup>63</sup> The clients gave Aalto an effectively free hand in its design; Maire Gullichsen reportedly said, ‘We told him that he should regard it as an experimental house; if it didn’t work out, we wouldn’t blame him for it.’<sup>64</sup>

The Villa Mairea plan (Fig.13) is built around a four-part program of work (Harry Gullichsen’s office/library on the ground floor, Maire’s painting studio upstairs) and play (living room and tearoom, courtyard and sauna), dining, and sleeping (parents, children and guests upstairs). The L-plan, hinged about the entry and stairs, consists of a service wing (dining room, dining veranda and kitchen, plus servants’ quarters) and a large, open living wing opening onto a grassed courtyard with a swimming pool, partly bounded by a grassed berm and a low stone wall, with a sod-roofed sauna opposite the living room (Fig.14).



**Figure 14** Villa Mairea. View from south. Sauna to left. Note rustic gate and earth berm.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

Architect Kristian Gullichsen, son of the clients, remarked that Aalto introduced ‘biomorphic and ethnographic accents’ in the Villa Mairea, as a counter to ‘techno-utopia’: ‘Biological forms and materials, together with the picturesque vernacular, playfully collide here with concrete, steel, and glass.’<sup>65</sup> Pallasmaa points out the landscape agenda of the house design: ‘the Villa Mairea is the finest

example of Aalto's "forest architecture", an architecture woven into its forest context and reflecting the randomly rhythmic and flowing space of the Finnish landscape.'<sup>66</sup> Treib holds that the villa's entire living area 'can be read as a forest architecturally transformed';<sup>67</sup> the landscape metaphor of forest prevails over that of geology or topography. Louna Lahti also recognizes the artificial landscape of the Villa Mairea courtyard: 'a broad bright view of the interior court opens up, which one can conceive of as an allegory of a Finnish beach landscape, with a stone wall and a sauna. To the south the view is delimited by a small, artificially shaped hill.'<sup>68</sup>

The notion of a 'refined humanized forest'<sup>69</sup> sums up Treib's judgement on Aalto's entire body of work, seen overall as 'the making of a sublime forest, constructed for the "little man," denying any grand formal scheme in deference to accommodating human activity and the nature of the site.'<sup>70</sup> The metaphorical forest houses the 'little man' in a harmonious setting, mediating between the natural world and the universal, everyday human.

Pallasmaa introduces his extensive 1998 essay 'Image and Meaning' by remarking that the Villa Mairea 'was to become a social and architectural experiment, as well as a token of the optimistic spirit of the open society.'<sup>71</sup> He also postulates that the house exemplifies 'fragile architecture' (as discussed in Chapter 4), as a design based not on a single dominant idea, but rather on 'the idea of an additive and episodic ensemble that grows detail by detail from below.'<sup>72</sup> This notion recalls Glanville's comments on the agglutinative planning of the Karelian farmstead (discussed earlier in this chapter).



**Figure 15** Villa Mairea. North (front) elevation.  
Richard Weston, *Alvar Aalto: Villa Mairea* (London: Phaidon, 1992)

Porphyrios discusses the Villa Mairea in terms of its metaphoric character, comparing the haptic experience of entry from the country (along a track) with the predominantly visual experience of approach from the city (along a road).<sup>73</sup> From the country or forest, one walks through a timber gate (Fig.14) into the domain of the courtyard, a rustic setting of stone walls and paving, with a large leaning pine, a grass mound, a pool, logs, timber planks, and the primitive shed of the sauna. By contrast, driving up from the city, one sees, high on the hilltop, white stucco, monitoring windows, polished timber and a *porte-cochère* entry (Fig.15). Porphyrios describes how Aalto entertains both experiences; opposites are assembled in one vast metaphoric work of art, almost orgiastic in its sensuous shape-shifting: ‘structural columns, decorative orders, wooden posts, and the tree-trunks of the forest in the background merge in an adulterous affair of incessant metaphoric substitution.’<sup>74</sup>

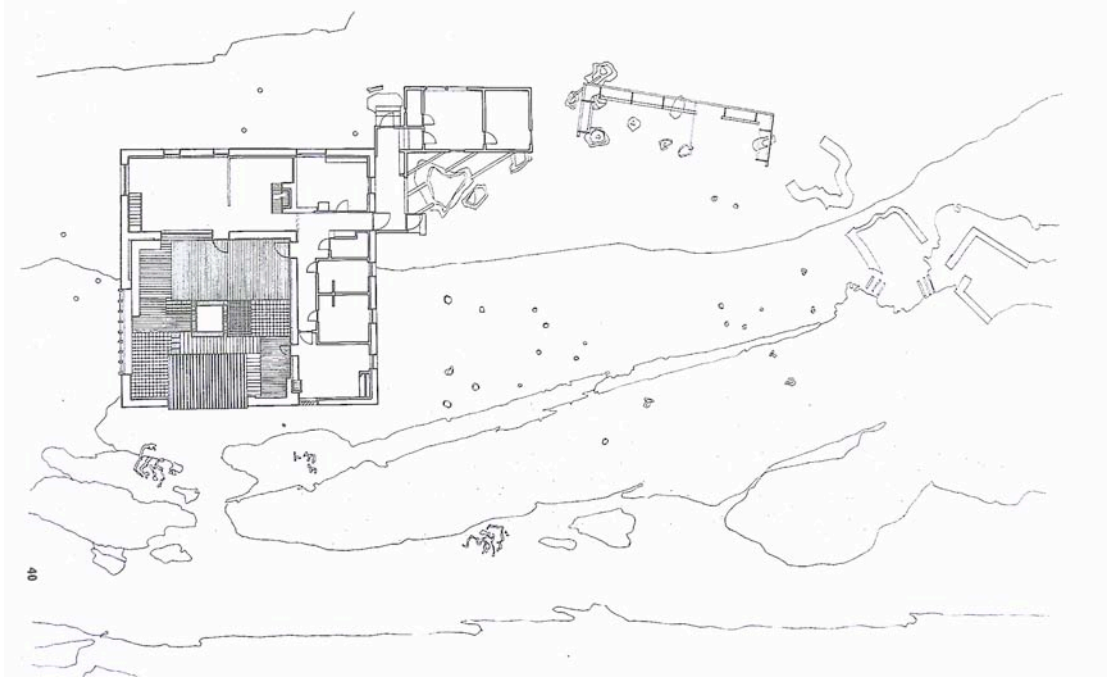
To Porphyrios the house typifies the continuing Enlightenment debate between nature and civilization, ‘which has not ceased to animate Western thought . . . between rusticity and the man-made; between the country and the city; between primitive shed and civil habitat.’<sup>75</sup> The notion of ‘debate’ also suggests doubt as to whether opposites might be resolved or fused in Aalto’s work; if ‘heterotopia’ concerns co-existence of diverse elements, the rich architectural experience of

which may depend on the difference of things, rather than their resolution or fusion, then, as Porphyrios suggests, ‘what to our eyes seems but a mere classificatory disorder, could very well be but “another” kind of order’.<sup>76</sup> Porphyrios, in observing the ‘hybrid compositional principles’—the disorder—of the Villa Mairea,<sup>77</sup> portrays the house as a multifaceted experimental setting, where an L-plan, based only on working, playing, dining and sleeping, frames an architectural laboratory of heterogeneous materials, spaces, thoughts, and experiences.

Architecture may not be obliged to resolve, simplify or fuse heterogeneous elements; its task may be to attain richness by juxtaposing or assembling heterogeneous elements on a common level. The aesthetics of prospect and refuge may similarly be intensified and enriched, rather than simply unified or fused, by acceptance and negotiation of differences between the two complementary qualities.

#### **6.2.7 Muuratsalo summer house: an Experimental House**

Amongst other things, the Muuratsalo summer house provided Aalto with an architectural research base—for experimentation with composition, materials, technology, and nature—and a conscious attempt to unite play and the evolution of dwelling design (Fig.16). Describing the role of play in the Muuratsalo house, he wrote that ‘an instinctive feeling has taken root in me, that we, in the midst of our hard-working, calculating, utilitarian era, must regard play as of decisive importance when we build communities for people—large children.’<sup>78</sup>



**Figure 16** Muuratsalo House. Floor plan with outbuildings. North to top of plan.  
(Drawings courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

Aalto's optimistic experimentation was not only scientific; the 'play' at Muuratsalo, Aalto's retreat, paradise, honeymoon cottage and laboratory, was actual, and even had metaphysical overtones. Aalto's mysticism, metaphysics, and even mischief are evident in a 1955 speech to architects in Vienna. Relating an anecdote about how a brick in Frank Lloyd Wright's hand was, according to Wright, 'worth its weight in gold', Aalto followed with an account of his own brick experiments:

Architecture is about turning a worthless brick to gold. In Finland, we have difficulties with this process of alchemy. We tried to build a laboratory house to set the process in motion. We built several experimental walls from different types of brick, and during the days we spent there we had the opportunity to talk to those bricks a little.<sup>79</sup>

The experimentation at the Muuratsalo 'laboratory house' was to have been in architectural structure, materials and solar thermal technology, located, as Aalto wrote, 'where the proximity to nature can give fresh inspiration.'<sup>80</sup>

The theme of combining pleasure and work reappears in Jari and Sirkkaliisa Jetsonen's *Finnish Summer Houses* (2008), where Aalto is quoted as saying, 'Between swims I can work completely in peace.'<sup>81</sup> The summer house was a retreat for work and art, as well as peace, conviviality and relaxation. Aalto made space for architectural work and for painting, providing room for drawing boards under the loft, and a painting atelier above; he is also photographed using the tiled recess in the courtyard's east wall as a *plein-air* painting easel (Fig.22).

### **6.3 Aalto, landscape and site**

#### **6.3.1 A kind of town**

For British historian Alan Colquhoun, it is the town, rather than the forest, which distinguishes Aalto's vision, a social vision as much as it was an environmental or poetic comprehension of the architectural task. Colquhoun wrote in 1978:

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of Aalto's work, and one which seems related to his study of Italian towns, is the way in which he strives to make each building into a social microcosm . . . in Aalto the subsidiary elements are freely grouped around the central core. The building becomes a kind of town, whose outer elements take up their positions as if through a tropism.<sup>82</sup>

Colquhoun implies Aalto's aspiration to embody social ideals in a building, a valuable idea for seeing the Muuratsalo house as an urban ideal—a whole, not a mere 'fragment'—given its square geometry, its brick walls and gateway, and its hard, dry forecourt, in contrast to the sensuous forest 'fragments' of the Villa Mairea.<sup>83</sup>

For Aalto, the northern Italian hill town was special: it represented 'the purest, most individual, and most natural form in urban design.'<sup>84</sup> In an essay in 1925 he described his vision for his home town of Jyväskylä: 'One of the surest criteria that enables us to evaluate the culture of a modern town is its market square.'<sup>85</sup>

Earlier in 1925 he had also written, as part of his 'mission' to bring Mediterranean civilization to central Finland: 'Whoever lives in Jyväskylä and has travelled through Tuscany . . . will certainly have noticed how a building placed on a hilltop or mountainside can give life to a landscape by bringing out its scale.'<sup>86</sup>

Göran Schildt wrote of Aalto's youthful ideals: 'Finland as a Northern reflection of the Mediterranean civilization, a modern version of the early Tuscan Renaissance on the shores of Lake Päijänne, Jyväskylä as a new Florence.'<sup>87</sup> Aalto's comments may have taken nearly thirty years to bear fruit, but it was ultimately in the siting and the planning of the Muuratsalo house that Aalto was able to enliven the landscape with his 'building placed on a hilltop or mountainside' in the Mediterranean manner.

### **6.3.2 Aalto's architecture as landscape: Frampton**

In 1985 in *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*,<sup>88</sup> Frampton posited Aalto as a maker of 'organic' architecture, within St John Wilson's 'Other Tradition' of European modernist architecture, along with Hans Scharoun and Hugo Häring.<sup>89</sup> In his 1998 Aalto centenary essay 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto', Frampton develops the 'organic' idea into a more complex hybrid notion encompassing Aalto's organic, biological, humanist and landscape principles, a notion germinated in the early 1930s when Aalto 'came upon the Modern Movement when its pioneers had already established a zero-degree functionalism against which he could react in humanist and organic terms.'<sup>90</sup> Frampton uses the terms biomorphic, bio-realist, and psycho-physiological to qualify Aalto's architecture, and quotes Aalto's use of terms such as 'biodynamic functions', 'biological conditions for human life', and 'organic growing shapes', applied to both dwelling and town planning;<sup>91</sup> Aalto's usage of 'biological' in 1930 referred to that which was life-giving and healthful, rather than standard things.<sup>92</sup>

Aalto's aim, as presented by Frampton, was to provide optimum dwelling conditions by using biological and organic principles to design apartments within

blocks, setting the blocks in appropriate compositions (such as fans and fingers) on contoured sites, which in turn were to be located in ‘forest towns’, thus creating an ‘all but mythical’ ecological ideal for urbanization which, speculates Frampton, ‘would come to be universally adopted... as a kind of regional Gaia system.’<sup>93</sup> Aalto wrote, ‘The landscape . . . is of course also of the utmost importance as an aesthetic point of departure for our town plans.’<sup>94</sup> This broad ideal lies at the base of Frampton’s connection (noted in Chapter 3) between Aalto’s humanist, bio-realist approach, and the theme of landscape: ‘His intuitive, biomorphically inspired approach to environmental design caused him to place an enormous emphasis on the capacity of built form to modify equally both the landscape and the urban fabric’.<sup>95</sup> In this approach, dwelling units aggregated as buildings are the biological entities, biomorphic urban elements ‘constituted as topographic structures’<sup>96</sup> composed *with* the landscape, as Frampton writes, ‘in such a way that one could not discern with certainty where building ended and context began.’<sup>97</sup>

Thus Aalto’s apparently casual, intuitive strategy for placing buildings in the landscape is a conception spanning from individual to national scale—from the ‘little man’ in his apartment (designed to incorporate biologically necessary space, air, and orientation) to the forest town in the Finnish landscape, a whole vision, ‘a critically realistic view in which ecologically tempered tracts of regional urbanization would become the universal norm’.<sup>98</sup> Seen in this way, as a fusion of nature and culture at ascending scales, Aalto’s strategies would appear to conjoin biological material to landscape material within a single scope, for the improvement of human life—a strategy for an ‘earthly Paradise for people’.<sup>99</sup>

It follows that Frampton’s determination, that ‘[Aalto’s] achievements as an architect cannot be separated at any stage of his career from his capacity as a designer of landscapes’,<sup>100</sup> can have meaning at the scale of the room, the dwelling, the forest town, even Finland, and that landscape, both as specific setting and as material for transformation, is an essential element of Aalto’s architectural production and thinking, and helps frame an enduring picture of the

architect as inextricably linked to landscape and the natural world. Frampton quotes a 1988 Finnish article on Aalto's town planning: 'The unique beauty of Finnish nature is not based on luxuriant growth or colours or enormous scale. Our nature is marked by a realistic beauty, and should be kept that way.'<sup>101</sup> This view of landscape is not 'picturesque' but real, and no less unique or appealing.

Frampton assumes that natural landscapes are made of tangible biological elements—a different assumption to Cosgrove's idea of landscape as a 'construction'.<sup>102</sup> It is an important assumption for architectural history that Frampton should adopt landscape (something natural, biological and topographic) as a paradigm for understanding Aalto's legacy:

Thus, the ultimate significance of Aalto's work for the coming century resides in his conviction that built work always has to be rendered, in large measure, as a landscape, thereby fusing and *confusing* both figure and ground, in a ceaseless interplay between natural constraint and cultural ingenuity. This surely is the critical essence of what Aalto leaves to us.<sup>103</sup>

Aalto's relevance, according to Frampton, lies in the critical value of his integration of building and site, and in an implied ontology of architecture understood as landscape, a natural reality more than a cultural construct, as the central locus for Aalto's synthesis of nature and culture.

### **6.3.3 Aalto's architecture as landscape: Curtis' mythic landscapes**

William J. R. Curtis makes landscape a central trope of his contemporary view of Aalto in his 1998 centenary essay 'Paysages Mythiques / Mythic Landscapes'.<sup>104</sup> It seems fair to ask, What is 'mythic' about landscape for Aalto? and, How does an idea of 'mythic landscapes' contribute to an understanding of Aalto's house architecture?

Curtis claims that Aalto was able ‘to touch upon a certain universality in both the medium of architecture and the human condition’;<sup>105</sup> hence, it might be assumed, the idea of a universal ‘myth’, cast perhaps in the medium of the landscape. The buildings are said to be ‘distillations of a kind, fusing function and structure, idea and form, matter and myth, and they touch the mind and senses on numerous levels.’<sup>106</sup> Analyzing the Villa Mairea, Curtis relates its ‘biomorphic abstraction’ to lakes, the female form, and the tropical gardens of Brazilian landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx.<sup>107</sup> Curtis’ formal comparison appears to be a process of symbolizing nature; Appleton’s prospect-refuge theory also involves symbolization of natural landscape forms (see Chapter 7).

The challenge for Aalto, according to Curtis, was to symbolize ideas about nature;<sup>108</sup> to this end, Aalto devised a series of ‘polarities’ to deal with ‘the contrast between the “civilized” and the “primitive”, the “urban” and the “rural”, the “artificial” and the “natural.”’<sup>109</sup> Aalto found architectural means to fuse these polarities in his house architecture: at Muuratsalo, the ‘civilized’ terrace and square geometry along with the ‘primitive’ fire pit and grassy steps; and the urban fragments of patterned brick wall, tiled roof edges, and portal opening, transported to a remote forest setting.

Assuming landscapes to be formed by both natural and artificial processes, Curtis maintains that ‘in Finland the landscape is an ever present force in daily life’, in town and city, and in collective life and mentality.<sup>110</sup> Curtis terms this construct ‘social landscape’,<sup>111</sup> a relationship of built form to natural topography by steps, level changes and contours, as in the Säynätsälo Town Hall project (1945-52).



**Figure 17** Saynatsalo Town Hall. Left: Corridor and courtyard. Right: Northern stairs to courtyard.  
(Photographs J. Roberts 2008)

In this ‘social landscape’ are woven together local, classical and Mediterranean versions of built forms, landscape ideas and social ideals (Fig.17). If, as Curtis claimed, a basic Aalto theme is ‘the origins of architecture in the forms of the land’,<sup>112</sup> then landscape approaches a myth of beginnings. Fusions, polarities, contrasts, social landscapes, symbols and myths are selected elements of what Curtis describes as Aalto’s ‘new world with its proper language’, for which ‘nature was an inspiration in the search for an order beyond the arbitrary’.<sup>113</sup>

The understanding of Aalto’s house architecture is enriched by Curtis’ interpretation of buildings in ‘mythic landscape’ terms: a house can be a universal statement as much as a personal refuge; Curtis also facilitates the idea of understanding architecture as though it were landscape, or close to landscape, or fused in contrast with landscape. Following Curtis, the elements of the Muuratsalo house may be interpreted as items of a ‘social landscape’, embodying a range of archaic, classical, modern, personal and regional ideals.

#### **6.3.4 The landscape of ideas**

Three articles written by Alvar Aalto in the 1920s—‘The Hilltop Town’ (1924); ‘Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland’ (1925); and ‘From doorstep to living room’ (1926)—indicate the scope of his early ideas about the city, the house and landscape, all in the context of his vision for Finland.<sup>114</sup> The young

architect's essays test his ideas of a course for himself and his country towards and through Modernism; that the essays are still extensively quoted and discussed over eighty years later confirms Aalto's foresight. In these essays Aalto discusses the role of the Italian hill town in his architectural formation, the influence of the northern forest and the Finnish topography, and possibilities of the relationship between interior rooms and immediate outdoor spaces.

Quantrill introduced his idea of the 'urban fragment' in *The Environmental Memory* (1987), arguing that Aalto's work had its origins in 'the organic informality of building groups' from three sources: Finnish vernacular architecture, the designs of the National Romantic Movement, and the spatial irregularity of the Italian *piazze*.<sup>115</sup> Aalto travelled to Italy often from the early 1920s, and seems to have retained a lifelong enthusiasm for Alberti, Brunelleschi, Palladio, and the Baroque architecture of Borromini.<sup>116</sup> Quantrill outlines how Aalto incorporated 'urban fragments' in his architectural synthesis by resorting to 'his "dreaming consciousness" of remembered environments.'<sup>117</sup> Quantrill observes that the idea of the small Italian piazza 'was to remain an important image in his environmental memory for the next four decades' from 1930.<sup>118</sup> Quantrill also discusses the red brick ('a material tradition that goes back five thousand years')<sup>119</sup> and the urban square—as at Säynätsalo—as memory-laden urban fragments, and as 'permanences', reminiscent in material and plan, 'of the Middle Ages in Italy and the Baltic tradition of brickwork.'<sup>120</sup> Aalto's use of red brick and the urban square at Muuratsalo carry with them associations, memories and reminiscences—legible architectural references to the diverse and ancient 'cultural' underpinnings of the Muuratsalo house.

### **6.3.5 The Italian hill town**

Aalto saw nature in a number of ways. Nature could be embodied at a biological level as 'cells and tissues', like the human body: 'Nature, biology, has rich and luxurious forms . . . man's life belongs in the same category.'<sup>121</sup> Aalto also saw nature at large scale as landscape, a setting for potentially beautiful towns and

buildings. In 1925 he wrote, in a polemical article on the landscape of Central Finland (setting for Säynätsalo Town Hall and the Muuratsalo house) that, ‘The landscape (I use this word, since it is best adapted to characterize nature as an object of our perception) is of course also of the utmost importance when we try to plan our towns in an aesthetically satisfactory way.’<sup>122</sup>

Such a combination of the terms landscape, nature, perception and aesthetic satisfaction (admittedly in translation) may be read as Aalto equating ‘nature’ with ‘landscape’, and emphasizing the aesthetic importance of landscape to planning and architecture. Aalto saw and knew nature not as an abstraction, but as a reality of topography, geology, vegetation, animals, and climate—experienced by people. Aalto’s experiences of hunting and surveying put him at ease with concepts of landscape, biology, and survival; he was an informed authority on Finnish nature and landscape. To complement his local passion, he spoke with both idealism and artistic insight when he mentioned Tuscan towns and landscapes: Aalto had seen towns, villas, public squares, gardens, churches, and paintings in northern Italy and had read Goethe; he was a cultured, travelled, European architect with a creative agenda. Weston claims: ‘For Aalto, Italian hill towns offered a paradigm of such harmonious accommodation between man and nature. The town was subservient to the topography, which was in turn heightened by man’s intervention—a cultural symbiosis.’<sup>123</sup> Aalto was able to fuse his understanding of and feeling for Finland, its landscape and architectural history, with his passion for Italy and classical traditions. The synthesis of these elements is evident in the ideas and forms of the Muuratsalo house.

#### **6.3.6 Levelled land**

A close study of Western attitudes to buildings, site and landscape has been made by historian David Leatherbarrow, who formed a concept of ‘topography’, discussed at length in *Topographical Stories* (2004).<sup>124</sup> In an earlier essay ‘Leveling the Land’ (1999) he reflects on cultural significances of levelled terrain in ancient, Renaissance, and modern Western settings.<sup>125</sup> Leatherbarrow aims to

demonstrate ‘the interplay between the technical and ethical aspects of leveled land, for that is where the real drama of place building is carried out.’<sup>126</sup> He looks at the significance of a dry, flat surface, as an aspect of place-making, and for its importance to civic life: ‘platform construction was, in some societies, accorded political significance on the premise that site-building prefigures city-building or sets the stage for public life.’<sup>127</sup> He describes a mythical aspect of the flattened floor, where, in Homer’s *Iliad*, Achilles’ shield depicted a *chora* or dancing floor:

Making a dancing deck such as this meant making a *human* textile, a society, a city. In Homeric myth, people were woven together once the vertical parts of place had been sewn into one—that is, once an artificial platform joined subsoil and sky . . . In ancient Sparta, the *agora*, or town center, was called *choros*, or dancing floor. On this level, the decisions of the *polis* were acted out.<sup>128</sup>

Leatherbarrow’s ideas illuminate Quantrill’s notion of the ‘urban fragment’ from a landscape perspective, informed by classical learning and architectural knowledge: at the centre of urban architecture’s classical roots, the nexus of Greek myth and (ancient and Renaissance) Rome—to which Aalto made frequent architectural pilgrimages<sup>129</sup>—paradoxically, Leatherbarrow seeks ‘the possibility of recovering a fuller sense of landscape.’<sup>130</sup> While Leatherbarrow does not seem to have written on Aalto, this article helps illuminate the significance of Aalto’s activity in locating the Muuratsalo courtyard house on its sloping, rocky, propitiously oriented parcel of Finnish forest land,<sup>131</sup> then composing the house partly by importation of urban, mythic and landscape elements.

Aalto yearned throughout his life to make highly civilized forest towns in the landscape of Finland, in the wilderness that he had experienced and seen surveyed as a boy.<sup>132</sup> From Leatherbarrow’s ideas it is possible to construct a view of Aalto’s Muuratsalo house as a civic microcosm combining landscape symbolism with mythic urban symbolism, joining nature and culture.

## **6.4 Aesthetics**

### **6.4.1 Aalto's architectural aesthetics**

Aalto's architectural aesthetics involved landscape, the Mediterranean, ancient and historic typology, ruins, the garden, paradise, selected contemporary architecture, and a mission to experiment. Aalto is also credited with anti-modern compositional strategies involving ideas of complexity and heterotopia, concavity and convexity, site and materials. Aalto's own writings and a range of critical opinions reveal a broad but selective aesthetic framework. Porphyrios offers particularly valuable historical insight into Aalto's aesthetics, describing Aalto's work in terms of scientific, aesthetic and ethical 'valorizations' of nature. The topics discussed below introduce aspects of Aalto's aesthetic framework.

### **6.4.2 Experiment and laboratory**

Aalto named his summer house Koetalo Muuratsalo—'Experimental House at Muuratsalo', as he titled his essay on the house when it appeared in *Arkkitehti* magazine and in *Collected Works Vol I*.<sup>133</sup> In 1955, in a speech given at his induction into the Finnish Academy, Aalto reflected on the possibility that Finland might be a kind of 'laboratory' for modes of living for the industrialized world:

Perhaps we will find a solution by which art with roots in a certain national milieu can at the same time be relevant to a wider field. Of course I don't mean that we should design our cities, our houses, and our objects, according to folkloric precedents or language divisions. But there is a deeper, perhaps mystical domiciliary right for thought and work which builds upon the popular psyche and on purely geographic conditions. The possibility occurs to one that such a small country as Finland could be used as a kind of laboratory to produce on a small scale things that the larger nations cannot make in their giant laboratories. Such a possibility exists, especially in the matter of the human environment: the shaping of cities, the countryside, dwelling complexes and units with dimensions of

human proportion. To this could be linked the manufacture of finished products, and experiments would aim at testing the articles' suitability for 'the little man'.<sup>134</sup>

It seems Aalto saw experimentation almost as an ethical obligation, for Finland as for himself, on behalf of the 'little man'; he identified and felt he was attuned to 'the popular psyche', and knew and understood from life experience the 'geographic conditions' of Finland. This idea of experimentation towards an idealized outcome extended back at least to the Villa Mairea (as noted earlier in this chapter), and was made explicit in the concept of the Muuratsalo house, 'an experimental centre where one can expect to try experiments that are not ready to be tried elsewhere'.<sup>135</sup> The idea of experiment can be seen as a defining characteristic of Aalto's architectural work, especially his house architecture.

#### **6.4.3 From doorstep to living room**

Aalto wrote an essay in 1926 titled 'From Doorstep to Living Room'.<sup>136</sup> The essay, suggesting new ways of living in the Finnish climate, is partly about an atrium house project for his brother, where Aalto shows means of linking the house interior with its surroundings.<sup>137</sup> Aalto would later build many of the ideas set out in the essay into his own house at Muuratsalo.

The ancient form of the courtyard, and the domestic type of the courtyard house, present an opportunity to reflect on relations between architecture and landscape. Aalto wrote in 1921, 'Nothing old is ever reborn. But it never completely disappears either. And anything that has ever been always re-emerges in a new form.'<sup>138</sup> Menin and Samuel relate the Muuratsalo courtyard to archetypes (the Finnish vernacular farmstead, the Roman courtyard), to nature and to atavistic behaviours:

The house is, according to the season, introverted or extroverted. Its relationship with nature is seasonally mediated by the courtyard, at the

heart of which is the sunken fire-pit, signifying the oldest actions of humankind in relation to nature.<sup>139</sup>

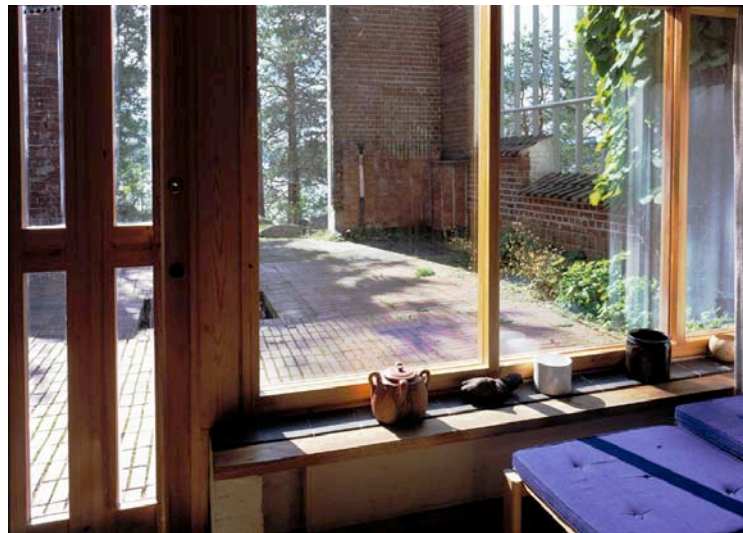
Menin and Samuel understand the courtyard as a room without a ceiling, where Aalto ‘uses the physical sky rather than creating its metaphysical kin’.<sup>140</sup> Skies—real, metaphysical, and artificial—characterize Aalto’s gathering spaces, auditoria, courtyards, reading rooms and atria, throughout his career, from the painted ceiling of the Jyväskylä Workers’ Club (1924-25) to the undulating ‘acoustic’ ceilings of the Viipuri City Library (1933) and the Maison Carré (1956), to the sky ceilings of outdoor amphitheatres at the Aalto studio, Helsinki (1956) and Jyväskylä University (1962), and the ground level foyer of the Hansaviertel Apartments, Berlin (1954), with its Arp-like painted cloud ceiling. The roofless room of Muuratsalo also recalls the ‘sky ceiling’ in Asplund’s Skandia Cinema (Fig.1). Menin and Samuel regard the courtyard in functional terms, as a ‘seasonally limited room’, fully used in summer, but becoming an inward-turning ‘interior landscape’ in the cold of winter.<sup>141</sup>

Menin and Samuel recognize the extent to which Aalto underpinned numerous principles of the Muuratsalo house with ideas set out in his 1926 article ‘From Doorstep to Living Room’. They describe an architectural strategy that aimed to integrate inside and outside, and which ‘sought out examples of buildings from the past where the relationship between exterior and interior was blurred.’<sup>142</sup> For Aalto the past, whether actual—as in the Pompeiian atrium house—or ideally depicted—as in a Fra Angelico *Annunciation* (Fig.18)—was as suitable a source as the Modern. Aalto described the *Annunciation* painting as chosen for ‘very special reasons . . . the trinity of *human being, room and garden* shown in the picture makes it an unattainable ideal image of the home.’<sup>143</sup>



**Figure 18** Fra Angelico, *Annunciation* (c.1440-50).  
*Alvar Aalto: Villa Mairea*, edited by Juhani Pallasmaa  
 (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation/ Mairea Foundation, 1998).

This astute observation sums up an enduring pattern recurring in Aalto's houses (particularly those considered in this chapter): a courtyard or garden, just outside glazed living room windows, and a comfortable semi-enclosed room inside. This aesthetic seems to have in fact been attained by Aalto, at the Helsinki house, at the Villa Mairea, and at Muuratsalo (Fig.19).



**Figure 19** Muuratsalo house. View from living room south into courtyard.  
 (Photograph courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

The image of the Villa Mairea interior, spanning living room, fireplace, stairs, windows and courtyard is one of twentieth-century architecture's enduring images (Fig.20). In the 'Doorstep' essay, Aalto also uses an image of Le Corbusier's 'Esprit Nouveau' pavilion from 1925, with a caption attesting to his admiration for the ambiguity of its interior and exterior spaces: 'Is it a hall, beautifully open to the exterior and taking its dominating character from the trees, or is it a garden built into the house, a garden room?'<sup>144</sup> The word 'beautifully' affirms the aesthetic value that Aalto attached to this combination of room and garden.



**Figure 20** Villa Mairea. Living room, stairs, fireplace.  
(Photograph courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

Treib observes that Aalto happily synthesised from diverse sources: 'There was no inherent contradiction in Aalto's mind about borrowing architectural ideas from prior cultures and alien places.'<sup>145</sup> Porphyrios notes similarly that Aalto borrowed eclectically, and claims that Aalto was 'not a true Modernist', and 'never understood or wanted to understand [Modernism's] axiomatic assumptions.' Porphyrios sees in Aalto's work 'his true nineteenth century mind—that is, a mind preoccupied with kaleidoscopic fragmentation, stylistic eclecticism, and reflections on the mediation of production.'<sup>146</sup>

The 'Doorstep to Living Room' essay is recognised by Schildt (who reprints it in *Alvar Aalto The Early Years*),<sup>147</sup> by Treib,<sup>148</sup> and by Menin and Samuel, who see it as anticipating future designs and as a kind of manifesto or theoretical

infrastructure for the design of (and now a key for unpacking) the Muuratsalo house and other works.<sup>149</sup> Aalto sets out and discusses numerous historic and contemporary architectural elements, which remarkably reappear in the Muuratsalo design over twenty-five years later: garden wall, hall, courtyard, inside-outside relationships, large openings, the Pompeian atrium house: all are arguably constituent elements of the young Aalto's ideal vision of an 'earthly paradise for people', and all are apparent in the synthesis of the Muuratsalo house.

#### **6.4.4 Aalto's concavities and Utzon's convexities**

Australian architect Brit Andresen recently commented in landscape terms on selected architectural strategies of Alvar Aalto and Jørn Utzon: 'Ancient gathering forms of hillside and valley underpin the architecture of both Alvar Aalto and Jørn Utzon.'<sup>150</sup> She compares the concavity of Aalto's 'poetic rooms'—atrium, book-lined room, theatre room, the 'tun or the small northern piazza', and the 'ruined room' of Muuratsalo—with the flattened convexity of Utzon's constructed raised platforms and artificial plateaus—the Sydney Opera House platform, the 'celestial plane' of the Bagsvaerd church, and the platform of the Majorca house Can Lis.<sup>151</sup> Andresen relates these forms to concave and convex topography, representing 'ancient gathering forms' of valleys and hillsides found in the architecture of Aalto and Utzon respectively, arguing that these 'oldest and most basic forms' are landscape analogues, valuable throughout human existence for their contribution to individual survival and social formation: 'Aalto's most poetic works tend to embrace ancient forms that gather us in towards a centre and Utzon's most memorable works are based on ancient forms that invite us to gaze outward towards the horizon.'<sup>152</sup>

In this reading, Aalto's work seems to be of the gathering, or in Appleton's terms, 'refuge' type, while Utzon's buildings, with their characteristic platforms, typify Appleton's 'prospect' of the horizon. In urban terms, Andresen writes of concave, gathering and containing forms found in Aalto's work: 'The public domain of the amphitheatre, the atrium and the piazza have a resonance within Western culture

that stirs memories of the oldest and most basic forms associated with gathering.’<sup>153</sup> The concavity of the Muuratsalo courtyard is part of this family, along with its atavistic echoes.

In Muuratsalo Andresen sees two summer houses: the ‘fugitive summerhouse’ containing conventional rooms and functions, and the ‘large, white, fractured form containing a single red room’, giving the appearance of a re-occupied ruin, a ‘grand palace now fallen into disrepair, discovered as a ruin and lately inhabited and patched up’.<sup>154</sup> Andresen has combined archaic forms and eternal human activity in her critical proposition that Aalto’s most memorable rooms ‘tend to embrace ancient forms that gather us toward a centre and the world of the interior’.<sup>155</sup> Aalto’s work is linked to the concave landform and the classical ruin, and connects with a human desire for centrality and conviviality, a complement of the contemplative solitude and exposure to sky, sea and horizon found on the platforms and plateaus of Utzon’s architecture.<sup>156</sup>

#### **6.4.5 Asplund, site and Aalto**

Peter Blundell Jones, in *Gunnar Asplund* (2006), points out that by the mid-1930s leading architects including Asplund (in his Stennäs summer house, 1937), Wright (in his Usonian houses), Le Corbusier (in his Petite Maison de Weekend, Paris, 1935), and Hugo Häring, Hans Scharoun, and Erich Mendelsohn, in various works, had begun to build houses using materials and modes of architectural expression other than the white render which had characterized the Functionalism and Purism of the 1920s: ‘Modernism was showing a distinctly vernacular tendency through the use of local materials.’<sup>157</sup>

Blundell Jones maintains that, for Asplund, consideration of the site, whether rural or urban, was ‘paramount’; he writes of three site-related Asplund projects, including the Stennäs summer house, where ‘the lightest touch’ was shown by the choice of the perfect spot for his summer villa, linking hill and shore, and absorbing the level changes with seeming effortlessness.

To transplant any of these elsewhere—the first test of contextual appropriateness—is unthinkable. If absent they would also leave their settings incomplete: the second test.<sup>158</sup>

This dual test, of whether or how the project needs the particular site, and how the site may benefit from ‘completion’ by the particular project, might also be applied to the Muuratsalo house, with its levels, views, openings, and its aspect from the lake approach.

Blundell Jones also mentions the issue of concavity, following a less atavistic and metaphysical interpretation of hollowed-out space than Brit Andresen (as discussed above).<sup>159</sup> Blundell Jones grants that while Aalto’s curves—of handrails, contours, or steps—in plan or section may ‘reflect a natural or biological source’,<sup>160</sup> concavity at a functional level ‘can indicate gathering together as opposed to flying apart, but it can also serve an optical or acoustic focus or a structural vault.’<sup>161</sup> The social function and associated feelings of the courtyard and fire were part of Aalto’s vision, and experience of the fire could trigger memories or images of the gathering of hunters around the fire on a winter night.<sup>162</sup>

#### **6.4.6 A damaged but still beating heart**

A somewhat melancholy account of the Muuratsalo house is given by New York architect Laurence Keith Loftin III who published a small volume on Alvar Aalto in 2005.<sup>163</sup> Loftin investigates a number of buildings, including the Muuratsalo house, from his own visits, and with reference to Weston’s *Alvar Aalto*.<sup>164</sup> His experience of the house forms the basis for reflections on themes of civilization, mortality, man/nature, landscape and ruins:

It is melancholy there . . . The place appears ruined, even abandoned. Standing in the apparently unfinished or repaired courtyard, looking out to distant views of gleaming water seen through the restless shadows of the surrounding forest, you almost shiver.<sup>165</sup>

Using a self-penned sketch, Loftin sees the deeply notched window openings of the eastern rear elevation as crenellations, implying ‘a faint association with the idea of castle, with protection and refuge.’<sup>166</sup> As well as refuge, Loftin reads the brick courtyard as an urban symbol, and sees in the house generally ‘melancholy in the contemplation of the rise and fall of civilisation’.<sup>167</sup>

Loftin also interprets the Muuratsalo house as a post-World War II ruin with a fire; referring to one of Aalto’s lecture images from 1941,<sup>168</sup> of a woman baking bread in the wreckage of her own war-ruined home, he quotes Aalto, describing the Muuratsalo house as a place where ‘Aalto built his own house as a “home without walls”, with a fire pit as a “damaged, but still beating heart.”’<sup>169</sup>

Menin has made poignant reference to Aalto’s psychological damage from the early loss of his mother, and to the vital refuge of the forest as an environment ‘against which the gaping psyche of a child could rage and scream, being sure of its embrace and constancy.’<sup>170</sup> The forest and its vernacular buildings provided a refuge and a basis for creativity; the refuge of creativity was a place where Aalto could draw together disparate phenomena into a single synthesis, and through a logic, described by Menin as ‘a phenomenon of “relation”’, which was, she argues, ‘quite different to that which conceived the tenets of Modernism.’<sup>171</sup> The refuge of Muuratsalo appears to have been ideal and real, metaphorical and symbolic, and connected to childhood experience; after World War II and his wife Aino’s traumatic death in 1949,<sup>172</sup> the Muuratsalo house appears to have provided refuge at various levels for Aalto.

#### **6.4.7 Aalto and postmodern discourse**

Architect and theorist Robert Venturi wrote on the occasion of Aalto’s death in 1976 that ‘Alvar Aalto’s work has meant the most to me of all the work of the Modern masters. It is for me the most moving, the most relevant, the richest source to learn from in terms of its art and technique.’<sup>173</sup> Venturi saw Aalto as

different from Mies van der Rohe and Wright, in composing an inclusive architecture of the ‘difficult whole’ through resolution of contradictory opposites—interior/exterior space, light and program demands, different front to rear conditions—and Aalto also dared to *not* simplify: ‘Aalto’s architecture acknowledges the difficult and subtle conditions of program, while “serene” architecture, on the other hand, works simplifications.’<sup>174</sup> Against Giedion’s categorization of Aalto as ‘irrational’<sup>175</sup> Venturi preferred to consider Aalto’s art ‘as contradictory rather than irrational—an artful recognition of the circumstantial and the contextual.’<sup>176</sup>

Following Venturi’s preference for complexity and tension over ‘serenity’, other, more theoretical, research has helped reveal and articulate complexities in Aalto’s methods and ideas. Porphyrios brought the paradigms of postmodern discourse to Aalto scholarship with *Sources of Modern Eclecticism* (1982), which, he averred, ‘is not a monograph on Aalto; instead, it aims at a critical reassessment of his work.’<sup>177</sup> More recently, Pallasmaa’s articles through the 1990s used a phenomenological paradigm to promote a theoretical view of architecture that paradoxically relates experience of architecture, especially that of Aalto, to the sensing body more than the thinking mind.<sup>178</sup>

#### **6.4.8 Porphyrios: scientific, aesthetic and ethical valorizations of nature**

Porphyrios opened up Aalto scholarship to new cultural discourse, using Foucault’s notion of *heterotopia* to describe Aalto’s compositional mode. Porphyrios maintains that Aalto was not a Modernist architect: ‘though labouring within the chronological brackets of Modernism, [Aalto] never understood or wanted to understand its axiomatic assumptions.’<sup>179</sup> Porphyrios is interested in formal composition as it articulates an avant-garde aesthetic of the object. Landscape is not a primary focus of Porphyrios’ work;<sup>180</sup> however, the role of nature in Aalto’s work is presented by Porphyrios in three guises: the *aesthetic* beauty of ‘unspoiled countryside’; the *scientific* variability of organic life; and as an *ethical* norm countering ‘the corrupt status of artificial and mechanized

society'.<sup>181</sup> Porphyrios allots the aesthetic, scientific and ethical values of nature, seen as a 'tactics' for Aalto, an entire chapter of his book.<sup>182</sup> Porphyrios' section on 'aesthetic valorization' claims that Aalto equated nature with both sensuous beauty and rational order:

In nature, Aalto found both the origins of a wisdom that standardizes and the solace of a picturesque variability. When dissected, nature yields its mathematical wisdom; in its phenomenal existence, it bathes in picturesque lusciousness . . . The architect should, therefore, understand nature's functioning while at the same time follow its appearances: he should grasp the principle of "variety" both as a mathematical relationship and a sensuous indulgence.<sup>183</sup>

At Muuratsalo, nature provides the 'sensuous indulgence'—the forest floor, the rocks, the lake views, the swimming and sunbathing; the compact, geometric house is located to indulge its users in the wisdom and luxury of nature.

## **6.5 Atavistic, primitive, biological**

### **6.5.1 Archaic figures**

The term atavism implies ancientness and ancestral beginnings.<sup>184</sup> Scully has defined, as the base of architecture, human action in relationship to the natural world: 'the larger reality still exists: the fact of nature, and of humanity's response to the challenge—the threat, the opportunity—that nature seems to offer in any given place.'<sup>185</sup> The archaic or atavistic figure may be seen dwelling in the foundation myths or beginnings of Western architecture: Rykwert's House of Adam in Paradise;<sup>186</sup> the primitive hut (of Laugier or Jung);<sup>187</sup> Scully's *megaron*;<sup>188</sup> Vitruvius;<sup>189</sup> and Rykwert's Roman town.<sup>190</sup> The founding myths of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were discussed in Chapter 3. Aalto, describing the courtyard at Säynätsalo, wrote, 'in parliament buildings and courthouses the court has preserved its inherited value from the time of ancient Crete, Greece and Rome to the Medieval and Renaissance periods.'<sup>191</sup>

While traceable in architectural history and in pre-historical speculations, atavism is also a fundamental notion of Appleton's prospect-refuge theory.<sup>192</sup> Appleton links atavism to 'the importance of the biological environment in landscape aesthetics.'<sup>193</sup> Appleton also connects atavism and hunting, assuming hunting as a survival activity, and an enjoyable one, which emerges 'as an important linking theme in the association between behaviour, landscape, and aesthetics.'<sup>194</sup> Appleton argues that the atavistic pleasure of hunting merges with perception of the landscape, into a single pleasurable experience of landscape, such that 'innate urges to satisfy primitive requirements give rise to man-landscape relationships which continue to provide pleasure long after they have ceased to be biologically necessary for survival.'<sup>195</sup>

### **6.5.2 Atavism and hunting**

Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset saw in hunting a return to an 'old homestead', a familiar place, inhabited by a familiar and vital other self:

although Nature is not our native or habitual environment, when the hunt places us in it we have the impression of returning to our old homestead. The hunting ground is never something exotic that we are discovering for the first time, but on the contrary something known beforehand, where we might have always been, and the savage man who suddenly springs up in us does not present himself as an unknown, as a novelty, but as our most spontaneous, evident, and comfortable being.<sup>196</sup>

Aalto was a hunter; Menin and Samuel note that 'he was a keen hunter and fisherman, able to poach salmon, trout, whitefish, pike, char and perch.'<sup>197</sup> Aalto knew of the necessary continuity between humankind's ancient past, the pleasure of the outdoor room, and its aesthetic value: 'Quite simply, every home must be technically planned so as to include an accessible outdoor area, and to correspond biologically to nature, to which man was accustomed before the advent of cities.'<sup>198</sup>

John Dewey's philosophy of 'experience' was connected with both art and nature.<sup>199</sup> Appleton cited Dewey as his main philosophical underpinning, most likely because of his direct insight into fundamental connections between man and his environment:

Dewey, from a post-Darwinian viewpoint, was able to see a far more fundamental relationship between man and his surroundings because he could recognize it as basically the same as that which links any animal with its environment; since landscape is nothing more or less than the perceived environment, this approach to the aesthetics of landscape is of inestimable importance to the present discussion.<sup>200</sup>

Architect Mike Brill has written of deep connections in behaviour with humanity's primal landscapes:

Most current theories about our innate preferences for types of *landscapes* also suggest that such preferences are bioevolutionary adaptive mechanisms

. . . The meanings and feelings we have about our developmental and mythic landscapes . . . are strong.<sup>201</sup>

Schildt saw Aalto positioned between two extremes, of rational technology on one hand, and a highly irrational view of nature on the other. He understood that there existed an archaic level of memory or consciousness, which Aalto seemed to have the ability to access when necessary, without being its hostage. In *Alvar Aalto Volume I* Schildt noted: 'He is unwilling to place nature above man, and just as disinclined to capitulate to natural mysticism and primitivism as to build a geometrical and rational human world separated from the organic and infinitely varied world of nature.'<sup>202</sup> Yet in his image of hunters in the 'pleasing, almost mystical appearance' of the fire-lit winter cave of the Muuratsalo courtyard, Aalto implies a real affinity with hunting and forest life.<sup>203</sup>

### **6.5.3 Archaic, atavistic and biological influences in Aalto's architecture**

Pallasmaa saw the emotional impact of Aalto's architecture as springing from very ancient human environmental experiences:

Many unconscious reactions of biological origin control our behaviour and preferences in the environment. An environment considered pleasant will also be in harmony with these archaic instinctive reactions . . . A strong bio-cultural and archaic background can also be felt in Alvar Aalto's architecture.

While modern architecture produces a new and ever more technological and urbanised environment horizon, it must recognise the gatherer, hunter and farmer hidden in each one of us.

Architecture's main purpose is to act as a mediator between aspects of our biological origin and our present technological culture, and good architecture includes archaic as well as new elements.<sup>204</sup>

Pallasmaa's overview (noted in Chapter 5), from 2001, bears witness to an idea about architecture which energizes much of the present study, an idea that contemporary urban humans harbour ancient instincts, and respond to architecture with ancient behaviours and instinctual emotional reactions. These archaic instincts surface in perception of architecture of high aesthetic value such as that of Aalto, who himself was obviously aware, as a hunter and skier, and a lifelong observer of nature and landscape, of the value of pleasurable landscape types. As a creative artist, Aalto seems to have carried many elements of both a cultural and a biological past with him, and to have been able to use these archaic currents to make architecture of high critical and public renown.

## **6.6 Conclusions**

In this chapter the work and philosophy of Aalto has been presented through five sections (life experience, house architecture, landscape, aesthetics, and atavistic and biological influences) to introduce his work and its personal and intellectual background.

Aalto's early life experiences influenced his 'intuitive' sense of siting, contour and form, and triggered a desire for shelter and harmony. Selected house designs, including the Villa Mairea and the Muuratsalo summer house, show Aalto's interest in social ideals, Finnish vernacular architecture, the notion of the house as an architectural laboratory, and an imperative to connect the house with its natural site.

Aalto idealized Italian hill towns for their empathy with landscape, and sought to transpose (as noted by Treib; see p.258) Mediterranean 'urban fragments' into the Finnish landscape. He located and planned buildings in harmony with natural settings, interweaving landscape and architecture: he is described as a 'designer of landscapes'.

Aalto's aesthetic framework included historical themes such as landscape, the garden, ruins and paradise. He related architecture to landscape through 'anti-modern', even 'heterotopic', compositional strategies which embraced spatial concepts of concavity and convexity (of site and building), and interior-exterior reciprocity. Aalto had a profound understanding of site and materials, and a will to experiment and surprise. He maintained a sense of deep-seated human archetypes and instincts, with a universal 'little man' as ideal user. A Goethean respect for nature and biological principles framed Aalto's desire for harmony in human-nature relationships, and was an overarching aesthetic principle.

An idealized human relationship with nature was a lifelong aesthetic theme for Aalto; geographer Jay Appleton put forward his prospect-refuge theory in 1975 as a hypothesis for human landscape preference. Hildebrand's use of prospect-refuge theory to investigate Wright's architecture may offer a means to observe landscape as an aesthetic theme in Aalto's work. In Chapter 7 Appleton's prospect-refuge theory is introduced and contextualized as a method for reviewing the aesthetics of Aalto's house architecture.

## CHAPTER 6 NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: His Life*, translated by Timothy Binham and Nicholas Mayow (Jyväskylä, Finland: Alvar Aalto Museum, 2007), p.42.
- <sup>2</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: His Life*, p.71.
- <sup>3</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: His Life*, p.71.
- <sup>4</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: His Life*, p.75.
- <sup>5</sup> Sarah Menin, 'Retreating to Dwell', in Sarah Menin, editor, *Constructing Place: Mind and Matter* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p.234.
- <sup>6</sup> Gordon Orians, 'An Ecological and Evolutionary Approach to Landscape Aesthetics', in Edmund Penning-Rowsell and David Lowenthal, editors, *Landscape Meanings and Values* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986).
- <sup>7</sup> Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Early Years* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984).
- <sup>8</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'The White Table' (1970s), in *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, edited by Göran Schildt, translated by Timothy Binham (Helsinki: Ottava, 1997), pp.11-12.
- <sup>9</sup> Malcolm Quantrill, *Alvar Aalto: A critical study* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1989/1983), p.3.
- <sup>10</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Early Years*, p.200.
- <sup>11</sup> Sarah Menin and Flora Samuel, *Nature and Space: Aalto and Le Corbusier* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p.21.
- <sup>12</sup> Jørn Utzon, in Pi Michael, *Skyer*, colour film, 55mins, DR-TV, The Danish Broadcasting Corporation, 1995.
- <sup>13</sup> Jared Diamond, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee: How our animal heritage affects the way we live* (London: Vintage, 1988), p.164.
- <sup>14</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Experimental House at Muuratsalo' (1953), in *Alvar Aalto Sketches*, edited by Goran Schildt, translated by Stuart Wrede (Cambridge, Mass., and London: The MIT Press, 1978), p.116.
- <sup>15</sup> *Alvar Aalto Houses: Timeless Expressions*, edited by Nobuyuki Yoshida (Tokyo: A+U Publishing, Extra Edition, June 1998); Jari Jetsonen, *Alvar Aalto Houses* (Helsinki: Rakennustieto Oy, 2005).
- <sup>16</sup> *Alvar Aalto: Villa Mairea*, edited by Juhani Pallasmaa (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation/ Mairea Foundation, 1998); Richard Weston, *Twentieth-Century Houses: Alvar Aalto: Villa Mairea, Noormarkku 1937-39* (London: Phaidon, 1999/1992).
- <sup>17</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'The Housing Problem' (1930), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.77.
- <sup>18</sup> Aalto, 'The Housing Problem', p.79.
- <sup>19</sup> Aalto, 'The Housing Problem', p.82.
- <sup>20</sup> Aalto, 'The Housing Problem', p.83.
- <sup>21</sup> Markku Lahti, *Alvar Aalto Houses* (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2005), p.14. The quote is from Alvar Aalto, 'An Architect of Grand Measures', *Seura*, June 1944.
- <sup>22</sup> Lahti, *Alvar Aalto Houses*, p.14.
- <sup>23</sup> Steven Groak, 'Notes on Responding to Aalto's Buildings', in *Architectural Monographs 4: Alvar Aalto*, edited by David Dunster (London: Academy Editions, 1978), p.100.
- <sup>24</sup> Lahti, *Alvar Aalto Houses*, p.20.
- <sup>25</sup> Lahti, *Alvar Aalto Houses*, p.20.
- <sup>26</sup> Louna Lahti, *Alvar Aalto: 1898-1976: Paradise for the man in the street* (Köln: Taschen, 2004).
- <sup>27</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'The Architect's Conception for Paradise' (1957), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto Sketches*, pp.157-59.

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- <sup>28</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1980), p.196.
- <sup>29</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, p.196.
- <sup>30</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, p.192.
- <sup>31</sup> Menin & Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.163.
- <sup>32</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Karelian Architecture' (1941) in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.116.
- <sup>33</sup> Lahti, *Alvar Aalto: 1898-1976*, p.31.
- <sup>34</sup> Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, p.81.
- <sup>35</sup> Ranulph Glanville, 'Alvar Aalto: Detail and Totality, a Style of Completeness', *The Architectural Association Quarterly*, Vol.10, No. 3, 1978, pp.18-29. Niemelä Farm, now at Suerassari Open Air Museum, Helsinki, is illustrated in Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Image and Meaning', in *Alvar Aalto: Villa Mairea*, edited by Juhani Pallasmaa (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation/Mairea Foundation, 1998), p.85.
- <sup>36</sup> Glanville likens the additive composition over time of the Finnish farmstead to the 'agglutination, vowel harmony, and consonant gradation' of Finnish grammar. Ranulph Glanville, 'Finnish Vernacular Farmhouses', *The Architectural Association Quarterly*, February 1978, pp.48-49.
- <sup>37</sup> Glanville, 'Alvar Aalto: Detail and Totality', p.20.
- <sup>38</sup> Glanville, 'Alvar Aalto: Detail and Totality', p.20.
- <sup>39</sup> Glanville, 'Finnish Vernacular Farmhouses', p.49.
- <sup>40</sup> Glanville, 'Finnish Vernacular Farmhouses', p.49.
- <sup>41</sup> Glanville, 'Finnish Vernacular Farmhouses', p.49.
- <sup>42</sup> Glanville, 'Finnish Vernacular Farmhouses', p.49.
- <sup>43</sup> Aalto, 'Karelian Architecture', p.118.
- <sup>44</sup> Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', p.50.
- <sup>45</sup> Aalto, 'Karelian Architecture', p.118.
- <sup>46</sup> Aalto, 'Karelian Architecture', p.119.
- <sup>47</sup> Aalto, 'Karelian Architecture', p.118.
- <sup>48</sup> Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Decisive Years* (New York, Rizzoli, 1986), p.26.
- <sup>49</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Decisive Years*, p.26.
- <sup>50</sup> Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', p.59. In Malcolm Quantrill's 2005 monograph on Nova Scotia architect Brian McKay-Lyons, the architect describes a seaside house with reference to Glenn Murcutt, and prospect and refuge: 'The Kutcher House is an essay on what Glenn Murcutt describes as the need for both "prospect" and "refuge" when dwelling in the landscape . . . one arrives into the protected courtyard and leaves the wild, natural landscape behind . . . The templelike great room offers an uninterrupted prospect over the sea, like some anthropomorphic landscape-viewing helmet.' Brian McKay-Lyons, in Malcolm Quantrill, *Plain Modern: The Architecture of Brian McKay-Lyons* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), p.102.
- <sup>51</sup> Aalto had noted in 1925: 'As the steamboat glides across Lake Päijänne . . . I while away the time by making corrections in my mind to the buildings we pass.' Given Aalto's familiarity with Lake Päijänne, it can only be speculated that the illustration may be of the Muuratsalo shore. See Alvar Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland' (1925), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.22.
- <sup>52</sup> Jari and Sirkkaliisa Jetsonen, *Finnish Summer Houses* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), p.82.
- <sup>53</sup> *The Architectural Drawings of Alvar Aalto 1917-1939: Volume 6*, with introduction and project descriptions by Göran Schildt (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1994), p.166.
- <sup>54</sup> Lahti, *Alvar Aalto: 1898-1976*, p.31.

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- <sup>55</sup> Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, p.78.
- <sup>56</sup> Schildt, *Architectural Drawings of Alvar Aalto: Vol. 6*, p.166.
- <sup>57</sup> Markku Lahti, 'Alvar Aalto's One-family Houses: Paradises for Ordinary People', in Yoshida, *Alvar Aalto Houses: Timeless Expressions*, p.10.
- <sup>58</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Private House Aalto', in *Alvar Aalto's Own House and Studio, Helsinki*, edited by Päivi Lukkarinen, Architecture by Alvar Aalto no.10, (Jyväskylä, Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation, 1999).
- <sup>59</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, 'The Idea of Paradise', *Lotus International*, no.119, 2003, p.10.
- <sup>60</sup> *The Architectural Drawings of Alvar Aalto 1917-1939: Volume 10*, with introduction and project descriptions by Göran Schildt (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1994), p.xiii.
- <sup>61</sup> Schildt, *Architectural Drawings of Alvar Aalto*, Vol. 10, p.xiii.
- <sup>62</sup> Schildt, *Architectural Drawings of Alvar Aalto*, Vol. 10, p.xiii.
- <sup>63</sup> Pallasmaa, 'The Idea of Paradise', p.10.
- <sup>64</sup> Richard Weston, *Twentieth-Century Houses: Alvar Aalto: Villa Mairea, Noormarkku 1937-39* (London: Phaidon, 1999/1992), unpaginated.
- <sup>65</sup> Kristian Gullichsen, Foreword, in Pallasmaa, *Alvar Aalto: Villa Mairea*, p.11.
- <sup>66</sup> Pallasmaa, 'The Idea of Paradise', p.12.
- <sup>67</sup> Marc Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', in Peter Reed, editor, *Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art), 1998, p.54.
- <sup>68</sup> Lahti, *Alvar Aalto: 1898-1976*, p.42.
- <sup>69</sup> Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', p.55.
- <sup>70</sup> Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', p.64.
- <sup>71</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Image and Meaning', in Pallasmaa, *Alvar Aalto: Villa Mairea*, p.70.
- <sup>72</sup> Pallasmaa, 'Image and Meaning', p.85.
- <sup>73</sup> Demetri Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism: Studies on Alvar Aalto* (London: Academy Editions, 1982), p.57.
- <sup>74</sup> Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, p.57.
- <sup>75</sup> Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, p.57.
- <sup>76</sup> Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, p.1.
- <sup>77</sup> Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, p.58.
- <sup>78</sup> Aalto, 'Experimental House, Muuratsalo', p.116.
- <sup>79</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Between Humanism and Materialism' (address to Vienna Architects' Federation, April 1955), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, pp.179-180.
- <sup>80</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto Sketches*, p.116.
- <sup>81</sup> Jetsonen and Jetsonen, *Finnish Summer Houses*, p.80; the Aalto quote is from an untranslated Finnish text, Göran Schildt, *The Human Factor* (Helsinki: Ottava, 1990).
- <sup>82</sup> Alan Colquhoun, 'Alvar Aalto: Type versus Function' (1976), in *Essays in Architectural Criticism: Modern Architecture and Historical Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), p.78. s.v. 'Tropism': 'the turning of all or part of an organism in a particular direction in response to an external stimulus'; Apple computer, *Oxford American Dictionary*.
- <sup>83</sup> Aalto himself wrote in 1925 that, 'We northerners, especially the Finns, are very prone to 'forest dreaming'. Alvar Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland' (1925), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.207.
- <sup>84</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'The Hilltop Town' (1924), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.49.
- <sup>85</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Urban Culture' (1925), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.20.
- <sup>86</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Early Years*, pp.254-55.

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- <sup>87</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Early Years*, p.255.
- <sup>88</sup> Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: a critical history* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985). See Chapter 22 'Alvar Aalto and the Nordic Tradition: National Romanticism and the Doricist Sensibility 1895-1957'.
- <sup>89</sup> Colin St John Wilson, *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture: the uncompleted project* (London: Academy Editions, 1995).
- <sup>90</sup> Kenneth Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto' (1998), in *Labour Work and Architecture: Collected Essays on Architecture and Design* (London: Phaidon, 2002), p.236.
- <sup>91</sup> Aalto's interests in nature and biology and 'a "biological" approach to form' are also discussed by Weston, who follows Schildt in crediting Bauhaus teacher Laszlo Moholy-Nagy—with his view of biology as 'the guide'—as a key influence on Aalto's thinking; see Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, p.102.
- <sup>92</sup> Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto', pp.242-45. Frampton quotes from Aalto's essay 'The Dwelling as a Problem' (1930), reprinted in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto Sketches*, pp.29-32.
- <sup>93</sup> Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto', p.248.
- <sup>94</sup> Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland', p.21.
- <sup>95</sup> Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto', p.238.
- <sup>96</sup> Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto', p.253.
- <sup>97</sup> Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto', p.252.
- <sup>98</sup> Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto', p.252.
- <sup>99</sup> Aalto, 'The Architect's Conception for Paradise'.
- <sup>100</sup> Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto', p.252.
- <sup>101</sup> Jussi Rausti, 'Alvar Aalto's Urban Plans 1940-1970', *DATUTOP*, no.13, 1988, p.55.
- <sup>102</sup> Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble, 1984), p.13.
- <sup>103</sup> Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto', p.253.
- <sup>104</sup> William J. R. Curtis, 'Alvar Aalto, Paysages Mythiques' / 'Mythic Landscapes', *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, Feb. 1998, pp.4-19.
- <sup>105</sup> Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', p.12.
- <sup>106</sup> Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', p.12.
- <sup>107</sup> Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', p.14.
- <sup>108</sup> Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', p.14.
- <sup>109</sup> Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', p.14.
- <sup>110</sup> Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', p.16.
- <sup>111</sup> Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', p.16.
- <sup>112</sup> Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', p.18.
- <sup>113</sup> Curtis, 'Mythic Landscapes', p.12.
- <sup>114</sup> Aalto, 'The Hilltop Town', p.49; Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland', pp.21-22; Alvar Aalto, 'From doorstep to living room' (1926), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, pp.49-55.
- <sup>115</sup> Malcolm Quantrill, *The Environmental Memory: Man and Architecture in the Landscape of Ideas* (New York: Schocken Books, 1987), p.162.
- <sup>116</sup> Quantrill, *Alvar Aalto: A critical study*, pp.2-3. Schildt also refers to Aalto's Italian inspirations: 'The anarchistically balanced Venetian townscape was an ideal which always inspired him, and Brunelleschi remained the greatest architect of all.' Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Early Years*, p.256.

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- <sup>117</sup> Quantrill, *The Environmental Memory*, p.162.
- <sup>118</sup> Quantrill, *The Environmental Memory*, pp.163-64.
- <sup>119</sup> Quantrill, *The Environmental Memory*, p.165.
- <sup>120</sup> Quantrill, *The Environmental Memory*, pp.165-69.
- <sup>121</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Rationalism and Man' (1935), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.93.
- <sup>122</sup> Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland', p.21.
- <sup>123</sup> Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, p.102. This quote also appears in Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', p.50.
- <sup>124</sup> David Leatherbarrow, *Topographical Stories: Studies in Landscape and Architecture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). His idea of topography is also developed in: *Uncommon Ground: Architecture, Technology and Topography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); and David Leatherbarrow, 'Topographical Premises', *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol. 57, No. 3, 'Landscape and Architecture', Feb. 2004, pp.70-73.
- <sup>125</sup> David Leatherbarrow, 'Leveling the Land', in James Corner (ed.), *Recovering Landscape: Essays in Contemporary Landscape Architecture* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), pp.170-184.
- <sup>126</sup> Leatherbarrow, 'Leveling the Land', p.172.
- <sup>127</sup> Leatherbarrow, 'Leveling the Land', p.171.
- <sup>128</sup> Leatherbarrow, 'Leveling the Land', p. 176.
- <sup>129</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Journey to Italy' (1954), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, pp.38-39.
- <sup>130</sup> Leatherbarrow, 'Leveling the Land', p.172.
- <sup>131</sup> Finnish architect Markku Komonen has recently written about Aalto's intensely diligent process of site selection and evaluation: 'Finding the exact location for the [Muuratsalo] house was a process of fundamental importance for Aalto, as is documented by the considerable number of surviving site plans drawn up at different scales. In these, the topography of the site, vegetation, aspect and prospect, and other basic factors in the architectural concept are all carefully analysed.' Markku Komonen, 'Experiments with Materials at the Architect's Own Expense', in *Alvar Aalto: The Brick*, edited by Hanni Sipponen (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Museum / Alvar Aalto Foundation, 2001), p.31.
- <sup>132</sup> Frampton's centenary essay discusses the ideals, successes and failures of the forest towns project as its central topic; see Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto.'
- <sup>133</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Experimental House at Muuratsalo' (*Arkkitehti*, No. 9-10, 1953), in *Alvar Aalto: Volume I 1922-1962*, edited by Karl Fleig (Basel: Birkhauser, 1963). See also *Experimental House, Koetalo Muuratsalo*, Architecture by Alvar Aalto No.9, edited by Marjo Holma and Päivi Lukkarinen (Jyväskylä, Finland: Alvar Aalto Museum, 1996).
- <sup>134</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Art and Technology' (1955), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto Sketches*, p.129.
- <sup>135</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto Sketches*, p.116.
- <sup>136</sup> Aalto, 'From Doorstep to Living Room'.
- <sup>137</sup> Aalto, 'From Doorstep to Living Room', p.49.
- <sup>138</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Painters and Masons' (1921), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in His Own Words*, pp.30-32.
- <sup>139</sup> Menin & Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.97. The 'Doorstep' essay is also discussed in the section 'Atria and Annunciation: Extending Boundaries of Garden and Room', pp.69-72.
- <sup>140</sup> Menin & Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.97.
- <sup>141</sup> Menin & Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.97.
- <sup>142</sup> Menin & Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.69.
- <sup>143</sup> Aalto, 'From Doorstep to Living Room', pp.50-51.

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<sup>144</sup> Aalto, 'From Doorstep to Living Room', p.52. The image is from Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Oeuvre Complète Volume I, 1910-1929* (Zurich: Les Editions d'Architecture, 1995).

<sup>145</sup> Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', p.51.

<sup>146</sup> Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, p.119, n.11.

<sup>147</sup> In *Alvar Aalto: The Early Years*, Schildt reprints the essay in a section titled 'Open and Closed Space'; he notes that Aalto had educational aims in writing for the home journal *Aitta* ('shed'), 'one of those magazines which have serious cultural aspirations, while trying to reach a wide readership of "ordinary" people' (p.214). Distrustful of academic critics, Aalto was by contrast aware of the needs of 'the little man' both as his ideal audience, and as the actual, everyday user of his architecture. See Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: Early Years*, pp.214-18.

<sup>148</sup> In a subsection of his 'Aalto's Nature' essay titled 'The Landscape Within', Treib picks out two aspects of Aalto's 'Doorstep' essay, where he cites a Fra Angelico *Annunciation*, not for its architectural elements, but rather for the psychological and emotional insights in its depiction of '[t]he unity between room, façade, and garden, and the shaping of these elements to reveal the human presence and reveal his moods'. See Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', p.66, n.36 (translation by Treib and Kenneth Lundell).

<sup>149</sup> See also Flora Samuel and Sarah Menin, 'The modern-day primitive hut? "Self-building" with Jung, Aalto and Le Corbusier', in Jo Odgers, Flora Samuel and Adam Sharr, editors, *Primitive: Original matters in architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>150</sup> Brit Andresen, 'Alvar Aalto and Jørn Utzon: An Architecture of Ancient Gathering Forms', in Michael Mullins and Adrian Carter, editors, *Proceedings of the First Utzon Symposium: Nature Vision and Place* (Aalborg, Denmark: Institute of Architecture and Design, University of Aalborg, 2003), p.25.

<sup>151</sup> Andresen, 'Alvar Aalto and Jørn Utzon', pp.25-36.

<sup>152</sup> Andresen, 'Alvar Aalto and Jørn Utzon', p.25.

<sup>153</sup> Andresen, 'Alvar Aalto and Jørn Utzon', p.26.

<sup>154</sup> Andresen, 'Alvar Aalto and Jørn Utzon', p.30.

<sup>155</sup> Andresen, 'Alvar Aalto and Jørn Utzon', p.35.

<sup>156</sup> Andresen, 'Alvar Aalto and Jørn Utzon', p.35.

<sup>157</sup> Peter Blundell Jones, *Gunnar Asplund* (London: Phaidon, 2006), p.200.

<sup>158</sup> Blundell Jones, *Gunnar Asplund*, p.226. Blundell Jones notes also that in Asplund's architecture, the finely wrought interior compositional relationships are correlate to exterior ones, e.g., the Stennäs summer house: 'The geometry of the building . . . cannot be reduced and analysed back to a more basic or essential form because doing so deprives it of essential content. The juxtaposition of doors and cupboards and chimneys can share something of the same quality as the relationship at larger scale of house with site.' Blundell Jones, *Gunnar Asplund*, p.227.

<sup>159</sup> Andresen, 'Alvar Aalto and Jørn Utzon'.

<sup>160</sup> Blundell Jones, *Gunnar Asplund*, p.228.

<sup>161</sup> Blundell Jones, *Gunnar Asplund*, p.228.

<sup>162</sup> Aalto, 'Experimental House at Muuratsalo'.

<sup>163</sup> Laurence Keith Loftin III, *An Analysis of the Work of Finnish Architect Alvar Aalto* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005).

<sup>164</sup> Weston, *Alvar Aalto*.

<sup>165</sup> Loftin, *An Analysis of the Work*, p.19.

<sup>166</sup> Loftin, *An Analysis of the Work*, p.26.

<sup>167</sup> Loftin, *An Analysis of the Work*, p.28.

<sup>168</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'The Reconstruction of Europe is the Key Problem for the Architecture of our Time' (1941), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, pp.150-151. The essay includes Aalto's

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lecture images of people in the ruins of war-wrecked houses. Loftin quotes Aalto's words: 'This is a home without walls or roof, with its damaged but still-beating heart.'

<sup>169</sup> Loftin, *An Analysis of the Work*, p.29.

<sup>170</sup> Sarah Menin, 'Fragments from the forest: Aalto's requisitioning of forest place and manner', *Journal of Architecture*, Vol. 6: no. 3: Autumn 2001, p.279.

<sup>171</sup> Menin, 'Fragments from the forest', p.280.

<sup>172</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: His Life*, pp.591-97.

<sup>173</sup> Robert Venturi, 'Learning from Aalto', in *Iconography and Electronics upon a Generic Architecture: A view from the drafting room* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996), p.77. Originally published as 'Alvar Aalto', *Arkkitehti*, July-August 1976, pp.66-67.

<sup>174</sup> Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977/1966), p.102.

<sup>175</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The growth of a new tradition*, 5th edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967/1941), p.414.

<sup>176</sup> Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, p.44.

<sup>177</sup> Porphyrios, Preface, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, p.viii.

<sup>178</sup> See the following: Juhani Pallasmaa, 'The Geometry of Feeling: A Look at the Phenomenology of Architecture' (1986), in Kate Nesbitt, editor, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996); Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Academy, 2005/1994); Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Hapticity and Time: Notes on fragile architecture', *The Architectural Review*, May 2000, Vol. 207, pp.78-84; Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Logic of the Image', *Journal of Architecture*, Winter 1998, v.3, n.4, pp.289-99; Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Image and Meaning', in Pallasmaa, *Alvar Aalto: Villa Mairea*.

<sup>179</sup> Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, p.119, n.11.

<sup>180</sup> Porphyrios, Index, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, pp.135-38. 'Nature' is a key critical category of Porphyrios' discourse; 'landscape' has no index reference.

<sup>181</sup> Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, p.59.

<sup>182</sup> Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, Ch. 5, 'Florilegia Naturalis: The Aesthetic, Scientific and Ethical Valorization of Nature', pp.59-81.

<sup>183</sup> Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, p.65.

<sup>184</sup> Atavistic: relating to or characterized by reversion to something ancient or ancestral. *atavistic fears and instinct*. s.v. 'atavistic', *Oxford American Dictionary*, Apple Computer.

<sup>185</sup> Vincent Scully, *Architecture: The Natural and the Manmade* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1991), p.1.

<sup>186</sup> Joseph Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise: The idea of the primitive hut in architectural history* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1981).

<sup>187</sup> Samuel and Menin, 'The modern-day primitive hut?'

<sup>188</sup> Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, revised edition 1979/1962).

<sup>189</sup> Vitruvius [Marcus Vitruvius Pollio], *Ten Books on Architecture*, edited by Ingrid D. Rowland and Thomas Noble Howe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>190</sup> Joseph Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town: The Anthropology of Urban Form in Rome, Italy and the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The MIT Press, 1988/1976).

<sup>191</sup> Text in the Alvar Aalto Archive; as noted in Richard Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, London: Phaidon, 1996, p. 137, note p. 234.

<sup>192</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.58-61.

<sup>193</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.61.

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- <sup>194</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.61.
- <sup>195</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.165.
- <sup>196</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Hunting*, translated by Howard B. Wescott, illustrated by Lewis S. Brown (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p.136.
- <sup>197</sup> Menin and Samuel, *Nature and Space*, p.21.
- <sup>198</sup> Aalto, 'The Housing Problem' (1930), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.82.
- <sup>199</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover, 1958/1925).
- <sup>200</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.44.
- <sup>201</sup> Mike Brill, 'Archetypes as a "Natural Language" for Place Making', in Karen A. Franck and Lynda H. Schneekloth, editors, *Ordering Space: Types in Architecture and Design* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1994).
- <sup>202</sup> Göran Schildt, 'Alvar Aalto', in Fleig, *Alvar Aalto Volume I 1922-1962*, p.16.
- <sup>203</sup> Aalto, 'Experimental House at Muuratsalo'.
- <sup>204</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, 'The Mind of the Environment', in Birgit Cold, editor, *Aesthetics, Well-being and Health: Essays within Architecture and environmental aesthetics* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001), pp.211-13.

## **Chapter 7 Appleton's prospect-refuge theory**

### **Theories and underpinnings: uses by Hildebrand and others**

#### **7.0 Chapter 7 Introduction**

##### **7.0.1 Jay Appleton: landscape and prospect-refuge theory**

Geographer Jay Appleton's book *The Experience of Landscape* (1975) was triggered by his own general questions, his 'quest' to explain human landscape preference; his research, based widely across the arts and sciences, is underpinned by research and philosophies in landscape-related disciplines.<sup>1</sup> His prospect-refuge theory is an atavistic and behavioural theory of landscape aesthetics. It holds that landscape preference is partly inherited and partly acquired. Appleton also saw potential broader application and implications for his work beyond his own field of geography, especially in architecture and landscape architecture.

Using Appleton's prospect-refuge theory, architect Grant Hildebrand assumed in *The Wright Space* (1981) that architectural experience is analogous to experience of natural environments.<sup>2</sup> He identified landscape-symbolic elements in Wright's house designs, and postulated that landscape and its symbolism were central to the general appeal of Wright's houses. Hildebrand's use of Appleton's theory to analyze Wright's house architecture suggests that prospect-refuge theory may provide a suitable framework to adopt to investigate Alvar Aalto's house architecture.

#### **7.1 Jay Appleton: landscape and prospect-refuge theory**

##### **7.1.1 Appleton's key publications**

Jay Appleton was a professor of geography at the University of Hull, UK when his two key works on landscape aesthetics and symbolism, *The Experience of Landscape* (1996/1975) and *The Symbolism of Habitat* (1990), were published.<sup>3</sup> He also wrote an autobiography, *How I Made the World: Shaping a View of Landscape* (1994).<sup>4</sup> Appleton has published significant articles on landscape and aesthetics, including: 'Prospect and Refuge in the Landscapes of England and

Australia' (1975); 'Pleasure and the Perception of Habitat' (1982); 'Prospects and refuges revisited' (1984); 'The Role of the Arts in Landscape Research' (1986); and 'Landscape and architecture', in Farmer and Louw's 1993 survey *Companion to Contemporary Architectural Thought*.<sup>5</sup> He has also written poetry and made paintings and photographs to explore other aspects of his landscape thinking.<sup>6</sup> Appleton's essays and photographs indicate that he visited Australia and experienced Australian landscape conditions before 1975.<sup>7</sup>

In *The Experience of Landscape* Appleton theorized landscape preference at two levels, summarized as *habitat theory* and *prospect-refuge theory*. Appleton's broader concept of habitat theory suggests that an observer's enjoyment of a view of landscape comes from an assessment that that environment will satisfy biological needs of shelter, food and reproduction over a sustained period of habitation. The more particular prospect-refuge theory suggests that a specific landscape type which allows a creature or person to enjoy views over near and distant territory while at the same time being sheltered and concealed supports immediate survival, and may become, over evolutionary time, a source of pleasure and aesthetic satisfaction—in other words, such a landscape may be seen as beautiful.<sup>8</sup>

Prospect-refuge theory holds that landscape preference is an inherited behavioural response to environment, with roots in archaic human behaviour, and that people find beautiful those landscapes which contain elements potentially or actually offering a balanced combination of outlook and shelter.<sup>9</sup>

### **7.1.2 Appleton's key sources**

Appleton set himself a problem, expressed in a pair of sentences: 'What is it that we like about landscape, and why do we like it?'<sup>10</sup> Appleton sought to better comprehend 'a subject which is as old as human experience.'<sup>11</sup> The problem set him on a 'quest' which triggered his research into landscape aesthetics.

Since the Enlightenment, according to Appleton, certain writers have discoursed on aesthetics, and others have discoursed on landscape, but few have written about the *aesthetics of landscape*, natural or built. Appleton nominates a number of sources for the direction and philosophies of his quest: the Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), who wrote of natural landscape beauty in terms of ‘the sublime’; Irish philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-97), who also reflected at length on ‘the sublime’;<sup>12</sup> landscape gardeners William Kent (1684-1748), Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown (1715-1783), and William Gilpin (1724-1804); as well as garden philosophers Richard Payne Knight (1751-1824), Uvedale Price (1747-1829), and Humphrey Repton (1752-1818).<sup>13</sup>

Appleton’s formative influences also include the work of art historian and theorist John Ruskin (1819-1900), especially his *Modern Painters* of the 1850s.<sup>14</sup> However, Appleton owes much to philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952), whose ideas on ‘experience’—of both art and nature—underpin Appleton’s sense of landscape experience:

Dewey’s main message, for our purposes, is that beauty resides neither intrinsically in ‘beautiful’ objects nor ‘in the eye of the beholder’, but that it is to be found in the relationship between the individual and his environment, in short in what he calls ‘experience.’<sup>15</sup>

It was ‘of inestimable importance’ to Appleton that Dewey recognized the relationship between man and his surroundings as ‘basically the same as that which links any animal with its environment.’<sup>16</sup> This philosophical assumption, central to Appleton’s theories of landscape aesthetics, implies that for humankind, as for other creatures, ‘aesthetic satisfaction is dependent on environmental characteristics that are favourable to survival.’<sup>17</sup>

Appleton notes the contribution of landscape architects to the formation of his ideas; their experience gives them authority, and they seem to have bridged the gap between the arts and the sciences. Yet their achievements are in action, in ‘the

creation of an aesthetic composition out of a particular environment', while Appleton sought a theory for landscape aesthetics.<sup>18</sup> Appleton also sought authority in ethology (the scientific study of human or animal behaviour), and what he calls 'a kind of atavistic sensitivity,'<sup>19</sup> from both popular and specialist writing in anthropology and geography of the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>20</sup> Appleton concluded from his research that, in terms of human environmental behaviour, '[a]ll the evidence points to the fact that the motivation which impels us is of the same kind as that which impels the animals. We do these things because we want to.'<sup>21</sup>

### **7.1.3 Appleton's quest: habitat theory and prospect-refuge theory**

Appleton observed the lack of a general theoretical basis for landscape aesthetics; there seemed to him to be no adequate way to link the 'abstract generalizations of the philosophers with the details of actual landscapes as observed by the ordinary traveller or studied more deeply by the field scientists.'<sup>22</sup> Appleton made this link between philosophy and the field by proposing two theories of landscape aesthetics: *habitat theory* and *prospect-refuge theory*.

Appleton's habitat theory, a broad-scale general theory of environmental survival, is discussed only briefly in the present study. Habitat theory is mentioned rarely in the architectural literature, and is not often cited in architectural discourse.

Appleton summarizes habitat theory as the more general of the two postulates: 'Habitat theory, in short, is about the ability of a place to satisfy *all* our biological needs.'<sup>23</sup>

Appleton's prospect-refuge theory, however, is central to the present study. At its most essential level, prospect-refuge theory, for human beings as for other creatures, is about seeing without being seen:

Prospect-refuge theory postulates that, because the ability to see without being seen is an intermediate step in the satisfaction of many of [the observer's biological] needs, the capacity of an environment

to ensure the achievement of *this* becomes a more immediate source of aesthetic satisfaction.<sup>24</sup>

One of Appleton's key assumptions is that human aesthetic reactions to landscape are partly inherited or innate, that people understand landscape and landscape symbols via 'a mechanism attuned to the natural environment.'<sup>25</sup> However he also notes—perhaps to avoid being labelled a biological determinist—that 'the behaviour-mechanisms which give rise to these sensations are only in part inborn. Their potential must be developed in each individual by practice and by environmental experience.'<sup>26</sup>

Reflecting on his 'invasion' of other disciplines to form an aesthetic theory which can be sustained theoretically and applied practically, Appleton reasons that 'we must invade many fields and, as soon as we stray from the discipline we profess, we become amateurs in someone else's territory.'<sup>27</sup> His interdisciplinary 'amateur' status in other fields seems to moderate exaggerated claims, and sustain a methodological clarity.

#### **7.1.4 Appleton's proposal: a framework of symbolism**

Appleton created a terminology, a lexicon of prospect-refuge symbolism to articulate his theory, with a view to its application as a mode of analysis and description. In *The Experience of Landscape*, Appleton uses terms from the list below to present and elaborate what he refers to as 'a framework of symbolism'.<sup>28</sup> Selected lexicon terms are used in the present study to look more closely at landscape symbolism particularly in Aalto's house architecture.

##### **7.1.4.1 Terminology of landscape symbolism: a prospect-refuge lexicon**

This framework of symbolism, once established, provides a means of looking at landscape and architectural settings (site, outdoor areas, building, room, building elements, views, materials) to enable an analysis of architectural and landscape

phenomena as to their quantities, qualities of prospect and refuge elements, and the balance of those elements. The terminology below is quoted directly from Appleton, and is set out after Appleton.

## **1. Prospect Symbolism**

### **Types of prospect**

#### 1. Direct prospects

##### A. Panoramas

###### (i) Simple panoramas

###### (ii) Interrupted panoramas

##### B. Vistas

###### (i) Simple vistas

###### (ii) Horizontal vistas (including sky dados)

###### (iii) Peepholes

(Panoramas and vistas may be either 'open' or 'closed', with varying degrees of 'fetch')

#### 2. Indirect Prospects

##### A. Secondary panoramas

##### B. Secondary vistas

###### (i) Deflected vistas

###### (ii) Offsets

##### C. Secondary peepholes

### **Types of vantage-point**

#### 1. Primary vantage-points (commanding direct prospects)

#### 2. Secondary vantage-points (commanding, in the imagination, indirect prospects)

##### A. Natural

##### B. Artificial

##### C. Composite

(Horizons comprise a special type of secondary vantage-point)

## **2. Refuge symbolism**

#### 1. By function

##### A. Hides

##### B. Shelters

##### C. Composite

#### 2. By origin

##### A. Natural

##### B. Artificial

###### (i) Buildings

###### (ii) Ships

###### (iii) Others

##### C. Composite

### 3. By substance

#### A. Earth refuges

- (i) Caves
- (ii) Rocks
- (iii) Hollows

#### B. Vegetation refuges

- (i) Arboreal
  - (ii) Others (reeds, grasses, etc.)
- C. Nebulous refuges (mist, smoke, etc.)

#### D. Composite (including most buildings etc.)

### 4. By accessibility (penetrability of margins, etc.)

### 5. By efficacy<sup>29</sup>

#### **7.1.5 Pleasure as the driving force**

An assumption of the present study, following Dewey, is that aesthetics is a matter of feeling, instinct and senses;<sup>30</sup> in landscape aesthetics, it appears that survival can depend on instinctual responses to opportunities of pursuit or being pursued: in survival settings, instinct and senses seem to dominate intellect and learning.<sup>31</sup> Schildt writes (using a relevant metaphor) that while Aalto did not mind discussing architectural theory, in his 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.’<sup>32</sup> Christian Gullichsen knew similarly of Aalto’s ‘empathetic dimension’, his ‘tactile sensitivity for materials and textures’; he reflects that the ‘obvious sensuality in [Aalto’s] approach to the details reflects his Dionysian appetite for life.’<sup>33</sup>

Appleton is aware of similar currents in humankind. A lengthy quotation from *The Symbolism of Habitat* shows Appleton’s understanding of the connection of perception, pleasure and contemporary ‘hedonistic’ aesthetics:

Let me then briefly summarize the ground we have covered so far. Our habits of environmental perception, while they are invariably modified and shaped by cultural, social, historical and personal experiences, are not created out of nothing by these influences; rather they are the derivatives of mechanisms of survival behaviour

which were already there, elements of our innate make-up. Aesthetic pleasure is the pleasure of *perception*. Environmental perception is the key to environmental adaptation which in turn is the basis of the survival of individual organisms and a central theme in the Darwinian theory of evolution by natural selection, while pleasure emerges both as the driving force of the whole biological system and as the criterion of excellence in a hedonistic aesthetics.<sup>34</sup>

Human environmental perceptions are innate, and underlie survival and evolution; the innate pleasure that drives evolution and biology is linked to standards of beauty. Appleton's theory offers a means to articulate this connection between innate, instinctual human response to environment and the aesthetics of contemporary landscapes and houses.

#### **7.1.6 Appleton's theory in architecture**

Appleton has used his prospect-refuge theory to comment on architecture in one short article, 'Landscape and Architecture' (1993).<sup>35</sup> He also commented in *The Experience of Landscape* on architectural use of his theory as a tool of analysis by Australian geographer Brian Hudson, and by American architect and academic Grant Hildebrand.<sup>36</sup>

A select few other writers have used prospect-refuge theory in an architectural setting; Weston implies Appleton's theory in describing the site of Utzon's Can Lis house, Majorca (1971):

The contrast between road and clifftop—enclosure and exposure, refuge and prospect, shade and blazing sun—could hardly be more pronounced and is both mediated and heightened by the architecture.<sup>37</sup>

Weston refers to contrasts between the literal refuge of the shady roadside and the literal prospect of the bright, exposed cliff overlooking the Mediterranean, rather

than Utzon's landscape symbolism. More recently, however, in *Constructing Place: Mind and Matter* (2003), Weston implies symbolic prospect and refuge in referring to the 'exhilaratingly open platform and cave-like shells' of the Sydney Opera House as 'potent examples of those qualities of prospect and refuge which Jay Appleton believes are archetypal human experiences.'<sup>38</sup>

Architect Stephen Kite, in his essay 'Modernity and the threshold', supports Appleton's prospect-refuge theory, linking it to Adrian Stokes' 'psychologized spatial theories' to discuss thresholds and edges in 'modernity's construction of place'.<sup>39</sup> Kite also acknowledges Hildebrand's use of the theory to investigate the 'telluric power' of Wright's houses.<sup>40</sup> Kite uses the theory in analyzing prospect-refuge symbolism in a Quattrocento painting by Lorenzo di Credi (which Appleton had analyzed in 1975),<sup>41</sup> recognizing the aesthetic value of the loggia as a spatially ambiguous screen between indoor rooms and outdoor landscape.<sup>42</sup> The combination of human figure, room and landscape mediated through the loggia, noted by Aalto in his article 'From Doorstep to Living Room' (see Chapter 6), was an element from classicism and art which formed his architectural philosophy from his earliest professional years.<sup>43</sup>

#### **7.1.7 Hildebrand's use of Appleton's theory to consider Wright's houses**

In *The Wright Space* (1991) Hildebrand, postulating that architectural experience is analogous to experience of natural environments, made sustained use of Appleton's prospect-refuge theory to identify landscape symbolism in Frank Lloyd Wright's house architecture. Hildebrand argued that landscape, in the form of a 'pattern' of landscape-symbolic elements ('the Wright pattern'), was central to the broad appeal of houses by Wright built from 1902 to the 1950s.<sup>44</sup>

Using the ideas and the lexicon of Appleton's prospect-refuge theory, Hildebrand argues that compositional elements in Wright's houses are symbolic of landscape features which actually or apparently offer the survival-enhancing properties of refuge and prospect. In Wright's architecture of sheltering roofs, labyrinthine

entrance routes, protective balconies, low eaves, and dappled window light, visitors feel protected; looking out from elevated terraces and corner windows in upper-floor rooms, people sense and enjoy a secure prospect over territory.<sup>45</sup> Hildebrand claims that Wright's houses have a universal and inherited appeal which is instantaneous, emotional, and connected to the human past, to the life of early ancestors who survived by taking advantage of landscape.<sup>46</sup> This method of enquiry can be followed in part to explore a notion that similar landscape-symbolic elements may be present in Aalto's work, to account in part for the appeal of Aalto's house architecture.<sup>47</sup>

Hildebrand claims that prospect-refuge theory 'holds the possibility of describing and exploring issues of spatial choice at a more significant level than has been offered by any other design-related theory.'<sup>48</sup> Hildebrand's apparently successful use of prospect-refuge theory to investigate preference in Wright's architecture underlies its adoption as a paradigm for the method of the present study.<sup>49</sup>

## **7.2 Prospects, refuges and space**

### **7.2.1 Spatial choice: prospect and refuge space in architecture and landscape**

Appleton's prospect-refuge theory gave Hildebrand a method and a terminology for understanding aesthetic preference, or (as noted above) 'issues of spatial choice', in Wright's designs. The prospect-refuge duality and its lexicon of enclosure and outlook (as discussed above) are spatial and visual constructs, for assessing 'symbolic value and meaning' in landscapes.<sup>50</sup> The understanding of spatial choice forms an important common ground between the different methods of architecture and landscape.

Nesbitt observes that 'Philosophical and scientific paradigms have largely shaped the architect's view of . . . the way in which nature (the wilderness) becomes landscape (a cultural artifact) through the designer's efforts.'<sup>51</sup> Norberg-Schulz argued (in 1980) that while architectural theory had 'to a high extent lost contact with the concrete life-world,' the 'character' evident in landscape might restore

that contact for architecture.<sup>52</sup> Norberg-Schulz's philosophical framework refers to both landscape and architectural space and associates them within a single theoretical enterprise.

This section considers selected critical writing on architectural and landscape spatiality (by Higuchi, Norberg-Schulz, Bachelard, Tuan, Samuel and Menin, and others) to frame an understanding of prospect-refuge symbolism applied to architectural space.

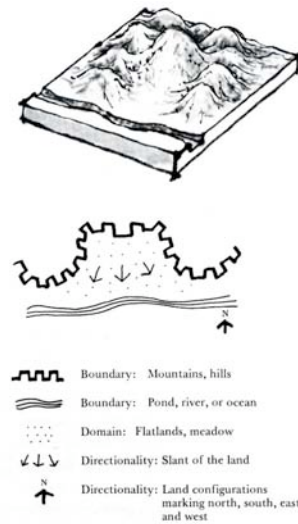
### **7.2.2 Aesthetics of habitat: Higuchi and *zofu-tokusui***

Appleton's habitat theory (noted above) links landscape aesthetics to perception of an environment's potential to support long-term survival:

Aesthetic satisfaction experienced in the contemplation of landscape stems from the spontaneous perception of landscape features which, in their shapes, colours, spatial arrangements and other visible attributes, act as sign-stimuli indicative of environmental conditions favourable for survival, whether they are really favourable or not.<sup>53</sup>

Japanese architect Tadahiko Higuchi refers to Appleton's habitat theory in his study of the visual structure and the aesthetics of Japanese landscape: 'In considering landscapes, we must regard them as potential habitats and analyze their aesthetic meaning from this angle.'<sup>54</sup>

Higuchi observes that topography, orientation, climate, water patterns and human living needs were synthesised in Japan into a set of rules dating to the 6th century AD. Based on Chinese geomancy, the method, known as *zofu-tokusui* (literally 'storing wind, acquiring water'), was used for determining location and placement of cities, buildings, and tombs.<sup>55</sup> *Zofu-tokusui* rules of landscape divination informed the choice of site for various Japanese cities before 1000 AD, including present-day Kyoto, 'surrounded by mountains and rivers . . . a natural stronghold'.<sup>56</sup>



**Figure 21** The *zofu-tokusui* landscape type.  
Tadahiko Higuchi, *The Visual and Spatial Structure of Landscapes*  
(Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), p.162.

Higuchi's diagram (Fig.21) shows elements of this landscape type: an open meadow enclosed by hills on three sides, slope and orientation of site towards the sun, with views over water.<sup>57</sup> Appleton's habitat theory outlines principles of 'environmental conditions favourable for survival'; Higuchi indicates that preference for environments with abundant food and water resources, balancing enclosure with exposure, appear to cross cultural and historical boundaries.

### 7.2.3 Norberg-Schulz: existence, enclosure, space and place

Norberg-Schulz uses landscape as part of his philosophical project to understand the 'phenomenon' of place: 'a concrete term for environment is *place*. It is common usage to say that acts and occurrences *take place*'.<sup>58</sup> While the present study is not a study of place (see Chapter 5),<sup>59</sup> it is noteworthy that Norberg-Schulz often enlists notions of landscape and images of natural places in articulating his phenomenology of architecture.<sup>60</sup> Norberg-Schulz rejected 'abstract' theories such as Appleton's contemporary prospect-refuge theory (Appleton is cited in Norberg-Schulz's footnote):

Various attempts at a description of natural places are offered by current literature on 'landscape' but again we find that the usual

approach is too abstract, being based on ‘functional’ or perhaps ‘visual’ considerations. Again we must turn to philosophy for help.<sup>61</sup>

Norberg-Schulz turned for philosophical underpinning to Heidegger, who referred to landscape and other archetypal concepts.<sup>62</sup> Nesbitt notes enclosure as a fundamental theme for Norberg-Schulz: ‘He interprets dwelling as being at peace in a protected place. Thus, enclosure, the act of marking or differentiating a *place* within *space* becomes the archetypal act of building and the true origin of architecture.’<sup>63</sup>

In *Existence, Space and Architecture* (1971)—recalling Aristotle’s proposal (noted in Chapter 4) that ‘generally art completes what nature cannot bring to a finish, and partly imitates her’<sup>64</sup>—Norberg-Schulz argues that architecture improves, or realizes the potential of, natural landscape space:

In general we may say that man, through his works, expresses the capacity of the landscape. As his life takes place in interaction with landscape, this is natural. His settlements, therefore, usually articulate places given by nature.<sup>65</sup>

Norberg-Schulz recognizes the harbour as a particular landscape type synonymous with security, enclosure and belonging; by contrast, fortifications and churches are artificial structures, often in inaccessible landscapes, affirming ‘the two basic aspects of man’s orientation: physical security and psychic identity.’<sup>66</sup> Appleton, however, does not mention the harbour in his ‘framework of symbolism’, promoting the refuge symbolism of the cave, rather than that of the cove.<sup>67</sup>

#### **7.2.4 Bachelard: prospect-refuge spatiality of the house**

Norberg-Schulz claims that the house remains ‘the central place of human existence’;<sup>68</sup> he cites philosopher Gaston Bachelard on the house’s spatial primacy: ‘Before he is thrown into the world, man is put into the cradle of the

house.’<sup>69</sup> For Norberg-Schulz house architecture is a matter of internal space: ‘essentially the house brings us “inside”; the essence of the house as architecture, therefore, is *interior space*.’<sup>70</sup> Spatiality of the house at different scales, especially its interiority (hence refuge potential), is discussed at length by Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*; he considers the house ‘a tool for analysis of the human soul.’<sup>71</sup> Referring to Jungian archetypes of cellar and garret, Bachelard argues that house space is vertical and centralized:

(1) A house is imagined as a vertical being. It rises upward. It differentiates itself in terms of its verticality. It is one of the appeals to our consciousness of verticality. (2) A house is imagined as a concentrated being. It appeals to our consciousness of centrality.<sup>72</sup>

Bachelard maintains that a house ‘constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability.’<sup>73</sup> Verticality and centrality, key spatial senses of the stable human body,<sup>74</sup> are basic constructs of Bachelard’s ‘topoanalysis’, his study of domestic space, ‘the sites of our intimate lives’.<sup>75</sup> As an extreme refuge, Bachelard idealizes a charcoal-burner’s hut (from Henri Bachelin’s 1918 novel *Le Serviteur*) built in the distant space of the forest, ‘far from the over-crowded house, far from city cares. We flee in thought in search of a real refuge.’<sup>76</sup> Bachelard argues that the humble hut ‘possesses the felicity of intense poverty . . . as destitution increases it gives us access to absolute refuge.’<sup>77</sup> This poetic linking of destitution and refuge recalls the theme of ruin often associated by various writers with the Muuratsalo project (as discussed in Chapter 3).

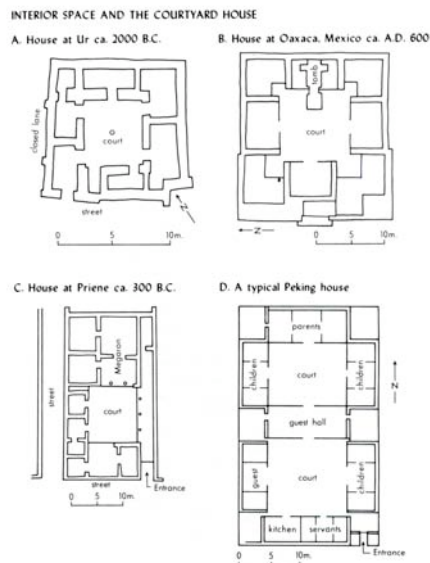
Yet the house can also symbolize prospect. A sense of prospect is found in Bachelard’s image of a light shining from a house, like someone keeping vigil: ‘The lamp in the window is the house’s eye. [It is] enclosed light, which can only filter to the outside’;<sup>78</sup> the house is further anthropomorphised by the lamplight: ‘It sees like a man. It is an eye open to night.’<sup>79</sup> This phenomenon, the effect of light in darkness, is for Appleton an *inversion*, whereby an apparent refuge symbol becomes one of prospect, in this case ‘a tiny prospect contained within the all-enveloping refuge of the night.’<sup>80</sup> The hut provides refuge inside the landscape

space of the forest; the light, a symbol of prospect, is like an eye looking out from within the refuge space of the house. Appleton and Bachelard seem to show that that prospect and refuge are intensified when set against their complementary phenomena, in darkness and in space.

#### **7.2.5 Landscape and architectural space: the courtyard house**

Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, in *Space and Place* (1977), uses geographical, anthropological and architectural frameworks in an extended study of the duality of space and place, a topic of concern for both geography and philosophy.<sup>81</sup> Tuan sees the upright human body (noted above) as the basis for spatial awareness: vertical-horizontal, high-low, front-back and left-right are dual concepts for creating and understanding architectural space: ‘the human body is the measure of direction, location, and distance.’<sup>82</sup>

For Tuan, architecture creates and improves human awareness of environment, refining perception and feeling via three architectural modes: (a) architectural space can define general human spatial sensations (dualities of interior-exterior, closed-open, dark-light, private-public); (b) architectural space can define social relations (identity, status, behaviour); and (c) architecture can teach knowledge of the world and the cosmos (church, temple, city form): ‘in the absence of books and formal instruction, architecture is a key to comprehending reality.’<sup>83</sup>



**Figure 22** Interior space and the courtyard house.  
Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*  
(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p.109.

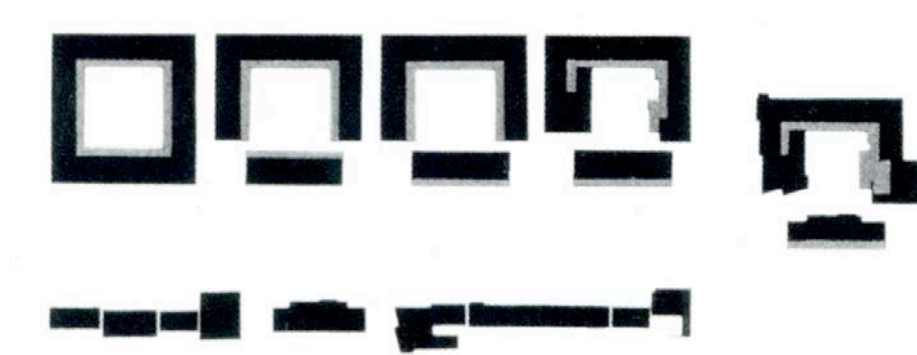
Tuan sees the traditional courtyard house, found across cultures and eras (Fig.22), as a closed, inward-looking type distinctly separated from its urban or landscape context: ‘Its basic feature is that the rooms open out to the privacy of interior space and present their blank backs to the outside world. Within and without are clearly defined; people can be certain of where they are.’<sup>84</sup> The courtyard house separates private and public space; human relations within may be of a different intensity to the laneways and streets of the urban landscape outside its blank walls.

### 7.2.6 Landscape and architectural space: enclosed garden

In contrast to the closed, internally focused, traditional courtyard house, Aben and de Wit (as noted in Chapter 5) see the enclosed garden as relevant to contemporary theory and practice, a spatially ambiguous type—enclosed, yet partly open: ‘an intermediary between man and landscape. It is both inside and outside, landscape and architecture, endless and finite.’<sup>85</sup> Aben and de Wit use their landscape theory to read Aalto’s Säynätsalo Town Hall (1948-52) as an urban fragment and an enclosed garden:

This town hall enfolds part of the landscape . . . The courtyard, as much a microcosm as a fragment, is particularized by being enclosed by several cutaneous layers: the inland sea, the island, the woods and finally the building . . . The courtyard is made part of the landscape. Its wall planes are fragmented, low-lying and tenuous so that they scarcely define the space they contain.<sup>86</sup>

Aben and de Wit regard the Säynätsalo project as a conceptual fusion of two types: the *hortus contemplationis*<sup>87</sup> of the monastery and the Karelian farmhouse, additively composed of biological cells (Fig.23).<sup>88</sup>



**Figure 23** Säynätsalo Town Hall: Transformation of types: *Hortus contemplationis* (above) and Karelian farmhouse (below). Rob Aben and Saskia de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1999), p.172.

Aben and de Wit's thoughts on Säynätsalo give insight into the landscape-related spatiality of the contemporaneous Muuratsalo project; the additive compositional method of Aalto's houses (see Chapter 6) has been likened to that of the vernacular Karelian farmstead. The summer house can similarly be seen as having 'cutaneous layers' of spaces-within-spaces: within the greater landscape space of woods, rock, and water<sup>89</sup> the building's white outer skin reinforces its status as a contrasting (perhaps Modernist)<sup>90</sup> object. At the courtyard scale, the brick skin forms a thick pelt or textile, optically and haptically reinforcing the containment of space; within the house a skin of white paint unifies indoor spaces and everyday materials.

The Muuratsalo house may be viewed as a composition of linked box-shaped spaces of different scales (living room, bedroom, hallway), some of which contain other spaces (loft, fireplace, shelf). As at Säynätsalo a strategy of ‘cutaneous layers’, from landscape through to interiors, combines with a fragmentation and rupturing of wall planes, so that courtyard and house begin similarly to be included as ‘part of the landscape.’

### **7.3 Biological and architectural: nature and culture; biology and humanity**

Authors writing about the separate topics of architecture, landscape, and human evolution can be connected through Appleton’s theory and Aalto’s architecture, especially the Aalto centenary writers (as discussed in Chapter 3). A common factor for these writers is the question of humankind’s relationship to the natural world, and the question of to what degree humans may be part of nature.

Sociobiologist E. O. Wilson referred in 1984 to both refuge and prospect as essential components of ‘the right place’ for human habitation;<sup>91</sup> Appleton felt accused of being ‘an extreme socio-biologist’ for his consideration of inherited landscape preference.<sup>92</sup>

Hildebrand in 1991 adopted prospect-refuge theory to hypothesize an inherited basis for the popularity of Wright’s domestic architecture.<sup>93</sup> Hildebrand’s work prompted Pallasmaa in 2001 to observe ‘psycho-biological’ tendencies in Aalto’s architecture.<sup>94</sup> Most recently, in the catalogue to the 2007 London exhibition ‘Alvar Aalto Through the Eyes of Shigeru Ban’, Pallasmaa quotes Aalto’s words from 1957: ‘Architecture is not mere decoration; it is a deeply biological, if not a predominantly moral matter.’<sup>95</sup> In the 25 years’ historical time span outlined here, ideas of human habitat preference, landscape, and Aalto’s architecture have become, from a certain perspective, interwoven; Appleton’s ideas have facilitated other arguments and connections.

### **7.3.1 Elements of our innate make-up**

Appleton argues in *The Experience of Landscape* that human aesthetic reaction to landscape has its beginnings in the biological prehistory, as much as the cultural history, of *Homo sapiens*' experience of the natural world.<sup>96</sup> Appleton proposed in 1990 that environmental behaviour is both inherited and acculturated:

Our habits of environmental perception, while they are invariably modified and shaped by cultural, social, historical and personal experiences, are not created out of nothing by these influences; rather they are the derivatives of mechanisms of survival behaviour which were already there, elements of our innate make-up.<sup>97</sup>

Appleton's adaptationist and atavistic argument differs, in its source and implications, from the greater body of architectural criticism, which tends to be argued from a cultural perspective—expressed, for example, in Adrian Forty's judgement that 'architecture—a human product—belongs to culture, not to nature, from which it is categorically different.'<sup>98</sup>

Appleton drew his arguments not only from literature and art history, but also from the sciences; for his research, 'the most fruitful inquiries were most likely to take place in the biological sciences, in ethology, in psychology, in ecology and in genetics itself.'<sup>99</sup> Science in return has shown interest in Appleton's insights into environmental behaviour.<sup>100</sup> Behavioural ecologist Gordon Orians has researched emotional responses to environment, and how they relate to aesthetics, citing Appleton's 'functional' (rather than morphological) concepts of prospect, refuge and hazard, in his evaluation of the role of environments in animal and human survival and reproduction.<sup>101</sup>

### **7.3.2 Aalto and Appleton: reconciling nature and biology, culture and humanity**

An interest in the biological human being and in archaic or atavistic human characteristics, partly characterizes the philosophies of Aalto and Appleton.

Weston relates that Aalto drew upon nature as a principle of harmony, and upon biological forms for their organization and variability, as Aalto himself set out in his 1935 address, 'Rationalism and Man':

Nature, biology, has rich and luxurious forms; with the same construction, the same tissues, and the same principles of cellular organization, it can create billions of combinations . . . Man's life belongs to the same category.<sup>102</sup>

In a 1954 interview Aalto expressed his sense of the primeval as an underlying influence on contemporary humanity along with his lifelong passion for the architectural ambience of northern Italy:

The fundamental problem of architecture is not that of attaining formal perfection but the task of creating an attractive environment with simple means in harmony with our biological needs. For me Italy represents a certain primitivism, characterized to an astonishing degree by attractive forms on a human scale.<sup>103</sup>

The statement was made in 1954, when the Muuratsalo house was a new building; it is not difficult to link these thoughts with his house. Aalto had expressed his preference for the Italian hill town in 1924 (as noted in Chapter 6) in similar terms, as 'a vision the senses receive whole and undisrupted, adapted to human size and sensory limitations.'<sup>104</sup> Aalto seems to have had little difficulty in reconciling the aesthetics of Italian urbanism with 'primitivism'.<sup>105</sup>

Appleton used evolutionary concepts of inherited human responses to environment to form and develop his ideas in *The Experience of Landscape*, drawing on the ideas of architect and planner Camillo Sitte, zoologist Desmond Morris, geographer Clarence Glacken and others.<sup>106</sup> Another influential source for Appleton, landscape architect Brenda Colvin, wrote that 'Humanity cannot exist independently and must cherish the relationships binding us to the rest of life. That relationship is expressed usually by the landscape in which we live.'<sup>107</sup>

Appleton supports Colvin's sentiment, holding the human relationship with landscape to be an essential connection.

In the early twentieth century, Aalto had experienced pre-urban life in the landscapes of central Finland. Familiar with Finnish vernacular building,<sup>108</sup> he had a clear picture of landscape as a pre-industrial human living condition, as a setting for creative work, and as a necessary component of future urban life; he wrote in 1971, 'For millennia, art has not been able to disengage itself from the nature-bound human environment, and neither will it ever be able to do so.'<sup>109</sup> Aalto appears to have fused his atavistic sense of a biological basis for environmental aesthetics with an affinity for Italian archetypes. This perspective, where both biological and cultural themes seem to inform his method, would seem to align Aalto with key aspects of Appleton's hypothesis, affirming the value of prospect-refuge theory as a means to analyze his architecture.

### **7.3.3 A bio-cultural and archaic background**

Appleton proposed prospect-refuge theory to hypothesize a biological basis for human landscape preferences, against a general notion in his field that such behaviour is culturally formed. As noted above, Norberg-Schulz rejected the 'functional' framework of prospect-refuge theory, in favour of the philosophies of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and others, to form his theory of architectural phenomenology.<sup>110</sup> Both E. O. Wilson and Anne Whiston Spirn have separately acknowledged 'refuge' and 'prospect' as essential and archaic concepts of living in the environment.<sup>111</sup> Appleton's passing reference, in *The Experience of Landscape*, to 'being represented as an extreme socio-biologist' (i.e, as rejecting the idea that cultural values influenced landscape aesthetics) acknowledges, without further reference, the established field of Wilson's sociobiology.<sup>112</sup>

Pallasmaa has referred to Aalto's pivotal historical role, arguing that humankind's biological past is a counterpoint to contemporary technical culture. He asserts that a 'strong bio-cultural and archaic background can also be felt in Alvar Aalto's

architecture’;<sup>113</sup> he also maintains that architecture’s main purpose is ‘to act as a mediator between aspects of our biological origin and our present technological culture.’<sup>114</sup> In a 1998 essay, Pallasmaa commented on Hildebrand’s use of prospect-refuge theory to discuss Wright’s houses, connecting this with Aalto’s interest in psychological and biological aspects of architecture as shelter:

Aalto’s architecture is based on similar essential psycho-biological motifs as Wright’s work. In his writings, Aalto frequently emphasises the importance of both biological analogies and the psychological dimension as the basis for his design.<sup>115</sup>

Pallasmaa’s comments suggest the viability of postulating a partly biological argument for the appeal of Aalto’s work. The added ‘psychological dimension’ of an architect’s own house—discussed (see Chapter 4) by Menin and Samuel—as a vehicle for study suggests the value of looking closely at this particular work in order to hypothesise a role for landscape in architectural aesthetics.

#### **7.3.4 The right place: camping and the Alhambra**

Hildebrand, in *The Origins of Architectural Pleasure* (1999) uses Appleton’s notion of landscape symbolism to portray works of architecture as surrogates for preferred landscape.<sup>116</sup> Hildebrand describes the delight experienced in the geometric garden of the Court of the Lions at the Alhambra in Seville as ‘an example of prospect-refuge juxtaposition [whose appeal] depends, not on enculturation or cognitive content, but on universal and immediate emotional response’<sup>117</sup> to symbolized landscape features which, according to Appleton’s theory, people generally enjoy.

In *The Poetics of Gardens*, architects Charles W. Moore, William J. Mitchell and William Turnbull, Jr, describe the Alhambra complex (a popular architectural tourism destination)<sup>118</sup> as ‘a sybaritic pleasure palace of beguiling delicacy and dazzling splendour’.<sup>119</sup> They praise the palace’s courtyards as ‘elaborate and

beautiful campsites’,<sup>120</sup> citing the appeal of the garden: ‘Gardens are rhetorical landscapes . . . composed to instruct and move and delight.’<sup>121</sup>

While Aalto locates a fire at the heart of his Muuratsalo courtyard, like a snowy winter campsite ‘with the fire . . . evoking a pleasing, almost mystical appearance’,<sup>122</sup> the Court of the Lions has stone lions and a fountain at its centre; Hildebrand describes this courtyard as a ‘sunlit meadow where the animals are gathered around the water source’.<sup>123</sup> The Alhambra is a place of both symbols and examples of water, shade, dappled light and animals; the palace has a universal aesthetic appeal which, says Hildebrand, ‘is not to the Muslim only but to Homo sapiens’.<sup>124</sup> Architects and the general public alike enjoy the experience of this camping palace, where architecture imitates and symbolizes nature; the symbolism leads the Alhambra visitor to feel that they are in, to use E. O. Wilson’s terms, ‘the right place’.<sup>125</sup> Moore, Mitchell and Turnbull conclude that camping ‘affords us special pleasure—and an entire palace for camping in, where rooms are gardens and gardens are rooms, seems the ultimate luxury’.<sup>126</sup> With its real and symbolic resources and security, the campsite of the Alhambra appears to exert an enduring attraction for people.

### **7.3.5 After Appleton: Bourassa and the aesthetics of landscape**

Geographer Steven C. Bourassa’s *The Aesthetics of Landscape* (1991) bridged biological and cultural arguments for environmental preference. Although critical of Appleton’s theory, Bourassa uses it to suggest a tripartite classification of landscape preference, into what he defines as *biological laws*, *cultural rules*, and *personal strategies*.<sup>127</sup> In Bourassa’s proposition, biological laws are inherited, universal human principles of survival behaviour; cultural rules are ways of seeing, understanding and judgement framed by the customs, learning and conventions of one’s society; and personal strategies are individual ways of behaviour based on personal meanings, experiences and interpretations derived from both inherited behaviours and one’s own particular social/cultural framework.<sup>128</sup> Bourassa’s classification is less a radical theoretical proposition

than a reflection of differing levels of control over one's behavioural circumstances; Appleton commends Bourassa's 'simple formula' of organizing explanatory arguments.<sup>129</sup>

## **7.4 The Darwinian adaptationist program**

### **7.4.1 Evolved human responses to landscapes**

Orians and Heerwagen refer to aspects of Appleton's prospect-refuge theory in the essay 'Evolved Responses to Landscapes' (1992). Relating evolution, landscape factors, and aesthetics, they describe how an evolutionary biologist 'studies the actions evoked by emotional states to determine why those emotions had survival value.'<sup>130</sup> Their connection of emotion and survival underscores the vital (and heritable, thus evolutionary) importance of such emotional responses to perceived environmental conditions:

Evolutionary approaches to aesthetics are based on the postulate that emotional responses, because they are such powerful motivators of human behaviour, could not have evolved unless the behaviour they evoked contributed positively, on average, to survival and reproductive success.<sup>131</sup>

Orians and Heerwagen also argue that emotional response to landscapes offers a valid topic for research into aesthetics: 'The study of human responses to landscapes is a profitable arena in which to study the evolution of aesthetic tastes.'<sup>132</sup> Orians and Heerwagen's argument seems to derive from interpretations or applications of Appleton's work on landscape aesthetics, rather than from his actual arguments.<sup>133</sup> They refer to Hildebrand's findings as set out in *The Wright Space*, hence their findings appear consistent with Pallasmaa's ideas about emotional aspects of Aalto's architecture:

Wright's consistent use of changes in ceiling elevation and the placement of major living spaces directly under the roof both open up the space visually and create the comfortable sensation of living under a tree canopy. The sense of refuge and protection one feels

under a spreading tree canopy is certainly consistent with an evolutionary approach to aesthetics.<sup>134</sup>

Opponents of the evolutionary argument, such as Appleton's fellow geographer Denis Cosgrove, point to a lack of physical or other evolutionary evidence for Orians' arguments;<sup>137</sup> paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould likened E. O. Wilson's evolutionary sociobiological explanations of human behaviour to Rudyard Kipling's 'Just So' stories.<sup>138</sup>

Orians and Heerwagen admit to their task's methodological difficulty; conceding that '[g]ood evolutionary theories are difficult to formulate and test', they endorse the use of an evolutionary method in environmental aesthetics.<sup>139</sup> The evolutionary perspective, as shown by Hildebrand, appears to offer new insight, and warrants inclusion in a study of landscape as a determining factor in architectural aesthetics.

#### **7.4.2 The savannah hypothesis**

Wilson, in *The Future of Life* (2003), describes human beings as 'a biological species dependent on certain natural environments until very recently in its evolutionary history.'<sup>140</sup> He holds that, due to the long human co-evolution with landscape, 'what we call aesthetics may be just the pleasurable sensations we get from the particular stimuli to which our brains are inherently adapted.'<sup>141</sup>

One scientific hypothesis recognized in landscape is Orians and Heerwagen's 'savannah theory' or 'savannah hypothesis', which holds that the ideal landscape type was the savannah landscape of eastern Africa, where hominids arguably became *Homo sapiens*:

The savanna is an environment that provides what we need:  
nutritious food that is relatively easy to obtain; trees that offer  
protection from the sun and can be climbed to avoid predators; long,

unimpeded views; and frequent changes in elevation that allow us to orient in space.<sup>142</sup>

Orians and Heerwagen argue that '[r]esearch on landscape preferences strongly indicates that savanna-like environments are consistently better liked than other environments.'<sup>143</sup>

Appleton saw value in the savannah hypothesis, even though he found its evidence 'circumstantial', rather than directly proven.<sup>144</sup> Landscape theorist Ian Thompson notes that the distinguished landscape architect Geoffrey Jellicoe incorporated the savannah hypothesis into his ideas of landscape aesthetics.<sup>145</sup> Wilson also supports the savannah hypothesis from the perspective of evolutionary biology:

The human habitat preference is consistent with the 'savannah hypothesis', that humanity originated in the savannahs and transitional forests of Africa. Almost the full evolutionary history of the genus *Homo*, including *Homo sapiens* and its immediate ancestors, was spent in or near these habitats or others similar to them.<sup>146</sup>

Wilson in *The Future of Life* (2003) describes a desirable house site in terms of an ideal human habitat: 'a long depth of view across a relatively smooth, grassy ground surface dotted with trees and copses. [People] want to be near a body of water, whether ocean, lake, river, or stream.'<sup>147</sup> Wilson uses Appleton's key terms in identifying characteristics of sought-after sites—elevation, views, security, greenery and water:

People prefer to look out over their ideal terrain from a secure position framed by the semienclature of a domicile. Their choice of home and environs, if made freely, combines a balance of refuge for safety and a wide visual prospect for exploration and foraging.<sup>148</sup>

This description also resembles Higuchi's *zofu-tokusui* pattern (discussed earlier). While Wilson's 'semienclature of a domicile' may suggest an open courtyard, a loggia, a large sunny room by a garden or terrace—as found in the work of Wright and Aalto—he regards a balance of refuge and prospect as part of a freely chosen ideal human habitat.<sup>149</sup> However, Wilson is aware, like Orians and Heerwagen, that this argument is inferential, rather than provable: 'No direct evidence has yet been sought for a genetic basis of the human habitat preference, but its presence is suggested by a consistency in its manifestation across cultures.'<sup>150</sup>

#### **7.4.3 Through landscape: an extended view using prospect-refuge theory**

In summary, it is worth restating that Appleton, to bridge a gap he saw between the arts and the sciences, hypothesized an explanation of landscape aesthetics. He postulated in *The Experience of Landscape* that 'what it is that we like about landscape, and why we like it'<sup>151</sup> is the ability to see without being seen, summarized as prospect-refuge theory, a functional explanation of landscape preference referring to evolutionary theory. Appleton's theory is not mentioned in the Aalto criticism of Curtis, Frampton, Treib, or Weston, although those writers are interested in landscape and use it as an interpretive lens for Aalto's architecture (as discussed in Chapters 3 and 6). However, as noted in this chapter, Weston and Kite have recently used prospect-refuge theory to write on Utzon and modernity, respectively.

Appleton's prospect-refuge theory, it has been argued here, makes a partly atavistic, biological explanation of landscape aesthetics; his concept of landscape preference as an inherited behaviour has interdisciplinary support. According to Hildebrand, architectural experience is analogous to experience of natural environments, and so Appleton's theory of natural environments can be used to consider the aesthetics of artificial environments (buildings, architecture, architectural elements) as much as natural landscapes and landscape features.

Human landscape experience predates and possibly underlies architectural experience; natural environments, perceived as landscape, were the settings for early human survival and evolution. The notion of an evolutionary basis for human behaviour has provoked recent reflection within the humanities and the life sciences. A traceable thread can connect evolutionary biology to Aalto's architecture, through Appleton's prospect-refuge theory and landscape experience. Landscape can thus be connected to atavistic tendencies recognized in Aalto's work, supporting a 'biological' explanation of the appeal of his architecture, to complement existing 'cultural' interpretations. Landscape symbolism may be a factor in landscape-related universal aesthetics.

### **7.5 Prospect-refuge theory: methodological problems: spatiality, biology, culture**

Appleton's case for prospect-refuge theory, he notes, 'was originally argued chiefly in terms of landscape rather than buildings'.<sup>152</sup> Two methodological problems inherent in applying a landscape theory to architectural aesthetics are considered below: an ontological problem, of difference between landscape and architectural spatiality; and an epistemological problem, of landscape aesthetics categorized as a type of 'biological' knowledge. A third problem, of a method for considering landscape symbolism in historical or 'cultural' elements in Aalto's architecture, is also discussed below. These issues may also present valuable areas for future research.

#### **7.5.1 Prospect-refuge theory: the problem of spatiality**

Landscape space, by definition and etymology (see Chapter 2), is generally exterior and physically large, a broad visual 'scape' over a portion of natural space. The ontology of landscape (see Chapter 5) includes elements of natural space, as well as artificial constructs such as landscape painting, rural landscapes, freeways, gardens, parks, even architectural elements such as terraces and steeples.<sup>153</sup>

While landscape space is potentially vast, architectural space, though similar in respects,<sup>154</sup> is constrained within, between, or in the vicinity of buildings, and is relatively limited in scale. Between the two, it may be said, lies urban space; Colquhoun (see Chapter 6) observes that for Aalto ‘The building becomes a kind of town’,<sup>155</sup> hence a creative conflation of urban and domestic space. The relative openness of landscape space suggests *prospect* symbolism, while architectural space, as enclosure,<sup>156</sup> seems to suggest *refuge* symbolism. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of Appleton’s landscape theory: it was not intended to identify and articulate preference for the many kinds of architectural space. In this respect, Norberg-Schulz, and Pallasmaa, using the work of Bachelard and others, have outlined ideas of architectural phenomenology, noting the possibilities of an emotionally related, haptic and material concept of spatiality.<sup>157</sup>

### **7.5.2 Prospect-refuge theory: the problem of biology**

Appleton’s theory has been seen by Ian Thompson as an attempt ‘to put our landscape preferences on a scientific basis.’<sup>158</sup> Appleton (following philosopher John Dewey and zoologist Desmond Morris)<sup>159</sup> sees human environmental behaviour—such as ‘hiding’ in the landscape (see list above)—as instinctual, ‘of the same kind as that which impels the animals.’<sup>160</sup> Thompson warns that biological hypotheses for landscape preference ‘will take us into the realm of environmental psychology and the controversial field of sociobiology’,<sup>161</sup> the controversy, he observes, stems from the claims of such discourses to explain complex human behaviour, such as landscape preference, in terms of Darwinian evolution.

Curtis argues (see Chapter 3) that Aalto took an ‘intuitive, biomorphically inspired approach to environmental design.’<sup>162</sup> Similarly, Frampton holds (as noted in Chapter 4) that Aalto was sustained by a lifelong interest in ‘complex geological or biological orders’.<sup>163</sup> Aalto himself (as noted in Chapter 6) used biological analogy to praise the Finnish vernacular farmhouse:

a building that begins with a single small cell, or dispersed, embryonic shacks—shelters for people or animals—and grows, figuratively speaking, year by year. ‘The great Karelian house’ is comparable to a biological cluster of cells.<sup>164</sup>

Using a ‘biological’ theory—conceived to understand spatial choice in landscape—to think about Aalto’s architectural aesthetics includes the authority of biological knowledge, along with spatial arguments for the appeal of Aalto’s architecture.

### **7.5.3 Prospect-refuge theory: the problem of culture**

Appleton’s ‘biological’ standpoint has been discussed relative to Cosgrove’s ‘cultural’ point of view (see Chapter 5). Forty, as noted above, holds that architecture, made by humankind, ‘belongs to culture, not to nature’.<sup>165</sup> Despite these strong arguments,<sup>166</sup> Hildebrand recently used prospect-refuge theory in *The Origins of Architectural Pleasure* (1999) to investigate the experience of historical and contemporary architecture; he notes that while numerous authors have researched aesthetic preference in the natural environment, few have studied architectural environments.<sup>167</sup> A nature-culture duality seems to be an inherent formative divide in architectural history, and an intriguing problem for the present study.

As noted through Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6, Aalto took a lifelong interest in Italian art, architecture and urbanism; yet there appears to be no extended study of Italian archetypes in Aalto’s work.<sup>168</sup> As a result, in the present study of Aalto’s house architecture—in the absence of a survey of, say, Italian *piazze* in terms of prospect-refuge symbolism—such precedents are regarded as ‘cultural’, even though Aalto himself (see Chapter 6) was aware of environmental and biological determinants in the aesthetics of Italian towns. As noted previously (see Chapter 5), he wrote in 1924,

We shall not go any further into the reasons that made people settle on these hills in ancient times. They are common knowledge and so natural

that there is no need to repeat them here. But aesthetic value arose as a by-product, just like the beautiful lines that mark human civilization in Mantegna's frescoes.<sup>169</sup>

Despite Aalto's reticence to discuss the aesthetics of Italian precedents, his judgement that the appeal of such places is 'common knowledge and so natural' suggests a universal preference; Aalto also seems to have no difficulty in connecting the aesthetics of northern Italian landscapes with the cultural achievements of Mantegna.<sup>170</sup>

## **7.6 Conclusion**

Appleton's 1975 publication of his theory of landscape symbolism, which included his prospect-refuge terminology, allowed his work to be used by Hildebrand; it was also noted in other disciplines: biologists and other scientists have acknowledged his theory, and its 'evolutionary basis', similar to 'savannah theory'. Consideration of the spatiality of prospect and refuge enhances its relevance for architecture as for landscape. Appleton's theory has biological and atavistic elements, not unlike Aalto's own method and enjoyment of camping and hunting. The theory seems to apply to architecture, as to landscape.

Some methodological problems arise: Appleton's theory is in terms of landscape, not buildings; landscape and architectural spatiality appear to be different; landscape aesthetics implies a 'biological' and evolutionary framework; landscape symbolism may help explain Aalto's adoption of historical or 'cultural' elements in architecture. These issues may also present valuable areas for future research.

The interdisciplinary breadth of sources, and problems implied in using prospect-refuge theory would seem to help clarify, as much as question, its value in thinking about architecture. Appleton's prospect-refuge theory presents a way to use landscape as a paradigm for reflection on the appeal of Aalto's Muuratsalo summer house.

## CHAPTER 7 NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, revised edition (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1996/1975).

<sup>2</sup> Grant Hildebrand, *The Wright Space: Pattern and Meaning in Frank Lloyd Wright's Houses* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*. Appleton left the 1996 revised edition unchanged from the 1975 edition, other than to append a substantial 'Postscript', where Appleton revisits his original arguments in light of the intervening two decades of comment and research on landscape aesthetics. See also Jay Appleton, *The Symbolism of Habitat: an interpretation of landscape in the arts* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Jay Appleton, *How I Made the World: Shaping a View of Landscape* (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> Jay Appleton, 'Prospect and Refuge in the Landscapes of England and Australia', in Ian Douglas, John E. Hobbs and John J. Pigram, editors, *Geographical Essays in Honour of Gilbert J. Rutland*, (Armidale, NSW: University of New England, 1975); Jay Appleton, 'Pleasure and the Perception of Habitat: a conceptual framework', in Barry Sadler and Allen Carlson, editors, *Environmental Aesthetics: Essays in Interpretation* (Victoria, Canada: University of Victoria, 1982); Jay Appleton, 'Prospects and refuges revisited', in Jack L. Nasar, editor, *Environmental Aesthetics: Theory, research, and applications* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1988); Jay Appleton, 'The Role of the Arts in Landscape Research' in Edmund Penning-Roswell and David Lowenthal, editors, *Landscape Meanings and Values* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986); Jay Appleton, 'Landscape and architecture', in Ben Farmer and Hentie Louw, editors, *Companion to Contemporary Architectural Thought* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Jay Appleton, *The Poetry of Habitat* (Hull, UK: University of Hull, 1978). Appleton's oil painting is used to illustrate prospect-refuge symbolism in *The Experience of Landscape*, p.78.

<sup>7</sup> Appleton, 'Prospect and Refuge in the Landscapes of England and Australia'; Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.224.

<sup>8</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.66.

<sup>9</sup> John D. Balling and John H. Falk, 'Development of visual preference for natural environments', *Environment and Behavior*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Jan. 1982, 5-28.

<sup>10</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.1.

<sup>11</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.1.

<sup>12</sup> Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas on the Sublime and the Beautiful*, edited by James T. Boulton, revised edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987/1757).

<sup>13</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.24-34. See also John Macarthur, *The Picturesque: Architecture, Disgust and Other Irregularities* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.40-42.

<sup>15</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.43.

<sup>16</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.44.

<sup>17</sup> s.v. 'Aesthetics', in Meto J. Vroom, *Lexicon of garden and landscape architecture* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006), p.34.

<sup>18</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.51.

<sup>19</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.61.

<sup>20</sup> See for example Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and culture in Western thought from ancient times to the end of the eighteenth century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967); Desmond Morris, *The Naked Ape: a zoologist's study of the human animal* (London: Cape, 1967).

<sup>21</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.60.

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- <sup>22</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.ix.
- <sup>23</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.63.
- <sup>24</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.66.
- <sup>25</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.x.
- <sup>26</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.x.
- <sup>27</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.x.
- <sup>28</sup> Chapter 4 of *The Experience of Landscape* is titled 'A Framework of Symbolism'; see pp.73-107.
- <sup>29</sup> The list is compiled from Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, Table 1, p.79; Table 3, p.91.
- <sup>30</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1934).
- <sup>31</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.149-51.
- <sup>32</sup> Göran Schildt, 'Epilogue', in *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, edited by Göran Schildt, translated by Timothy Bingham (Helsinki: Ottava, 1997), p.286.
- <sup>33</sup> Christian Gullichsen, Preface, in Peter Reed, editor, *Alvar Aalto: Between Humanism and Materialism* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), p. 10.
- <sup>34</sup> Jay Appleton, *The Symbolism of Habitat: An interpretation of landscape in the arts* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), p.22.
- <sup>35</sup> Jay Appleton, 'Landscape and architecture', in Ben Farmer and Hentie Louw, editors, *Companion to Contemporary Architectural Thought* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993).
- <sup>36</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.248-53.
- <sup>37</sup> Richard Weston, *Utzon: Inspiration Vision Architecture* (Hellerup, Denmark: Editions Blondal, 2002), p.371.
- <sup>38</sup> Richard Weston, 'From place to planet: Jørn Utzon's earthbound platforms and floating roofs', in Sarah Menin, editor, *Constructing Place: Mind and Matter* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p.251.
- <sup>39</sup> Stephen Kite, 'Modernity and the threshold: Psychologizing the places in-between', in Menin, *Constructing Place*, pp.182-83.
- <sup>40</sup> Stephen Kite, 'Modernity and the threshold: Psychologizing the places in-between', in Menin, *Constructing Place*, pp.182-83.
- <sup>41</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.117.
- <sup>42</sup> Kite, 'Modernity and the threshold', p.196.
- <sup>43</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'From doorstep to living room' (1926), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, pp.50-51.
- <sup>44</sup> Hildebrand, *The Wright Space*, pp.19-27.
- <sup>45</sup> The 14 elements diagnosed in Hildebrand's 'Wright Pattern' are as follows (in abbreviated form, using and paraphrasing Hildebrand's terms; bolds by this writer). Interior features include: (1) **major spaces** elevated above terrain; (2) **fireplace** at heart of house; (3) **low ceiling edge** with (4) flanking **built-in seating and cabinetwork**; (5) **ceiling** echoes roof form; (6) **distant edges of ceiling** return to low elevation; (7) **interior views** to contiguous spaces through screens; (8) **glass and glazed doors** on walls distant from fire; (9) large elevated **terrace** beyond. Exterior features include: (10) **deep overhanging eaves**; (11) **central chimney**; (12) broad horizontal groupings of **window bands**; (13) conspicuous **balconies or terraces**; (14) a **long, circuitous path** to interior. See Hildebrand, *The Wright Space*, p.25.
- <sup>46</sup> Hildebrand, *The Wright Space*, pp.28-29.
- <sup>47</sup> The work of other architects—Walter Burley Griffin, Richard Neutra, Mario Botta—is examined by Hildebrand using a similar methodology. See Hildebrand, *The Wright Space*, pp.150-62.
- <sup>48</sup> Hildebrand, *The Wright Space*, p.16.

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- <sup>49</sup> Grant Hildebrand, *The Origins of Architectural Pleasure* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
- <sup>50</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.91.
- <sup>51</sup> Kate Nesbitt, 'Introduction', in Kate Nesbitt, editor, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), p.20.
- <sup>52</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1980), p.15.
- <sup>53</sup> Appleton, 'Glossary of Terms', *The Experience of Landscape*, p.261.
- <sup>54</sup> Tadahiko Higuchi, *The Visual and Spatial Structure of Landscapes* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1983), p.90.
- <sup>55</sup> Higuchi, *The Visual and Spatial Structure of Landscapes*, p.146.
- <sup>56</sup> Higuchi, *The Visual and Spatial Structure of Landscapes*, p.151.
- <sup>57</sup> Solar orientation and habitat of world capital cities is discussed in Paul Jacques Grillo, *Form Function and Design* (New York: Dover, 1960), pp.112-13.
- <sup>58</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, 'The Phenomenon of Place', in Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, p.414. (*Architectural Association Quarterly* 8, no.4 (1976): 3-10).
- <sup>59</sup> See for example: Charles Moore, Gerald Allen and Donlyn Lyndon, *The Place of Houses* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000/1978); Kevin Nute, *Place, time, and being in Japanese architecture* (London: Routledge, 2004); Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A philosophical history* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
- <sup>60</sup> 'A phenomenology of architecture is therefore urgently needed.' Norberg-Schulz, 'The Phenomenon of Place', p.415.
- <sup>61</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, p.10; p.203, n.9.
- <sup>62</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, pp.10-23. He also cites Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Bachelard, Bollnow 'and others'; Christian Norberg-Schulz, *The Concept of Dwelling: On the way to figurative Architecture* (New York: Electa/Rizzoli, 1984), p.133.
- <sup>63</sup> Kate Nesbitt, 'Introduction: The Phenomenon of Place, Christian Norberg-Schulz', in Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, p.412.
- <sup>64</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, translated by J. Rykwert, N. Leach, and R. Tavernor (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1988); Aristotle, *The Physics*, Book II, §8. Quoted in Forty, *Words and Buildings*, p.221.
- <sup>65</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture* (New York: Praeger, 1971), pp.70-72.
- <sup>66</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture*, p.72.
- <sup>67</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.92.
- <sup>68</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture*, p.31.
- <sup>69</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *The Concept of Dwelling*, p.89.
- <sup>70</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture*, p.88.
- <sup>71</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p.xxxvii.
- <sup>72</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.17, also pp.18-26.
- <sup>73</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.17.
- <sup>74</sup> See also Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a renewed understanding of the place-world* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp.71-105; Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), pp.35-36; J. D. Dickson, *The Mastery of Space, Part One: Space, shape, movement, and their social implications*, Study Paper No.66 (Auckland, NZ: University of Auckland, School of Architecture, 1982).

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- <sup>75</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.8.
- <sup>76</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.31.
- <sup>77</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.32.
- <sup>78</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, pp.34-35.
- <sup>79</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, pp.34-35.
- <sup>80</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.122.
- <sup>81</sup> John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994); Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, pp.76-82.
- <sup>82</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, p.35, p.45.
- <sup>83</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, p.102.
- <sup>84</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*, p.107.
- <sup>85</sup> 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), p.10.
- <sup>86</sup> Aben and de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden*, p.175.
- <sup>87</sup> ‘Garden of meditation or contemplation’; Aben and de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden*, pp.54-56.
- <sup>88</sup> Aben and de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden*, p.173.
- <sup>89</sup> This thematic triad of wood/ water/ rock, ‘when a place suddenly exposes its connections to an ancient and peculiar vision of the forest, the mountain, the river’, is explored at length in Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Collins, 1995), p.16.
- <sup>90</sup> ‘The house itself reflects the requisite modernist departure from traditional form’; Norman Crowe, *Nature and the Idea of a Man-made World: An investigation into the evolutionary roots of form and order in the built environment* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1997), p.88.
- <sup>91</sup> Edward O. Wilson, *Biophilia: The human bond with other species* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp.103-18. Appleton’s *The Experience of Landscape* was first published in 1975, the same year as Wilson published his ideas in *Sociobiology*; see Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Harvard, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1975).
- <sup>92</sup> Appleton exclaims in reflection: ‘It seemed to me [that] what was needed was the injection of an argument pressing for a serious consideration of the hereditary case . . . I was therefore represented as an extreme socio-biologist . . . and it was assumed that I rejected the idea that cultural values had anything to do with the formation of taste in landscape!’ Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.236.
- <sup>93</sup> Hildebrand, *The Wright Space*, pp.28-34.
- <sup>94</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, ‘The mind of the environment’, in Birgit Cold, editor, *Aesthetics, Well-being and Health: Essays within Architecture and Environmental Aesthetics* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001), pp.212-13.
- <sup>95</sup> Alvar Aalto, ‘More Beautiful Housing’ (1957), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.262; quoted in Juhani Pallasmaa, Tomoko Sato, eds, *Alvar Aalto Through the Eyes of Shigeru Ban* (London: Black Dog, 2007), p.30.
- <sup>96</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*.
- <sup>97</sup> Appleton, *The Symbolism of Habitat*, p.22.
- <sup>98</sup> Forty, *Words and Buildings*, p.220.
- <sup>99</sup> Appleton, *Experience of Landscape*, p.236.
- <sup>100</sup> See Stephen Kaplan, ‘Perception and landscape: conceptions and misconceptions’, in Jack L. Nasar, editor, *Environmental Aesthetics: Theory, research, and applications* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.49; also Judith H. Heerwagen and Gordon H. Orians, ‘The ecological world of children’, in Peter H. Kahn, Jr., and Stephen Kellert, eds, *Children and Nature*:

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*Psychological, sociocultural, and evolutionary investigations* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 2002), p.44.

<sup>101</sup> Gordon H. Orians, 'Human Behavioral Ecology: 140 Years Without Darwin Is Too Long', *Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America* 79, (1): 15-28, 1998.

<sup>102</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Rationalism and Man' (1935), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.93.

<sup>103</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Journey to Italy' (1954), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.39. (Interview in Italian architectural journal *Casabella Continuità*, in 1954.)

<sup>104</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'The Hilltop Town' (1924), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.49.

<sup>105</sup> Many aspects of the idea of 'the primitive' in architecture are discussed and challenged in Jo Odgers, Flora Samuel and Adam Sharr, editors, *Primitive: Original matters in architecture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>106</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.58-61.

<sup>107</sup> Brenda Colvin, *Land and Landscape: Evolution, Design and Control* (London: John Murray, 1970), p.108; quoted in Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.61.

<sup>108</sup> Ranulph Glanville, 'Finnish Vernacular Farmhouses', *The Architectural Association Quarterly*, February 1978, pp.36-53.

<sup>109</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'The Arts,' in *Alvar Aalto Volume II, 1963-1970*, edited by Karl Fleig (Zurich: Éditions d'Architecture Artemis, 1971), p.12.

<sup>110</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, 'The Phenomenon of Place' (1976), in Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, n.9, p.427.

<sup>111</sup> Wilson, *Biophilia*, pp.103-118; Anne Whiston Spirn, *The Language of Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>112</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.236.

<sup>113</sup> Pallasmaa, 'The mind of the environment', p.211.

<sup>114</sup> Pallasmaa, 'The mind of the environment', p.213.

<sup>115</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Image and Meaning', in *Alvar Aalto: Villa Mairea*, edited by Juhani Pallasmaa (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation/ Mairea Foundation, 1998), p.86.

<sup>116</sup> Hildebrand, 'Finding a Good Home', Chapter 2, *The Origins of Architectural Pleasure*, pp.15-49.

<sup>117</sup> Hildebrand, *The Origins of Architectural Pleasure*, p.26.

<sup>118</sup> The Alhambra's contemporary popularity is noted: its 'splendours are very much in evidence, hidden only partially by the swarms of tourists who cover its surfaces. It has been showered with appreciations.' Charles W. Moore, William J. Mitchell, William Turnbull, Jr, *The Poetics of Gardens* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1988), p.190.

<sup>119</sup> Moore, Mitchell, Turnbull, *The Poetics of Gardens*, p.190.

<sup>120</sup> Moore, Mitchell, Turnbull, *The Poetics of Gardens*, p.190.

<sup>121</sup> Moore, Mitchell, Turnbull, *The Poetics of Gardens*, pp.49-50.

<sup>122</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Experimental House at Muuratsalo', in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his Own Words*, pp.234-35.

<sup>123</sup> Hildebrand, *The Origins of Architectural Pleasure*, p.26.

<sup>124</sup> Hildebrand, *The Origins of Architectural Pleasure*, p.26.

<sup>125</sup> Wilson, *Biophilia*, pp.103-18.

<sup>126</sup> Moore, Mitchell and Turnbull, *The Poetics of Gardens*, p.194.

<sup>127</sup> Steven C. Bourassa, *The Aesthetics of Landscape* (London: Belhaven Press, 1991).

<sup>128</sup> Bourassa, *The Aesthetics of Landscape*, pp.47-65.

<sup>129</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.242-43.

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- <sup>130</sup> Gordon H. Orians and Judith H. Heerwagen, 'Evolved Responses to Landscapes', in Jerome Barkow, Lida Cosmides and John Tooby, editors, *The Adapted Mind: evolutionary psychology and the generation of culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p.555.
- <sup>131</sup> Orians and Heerwagen, 'Evolved Responses to Landscapes', p.555.
- <sup>132</sup> Orians and Heerwagen, 'Evolved Responses to Landscapes', p.555.
- <sup>133</sup> Orians and Heerwagen cite Hildebrand's *The Wright Space*, and refer to trees more than buildings, under the subheading of 'Architectural Applications'; see Orians and Heerwagen, 'Evolved Responses to Landscapes', p.572.
- <sup>134</sup> Orians and Heerwagen, 'Evolved Responses to Landscapes', p.572.
- <sup>137</sup> Denis Cosgrove, 'Critiques and queries', in reply to Gordon Orians, 'An Ecological and Evolutionary Approach to Landscape Aesthetics', in Penning-Roswell and Lowenthal, *Landscape Meanings and Values*, p.23.
- <sup>138</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, 'Sociobiology: The Art of Storytelling', in Robert W. Sussman, *The Biological Basis of Human Behaviour: a critical review*, 2nd edition (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1999).
- <sup>139</sup> Orians and Heerwagen, 'Evolved Responses to Landscapes', p.575.
- <sup>140</sup> Edward O. Wilson, *The Future of Life* (London: Abacus, 2003), p.137.
- <sup>141</sup> Wilson, *The Future of Life*, p.137.
- <sup>142</sup> Orians and Heerwagen, 'Evolved Responses to Landscapes', p.558.
- <sup>143</sup> Orians and Heerwagen, 'Evolved Responses to Landscapes', p.558.
- <sup>144</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.240.
- <sup>145</sup> Ian Thompson, introduction, 'Biological Theories', in Thompson, *Rethinking Landscape*, pp.64-65.
- <sup>146</sup> Wilson, *The Future of Life*, pp.135-36.
- <sup>147</sup> Wilson, *The Future of Life*, p.134.
- <sup>148</sup> Wilson, *The Future of Life*, p.135.
- <sup>149</sup> Wilson, *The Future of Life*, p.135.
- <sup>150</sup> Wilson, *The Future of Life*, p.135.
- <sup>151</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.255.
- <sup>152</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.248.
- <sup>153</sup> 'Artificial secondary vantage-points include all man-made structures which have the effect of providing an observation-point from which an extended field of vision could be achieved.' Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.81.
- <sup>154</sup> 'One familiar notion maintains that the two disciplines are essentially *different* from each other, best studied and practiced as distinct. Another idea supposes a contrary affiliation, that the two are really one and best taken up as the *same*.' David Leatherbarrow, *Topographical Stories: Studies in Landscape and Architecture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p.1.
- <sup>155</sup> Alan Colquhoun, 'Alvar Aalto: Type versus Function' (1976), in *Essays in Architectural Criticism: Modern Architecture and Historical Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), p.78. 'Tropism': 'the turning of all or part of an organism in a particular direction in response to an external stimulus'; Apple computer, *Oxford American Dictionary*.
- <sup>156</sup> Forty considers space as enclosure, continuum, and extension of the body; see Adrian Forty, 'Space', in *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), p.266.
- <sup>157</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, 'The Phenomenon of Place', in Kate Nesbitt, editor, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996); Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the*

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*Senses* (Chichester UK: Wiley-Academy, 2005); Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand: Existential Wisdom and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture* (Chichester, UK: Wiley, 2009).

<sup>158</sup> Ian Thompson, ed., *Rethinking Landscape: a critical reader* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2009), p.59.

<sup>159</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover, 1958/1925); Morris, *The Naked Ape*.

<sup>160</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.60. 'Desmond Morris has shown that, if we are to take a meaningful interpretation of the patterns of human behaviour we must start from the premise that *Homo sapiens* is merely one of 193 living species of monkeys and apes.' Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.58.

<sup>161</sup> Thompson, *Rethinking Landscape*, p.59.

<sup>162</sup> Frampton, 'The Legacy of Alvar Aalto', p.238.

<sup>163</sup> Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900*, p.302.

<sup>164</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Karelian Architecture' (1941), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.118.

<sup>165</sup> Forty, *Words and Buildings*, p.220.

<sup>166</sup> Nature can be a neglected category in architectural theory: Hays' 1998 theory anthology contains one paragraph on nature (in the work of Michael Graves) in 800 pages of text. The index of Nesbitt's 1996 anthology (590 pages) contains 19 references to nature, of which 4 are extended discussions. See Alan Colquhoun, 'From Bricolage to Myth, or How to Put Humpty Dumpty Together Again' (1978), in K. Michael Hays, ed., *Architecture Theory since 1968* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 1998), p.345; Index, in Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, p.600.

<sup>167</sup> Grant Hildebrand, *The Origins of Architectural Pleasure* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp.xv-xvii.

<sup>168</sup> See Riitta Nikula, 'The city in the writings of Alvar Aalto', in Timo Tuomi, Kristina Paatero, Eija Rauske, eds, *Alvar Aalto in Seven Buildings* (Helsinki: Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1998).

<sup>169</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'The Hilltop Town' (1924), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.49.

<sup>170</sup> Appleton similarly uses the 'beautiful lines' of nature to gauge prospect-refuge symbolism in Dutch and Italian landscape painting; see Chapter 5 'Balance', in Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.108-48.

## **Chapter 8 Muuratsalo**

### **Aalto's Muuratsalo summer house: analysis and experience, through the lens of prospect-refuge theory**

#### **8.0 Chapter 8 Introduction**

##### **8.0.1 Introduction: knowledge and experience**

This chapter presents an analysis of Alvar Aalto's Muuratsalo house based on two bodies of knowledge: historical knowledge from the literature reviewed in previous chapters; and this writer's experience, as an architectural tourist, of a group visit to the Muuratsalo house in August 2008. Readings of historical opinion on Aalto's house are combined with personal experience of house and site, to consider landscape-symbolic elements in the Muuratsalo house.

Jay Appleton's prospect-refuge theory—used by Grant Hildebrand to consider the appeal of Wright's houses—is used, following Hildebrand, as a lens of landscape, to identify landscape-symbolic architectural elements symbolizing prospect and refuge in the Muuratsalo house, and to argue that the appeal of Aalto's summer house architecture can be considered in terms of landscape-based theory. While arguing that Appleton's theory offers a landscape lens for architecture, the present study uses the methodology of architecture, as set out in Chapter 2. Notions of domestic, urban and landscape spatiality provide a critical framework through which to regard Appleton's landscape theory as a tool for thinking about architectural aesthetics.

The visitor's experience of the Muuratsalo house and site is considered in light of notions discussed in previous chapters, such as: architectural views on landscape emerging during the Aalto bicentenary, reviewed in Chapter 3; architectural reflections on landscape and site, reviewed in Chapter 4; landscape ideas, of enclosed garden and terrace, discussed in Chapter 5; and Aalto's houses, architectural aesthetics, and his archaic and biological affinities, as considered in Chapter 6. Appleton's prospect-refuge theory, as discussed in Chapter 7, is the

framework for this chapter's selective approach to landscape and architectural elements encountered during one afternoon visit to Aalto's summer house.

### **8.0.2 Three perspectives: approach, outside, inside**

Appleton maintained that his prospect-refuge theory 'is not irrelevant to the analysis and criticism of architecture as an important component of landscape.'<sup>1</sup> Appleton was able to see prospect and refuge opportunities in both everyday and architect-designed buildings.<sup>2</sup> Grant Hildebrand paraphrases Appleton's key characteristics of 'evidences of pleasurable response to landscape conditions',<sup>3</sup> describing the essential conditions for symbolism of prospect and refuge:

The setting must suggest and provide a refuge in which the occupant cannot easily be seen . . . from the refuge the occupant must be able to identify and move to a prospect setting . . . the prospect setting must suggest and provide an unimpeded outlook over a considerable distance.<sup>4</sup>

The analysis below—following Hildebrand's use of prospect-refuge theory to investigate landscape symbolism in architectural settings—looks at Aalto's Muuratsalo house from three perspectives: as the visitor approaches the house site; from outside the house, looking at walls, courtyard, windows, etc.; and from inside the house. Architectural elements which offer or symbolize prospect and refuge are identified and located using Appleton's prospect-refuge terminology. The Aalto literature, and observations of the Muuratsalo house by this writer, are used to form a critical reading of real and symbolic landscape elements in Aalto's design, and to argue that the appeal of Aalto's house architecture is landscape-related.

### 8.0.3 Method: theory and experience

The description of a visit to the Muuratsalo house forming the body of this chapter combines two components which were initially separate stages of research: a review of selected historical literature on the Muuratsalo house from 1953, and this writer's firsthand experience of the Muuratsalo house in late August 2008. The historical literature (writing, drawings, photographs) forms a database to help identify potential symbols of prospect and refuge. It is also interesting and valuable, as Appleton writes, 'to test the imagery and symbolism of prospect-refuge theory against one's own experience of particular [built settings] and the emotive response they provide.'<sup>5</sup> This is the moment in the research process when theoretical knowledge is used to consider and interpret, on site, an actual work of architecture.

Finnish architect Matti Sanaksenaho emphasizes 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.'<sup>6</sup> The challenge for the visitor, on encountering site and building with knowledge, body and senses—from three sequential spatial viewpoints (approach, outside, and inside the building)—is to gauge the experience of, and responses to, the house.

This process considers less the theory than the literature: is the hypothesis suggested by the literature—that the appeal of Aalto's Muuratsalo house can be understood in terms of landscape aesthetics—supported by experience of the architecture? The 'narrative' of this chapter diagrammatically follows a visitor's experience of the building. A group of thirty visitors arrives by boat on Lake Päijänne from the south; they see the house in the forest and approach along the granite spur; they draw closer and look at the outside of the building; they enter the courtyard with its tall freestanding walls, patterned red brickwork, firepit, openings and monopitch roofs. The group filters into the house, into the living room with fireplace, painting loft, small windows and one large window looking south into the courtyard; they drift into the corridors and snug spaces of the

bedroom wing. After wind and rain on the lake journey, the sun shines through the afternoon.

Within the group of visitors, the individual encounters Aalto's architecture and his chosen site in the Finnish landscape; images, concepts and theories from research interweave with the actuality of forest and building, views and sensations. Aalto's personality is evident: little of the design seems left to chance or the builder's art. A sense of design intentionality, purpose and care seems to permeate all aspects of Aalto's project, allowing this chapter's general assumption that elements and relationships noticed by this visitor result from the architect's deliberate decisions.

This chapter observes prospect-refuge symbolism in the Muuratsalo house, based on the historical literature and as personally experienced by this writer. The ontology of the 'desk-bound' research of earlier chapters is complemented in the present chapter with first-person observations of the summer house and its landscape setting. The house is seen from three sequential points of view, each based on a visitor's drawing closer to the house and its interior. Selected terms from Appleton's prospect-refuge lexicon (as set out in Chapter 7) are used in the narrative of this chapter, and appear in italics, e.g., *indirect prospect*.

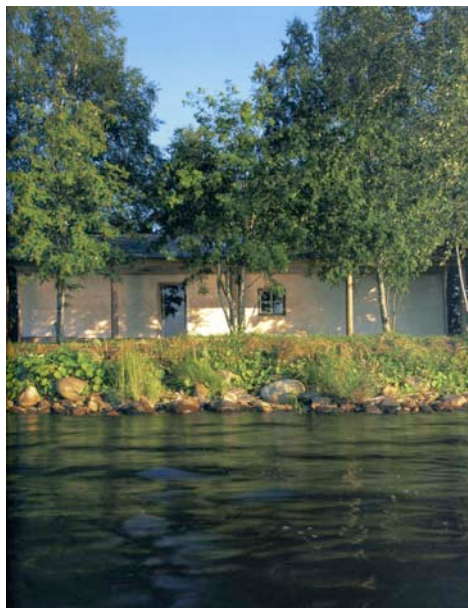
## **8.1 Aalto's summer house: history and theory**

### **8.1.1 A Finnish summer house**

Jari and Sirkkaliisa Jetsonen in *Finnish Summer Houses* (2008) describe twenty summer houses, including Aalto's Muuratsalo house, built by Finnish architects from 1895 to 2003. These 'own houses' are predicated on the idea of a retreat into nature; as architect Severi Blomstedt writes: 'For Finns, the ideal way of spending [summer] months is at one's own cottage and sauna amidst nature, by the shore of a lake.'<sup>7</sup> While nineteenth-century summer houses were typically large villas owned by wealthy city dwellers, the late twentieth century summer houses embodied a 'cottage culture', reflecting a return to nature and generally more primitive or minimal conditions than in city dwellings.<sup>8</sup>

Aalto's summer house at Muuratsalo represents a Finnish architectural tradition extending from Lars Sonck (1870-1956) to Reima Pietilä (1923-1993) to Kristian Gullichsen (b.1932), and others.<sup>9</sup> Jetsonen and Jetsonen, summarizing the program and design of the summer house type, echo Aalto's ideas of experimentation close to nature:

A summer house can also be a natural testing ground for different ways of living . . . minimalist habitation and the relationship with nature are recurrent themes . . . The summer villas can thus be regarded as experimental houses that provide the opportunity for the architect to study a technical or functional aspect in concrete terms or to develop spatial ideas.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 24** Aino Aalto. Villa Flora, Alajärvi.  
Jari and Sirkkaliisa Jetsonen, *Finnish Summer Houses*  
(New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008)

Ideas of retreat, architectural experiment, and proximity to nature seem to be common themes for the Finnish architects' summer houses generally. Aalto's first wife Aino had designed a simple 'country cottage' style summer house, known as the Villa Flora, on a lakefront site at Alajärvi, about 100 km from Muuratsalo, in 1926.<sup>11</sup> The Aalto family had a long connection with the house, whose lakeside

elevation (Fig.24) has only a single door and a single square window. The door/window combination of the Muuratsalo house living room could possibly be read as descended from, or influenced by that of the Villa Flora. The ethics and the habits of the Finnish summer house seem to have been part of Aalto's consciousness for much of his life.

### **8.1.2 Ethic of a summer house: work between swims**

Jetsonen and Jetsonen describe Aalto's Muuratsalo house as part of a summer life of both pleasure and work:

[Muuratsalo] was both an important retreat in the heart of nature and a place where friends came together to relax and find peace. As Aalto once said, 'Between swims I can work completely in peace.'<sup>12</sup>

Sarah Menin mentions how Aalto at times 'exhibited episodes of great drive, verging on manic behaviour.'<sup>13</sup> Aalto's words reflect his perhaps 'manic' creative energies, alternating between play and work, possibly also reflected in the design of his island retreat, with at least three places for drawing or painting work: the painting loft; the drawing boards by the north wall of the living room; and even the recess in the courtyard's east wall, where Aalto used the tiled panel as a painting easel (Fig.25).

An analysis of the summer house would seem obliged to acknowledge the program and the use of the house, its accommodation of work and play. Introspective and concentrated work (painting and architectural drawing) would seem to require enclosure and security, elements cognate with refuge; play seems cognate with outdoor living, water, sun, nature, hence prospect. Menin observes a similar duality at Muuratsalo, of 'dwelling enclosure and natural exclosure', an interplay between the tight spaces of the house and the 'more loosely defined realm' of the courtyard and the natural world beyond.<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 25** Muuratsalo. Alvar Aalto using the courtyard's east wall as easel.  
(Photo courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

Aalto saw the Muuratsalo house as a place combining protection and experiment, work and play, close to the freedom and richness of the natural world.<sup>15</sup> The 'Experimental House, Muuratsalo' was first described by Aalto in *Arkkitehti* in 1953 as a retreat for architectural research, located close to nature:

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 both in terms of form and construction.<sup>16</sup>

As noted by Schildt (see Chapter 4), Aalto saw nature as a 'symbol of freedom', and drew upon nature as a source of personal inspiration for experimental architectural thinking.

## **8.2 The summer house: experiment, retreat and refuge**

### **8.2.1 Taliesin and Muuratsalo: architects' own refuges**

Aalto and Frank Lloyd Wright both produced houses for themselves at critical times in their personal lives, not only as places of work, recuperation and play, but

also as places to shelter from society, in proximity to the natural world, in remote sites of personal significance. Like the Finnish summer houses, these retreats from city life were also private architectural laboratories for trying ideas of building and living which, as Aalto wrote, ‘are not ready to be tried elsewhere’.<sup>17</sup>

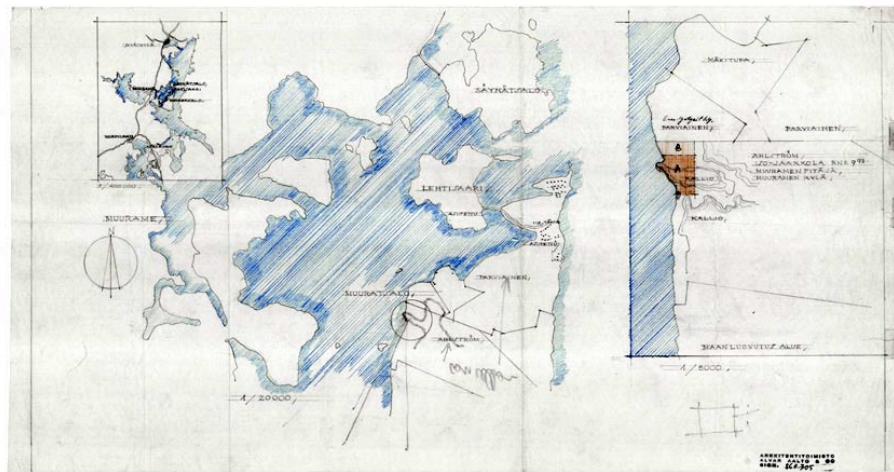
Taliesin (East), Spring Green, Wisconsin (1912), built on a site owned by his family, and known from childhood, was Wright’s refuge from society and personal dislocation, built in ‘the beloved ancestral valley . . . my grandfather’s ground.’<sup>18</sup> The house was located protectively on the hillside, rather than on the more prospect-rich hilltop, notes Grant Hildebrand, ‘partly because of Wright’s sense of sanctity, but partly because at that time he needed to have his—and therefore its—back against the wall.’<sup>19</sup> Hildebrand emphasizes refuge to describe Taliesin, ‘a building consistent, rich, and appropriate in its management of prospect but far more importantly of refuge.’<sup>20</sup>

Aalto visited Taliesin in 1945, and wrote to a colleague, praising its earthy aesthetic: ‘it is so damned beautiful here. You could call this place the heart of America. The building is simple and sweet—built by farmers and students of the school with their own hands, using stones straight out of foundations and the soil.’<sup>21</sup> It is possible to see the courtyards, terraces and ramparts of Taliesin as part inspiration for the courtyard and high walls of Aalto’s Muuratsalo house.

Wright knew his Wisconsin valley from childhood; Aalto similarly knew Central Finland from his youth in Jyväskylä, where he also designed buildings from the 1920s to the 1960s. Writing in 1925 (as noted in Chapter 5) Aalto daydreams of transplanting the architecture and the ‘harmonious, civilized landscapes’ of the Mediterranean into Central Finland: ‘As the steamboat glides across Lake Päijänne . . . I while away the time by making corrections in my mind to the buildings we pass.’<sup>22</sup> The lake and its islands were a familiar locality for Aalto, and a sympathetic setting for his imagination from his earliest professional years.

### 8.2.2 Muuratsalo as setting

The island of Muuratsalo (62°N), in Lake Päijänne in Central Finland, is 150 kilometres north of Helsinki, and an hour's boat ride south of Jyväskylä, the nearest major city; the island may be described as a natural refuge, and was more so when accessible only by water in the 1950s. The island is now connected to the mainland by a bridge, and is the location of a dormitory suburb of Jyväskylä.



**Figure 26** Muuratsalo. Location drawings by Alvar Aalto.  
(Drawings courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

The five-hectare parcel of land bought by Aalto from Maire Gullichsen's family company Ahlstrom Oy in the early 1950s, during construction of the nearby Säynätsalo Town Hall project<sup>23</sup>, looks to water to both south and west, backs onto a hill, and has its own square-shaped bay, a miniature harbour enclosed by two small arms of land, the more prominent and rocky one to the south—a continuation of the granite outcrop running east-west, downhill, beside the house (Fig.26, 27).



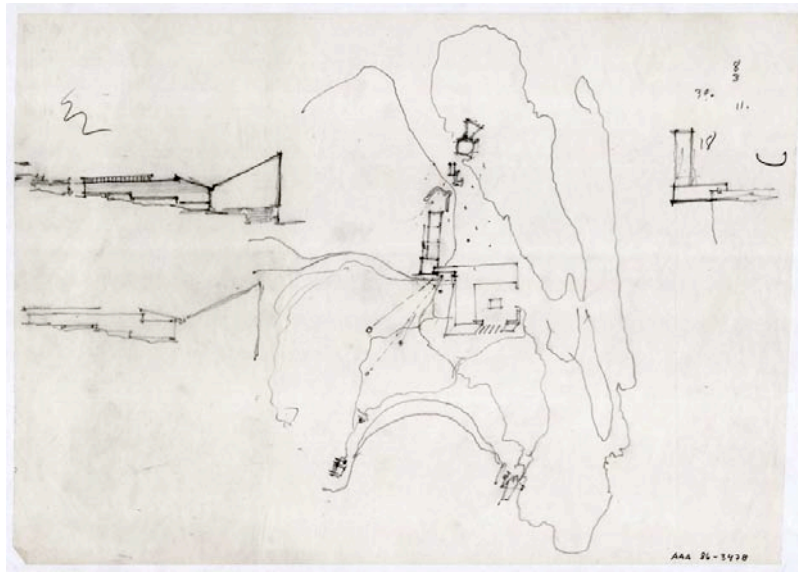
**Figure 27** Muuratsalo. Site plan. Unbuilt irregular structures to east (top of image).  
(Drawing courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

The forested Muuratsalo island in Central Finland was relatively inaccessible in the 1950s. Aalto's portion of land is partly enclosed by the hill slope, a granite rock formation, and the shadows of the open forest; it is still largely secluded from its contemporary suburban setting, with glimpses of adjacent houses to the north. The block includes a small stream and an enclosed cove, effectively a private harbour; to the south, lake waters and a distant horizon are seen beyond exposed granite rocks and scattered trees. The generous portion of land is secluded, with fresh water and views in two directions through open forest; it must have seemed propitious to Aalto, attuned to natural spaces, contours and levels, and keen at that stage of his life for both a personal retreat and a site for a 'honeymoon cottage' following his marriage to Elissa Mäkinen.<sup>24</sup>

### **8.2.3 Summer house: prospect and refuge of the house site**

Aalto invested considerable time in both finding and analyzing the Muuratsalo house site. Site maps, site plans and site sections were carefully made by Aalto, at various scales and sizes.<sup>25</sup> While the broader setting offers the protection of a remote island and a harbour, the house site offers opportunities for prospect: an elevated, sloping forest, with water views. The site is topographically rich, falling to the west, folding north across a small natural watercourse, and bounded by water to the west and south. The site is bounded on its southern edge by a nearly

bare granite spur, like a large grey arm pointing down westwards, enclosing both the house site and the little bay (Fig.27). On the northern side of this granite arm, the deck, rails and steps of the timber jetty fit into natural rock niches, allowing visitors to land and walk approximately one hundred metres along the granite arm, up to the house, visible through the trees. A sauna built of tapering logs by Aalto sits close by the water on the other side of the small bay.



**Figure 28** Muuratsalo. Early sketches showing north elevation and site plan.  
Sauna and jetty at water's edge.  
Drawings by Alvar Aalto. (Drawings courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

Topography, house, courtyard, outbuildings, sauna and boat landing appear imagined within a singular vision incorporating buildings and site. Aalto's preliminary site plan and north elevation sketches (Fig.28) show the wedge of the living room positioned like an expansive head, while a tail of domestic elements steps up the hill, hugging the ground, keeping a low profile: the wedge projecting into space seems to be balanced and restrained by the earthbound buildings behind.

The main level of the house site is located about six metres above the lake. At this level the site is rich in natural prospect, with partly obstructed views westward down to Lake Päijänne through pine and birch trees, and with a less-obstructed distant view southward down the lake.<sup>26</sup> The boulder-strewn site is in a mixed

open forest of deciduous trees and conifers, with a green ground cover of moss, ferns, vines, brambles, shrubs and young trees (Fig.29).



**Figure 29** Muuratsalo. The forest understorey. (Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

Weston's description of the Finnish forest applies to the Muuratsalo site, and begins to indicate the sensuous nature of the forest environment:

Beneath the tree canopy, the forest floor is discontinuous, a broken terrain with occasional rock outcrops, varied but generally low relief, and a mix of ground cover plants and low shrubs. The more or less continuous tree-cover may be interrupted by occasional wind throws, creating small glades where the sun can penetrate.<sup>27</sup>

Norberg-Schulz contends that Nordic landscape space is 'dominated by the *earth*. It is a chthonic landscape, which does not with ease rise up to approach the sky, and its character is determined by an interacting multitude of unintelligible detail.'<sup>28</sup> This general description may be applied to the native forest space of Muuratsalo.

The site consists of natural elements, some of which enclose, accommodate and protect house and visitors, while others expose the visitor to glimpses and views of water and horizons. Thus it appears that in Appleton's terms (as discussed in Chapter 7) the island setting appears to offer a biologically satisfying *habitat* for

living, while the house site displays various elements of natural *prospect and refuge*.

### **8.3 Analysis and experience: approach: prospect and refuge**

#### **8.3.1 Approach by water**

Aalto originally travelled to Muuratsalo island by water, from Jyväskylä, one hour by boat to the north. From the water, the house is visible through the trees, while Aalto's timber sauna can be seen overlooking the small bay; the boat landing is at the other side of the bay, tucked in fissures of the rocky spur.



**Figure 30** Muuratsalo. View of house from lake.  
Sauna is to left, boat landing to right; both out of picture frame.  
(Photograph courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

The Jetsonens describe three aspects of the house: as seen from water to the west (Fig.30); from the forest to north and east; and from rocks to the south:

Standing on bare rock adjacent to the lake . . . the white-walled villa appears almost like a temple when approached from the lake . . . On the forest side the house transforms into a small-scale building cluster. The third face of the villa, draped in red brick and coloured tiles, turns inward toward a central courtyard.<sup>29</sup>

Three key site elements—water, forest, rocks—frame this approach to the house in the landscape. It appears as a different entity from each of the three viewpoints:

its compound even perhaps ‘heterotopic’<sup>30</sup> identity is closely tied to the site’s natural elements and spatiality.



**Figure 31** Muuratsalo. Approaching the site by ferry from south.  
House is visible in trees. Swimming jetty by water’s edge.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008.)

In August 2008, the visiting group arrives by water from the south. The ferry moors by the flank of the rock formation (Fig.31), and the group lands and proceeds uphill towards the house along the glaciated granite spur (Fig.32).



**Figure 32** Muuratsalo. Approaching house along granite spur.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

In stepping from water to land, a significant transition is made, from horizontal to vertical natural space: the voyage northward by ferry across the flat, exposed water of Lake Päijänne becomes, in a few steps, a hike over bare granite along an undefined path, up towards the white object in the forest.

### 8.3.2 Site and refuge

In prospect-refuge terms, seen from the water, the Muuratsalo house appears as a prominent *primary refuge*, its walls offering seeming opportunity to hide from an animate pursuer or quarry, while the (assumed) rooms within might offer shelter from the elements (Fig.30). This appearance of protection is reinforced by the height and solidity of the walls, which gave Schildt a sense of refuge and retreat, ‘reminiscent of a monastery on the forested cliffs of Mt Athos’.<sup>31</sup>

The wedge of sunlit white walls high in the shadowy forest appears taller still when viewed from water level, looking like a small castle, or a fragment of a Mediterranean village, a penetrable and welcoming mass of masonry. The house is readable as an archetypal shelter, a safe place of arrival at the end of a journey across water. Paradoxically, Aalto’s elevated white ‘castle’ in the forest, viewed from the lake, can be a symbol of both prospect and refuge, promising an *artificial secondary vantage point* to complement the imagery of refuge. Appleton affirms the dual prospect-refuge symbolism, referring to an image of a castle in a Wordsworth poem: ‘Exposure and seclusion are combined in the heroic images of consciousness as a fortress.’<sup>32</sup>



**Figure 33** Muuratsalo. The house in the forest, seen from the granite spur.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

When seen from the approach trail along the granite spur (Fig.33), windows and other openings in the wall may be read as *refuge* symbols of accessibility—facilitating the observer’s entering and hiding; as Appleton says, ‘anything which suggests ease of penetration is conducive to the symbolism of the refuge.’<sup>33</sup>



**Figure 34** Muuratsalo. Western elevation: window and screened opening.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

The wall appears as an *accessible refuge*, particularly when seen from the falling ground of the forest site below; the stepped western opening symbolizes accessibility. The looming white walls read more as a geological mass—not at

cottage scale, but in landscape space, at the scale of the glaciated topography. The white building stands out against the ‘unintelligible detail’ of Norberg-Schulz’s Nordic forest. Yet while the house is clearly an object in the landscape, its enclosure seems incomplete: there are windows in the house wall, but red tiles and bricks can be seen through a gap in the wall (Fig.34); a slatted screen ‘rhymes’ with the vertical tree trunks.

The spatial condition of house and site is ambiguous: the white walls and clear geometry distinguish it from its surrounds as an object, yet its partly enclosed space is not clearly distinct from that of the forest. This recalls Aben and de Wit’s description (noted in Chapter 7) of the Säynätsalo Town Hall: ‘wall planes are fragmented, low-lying and tenuous so that they scarcely define the space they contain.’<sup>34</sup> Site and building seem to share spaces, elements and materials; they might be said to form a heterotopic whole, made up of different parts.

### **8.3.3 Entry portal: a threshold between house and landscape**

The high brick walls and the natural granite formation—described by Sanaksenaho as a ‘massively arching open rock next to the house’ (Fig.35)—combine to form the dramatic southern entry to the courtyard: ‘the building seems to seek shelter from [the rock], leaning against it . . . By the rock you can sneak into the courtyard.’<sup>35</sup>



**Figure 35** Muuratsalo. The ‘massively arching open rock’ immediately south of the building.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

The massive convex rock orients and organizes the house and the visitor in the landscape. Obviously predating the house, the rock is the dominant landscape element—a natural fulcrum between forest space and lake space. The house’s southern flank seems located as close as possible to the rock: to pass from west to east (from ‘front’ to ‘back’ of the house) a visitor must indeed ‘sneak’ through a narrow, relatively unwelcoming slot between artificial and natural walls.

A welcoming space opens to the left, a flat dry terrace, echoing and improving on what has just been experienced—the flat wet lake, the dry convex rocks, the moist enclosing forest. This piazza or patio is framed by red brick walls, rising high in parts, lying low and snug in others, and has a fireplace at its centre. The space is solidly enclosing, yet randomly fractured by large and small openings; the archetypal elements (square, walls, fire, gate) stand in the open air like colossal relics, or oversized things from a dream or legend. The space is not intimate, cosy or casual like a DIY summer house patio: it is a miniature urban space. The square breathes of high aesthetic ambition, informed by a big idea, with elements exaggerated and contrasting in scale, to match the natural aesthetics of the site.<sup>36</sup> The square recalls Italian urbanism: the Porta Pia and the Campidoglio in Rome, the Piazza San Marco in Venice, the Campo Santo in Siena.

The architectural moment at the portal, when the visitor turns left from the almost-flat granite rock to enter the levelled courtyard terrace, contains significant spatial drama (Fig.36). A threshold is created between two different domains: the courtyard and house inside, and the forest, rocks and lake of the natural landscape outside.



**Figure 36** Muuratsalo. Right to left: courtyard, portal, slot, lake.  
(Photographs J. Roberts 2008)

Much of the Muuratsalo house is visible from this threshold: the house connects with the landscape through the southern portal. The site extends from the house, through the threshold, into landscape elements of forest, rock and lake.

Leatherbarrow's general observations (noted in Chapter 4), on how the entry connects a building to its site and locality, are illuminating in this context:

Every architectural entry is *preconditioned* by the building's site, which extends from the edge of the building itself into its immediate vicinity, and then further into the precinct in which it stands, and finally into the encompassing region, never quite exhausting itself.<sup>37</sup>

The idea that the site should 'precondition' aspects of the building's extension into space helps explain (as discussed further below) how Aalto's building connects differently with enclosing landscape space to the west and with 'exclosing' landscape space to the south.

Beside the dramatic expansions and contractions of scale (from bricks and cloured ceramics to colossal walls and horizon views) at the threshold, the square courtyard, by contrast, provides a finite ordering element—in Aben and de Wit’s terms (as noted in Chapter 7), an ‘intermediary’ between house and landscape. The flat courtyard floor symbolically echoes the flatness of the lake, while providing a necessary level area for the comfort of bipedal humans—uncomfortable and unstable when standing on sloping ground<sup>38</sup>—and a cultural structure for urban purposes generally (as discussed in Chapters 3 and 5).

## **8.4 Analysis and experience: outside: prospect and refuge**

### **8.4.1 Courtyard and landscape space**

The large scale of walls and enclosed space, its formal geometry, its orientation to both the warming southern sun and long water views, along with the openness of both landscape and artificial space, establishes the southern portal as the primary, ‘formal’ entry to the courtyard and the house. The Muuratsalo courtyard is an element of spatial complexity and significant aesthetic value. It is entered through the great opening in the south wall, has a brick-paved patterned floor, and is enclosed by patterned red brick walls of fifty different brick types and two ceramic panels perforated by various doors and windows. The large portal opening directs and frames the visitor’s gaze outwards (Fig.35). The courtyard may be seen as a place of visual *prospect*, a viewing space for looking into and beyond the immediate landscape. The lake view southward is in prospect-refuge terms a *vista*, a commanding view, to be enjoyed through the wide opening, from the courtyard.

Aben and de Wit (as noted in Chapter 5) discuss the landscape-architecture duality of the courtyard type generally, as an enclosed garden:

The garden *gathers* the landscape around it (garden) and at the same time shuts itself off from it (enclosed). The enclosed garden is as broad as the landscape . . . and as contained as a building . . . It is

both inside and outside, landscape and architecture, endless and finite.<sup>39</sup>

Seen in this way, a courtyard is a landscape element for a building, and simultaneously a building element in the landscape. Aben and de Wit outline the paradoxical nature of the indoor-outdoor courtyard space; from this understanding it may be said that while a courtyard provides prospect—with elements of enclosure—when considered from the house, it also provides refuge—with views—when seen as part of the landscape. This inside-outside spatial reciprocity, as Berrizbeitia and Pollak<sup>40</sup> observe (see Chapter 4) breaks down the dominance of architecture over landscape and affects the experience of both building and landscape. Similarly, the Muuratsalo courtyard exemplifies a reciprocity as described by Goad (also noted in Chapter 4), whereby buildings ‘oscillate between topography and architecture, constantly raising the question of reciprocity between object and landscape.’<sup>41</sup>

#### **8.4.2 Courtyard and prospects**

Looking west through the courtyard’s stepped, slatted, vine-shrouded western opening, the tower of Aalto’s Muurame Church (1929) may be visible across Lake Päijänne (Figure 37), through the screen of mature trees.<sup>42</sup> In Appleton’s terms this view through the opening is a *simple vista*, a view restricted by conspicuous margins—as distinct from *panorama*, a ‘wide view from a good vantage point’.<sup>43</sup> The hilltop church tower is also a symbol of *indirect prospect*, ‘aimed at expressing elevation above the surrounding country’<sup>44</sup> and promising command of a further field of vision.



**Figure 37** View west from Muuratsalo house. Tower of Muurame Church on horizon.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

The *simple vista* through the courtyard's western opening is a view 'obscured by some intervening screen which contains a limited breach through which the eye can penetrate further',<sup>45</sup> not unlike a view through a gap in a hedge (Fig.38). Quantrill notes how this opening, framed on three sides, 'allows the view itself to become the treatment, recalling the idea of fresco, and particularly the painted walls of Pompeii, which depict a different world beyond.'<sup>46</sup>

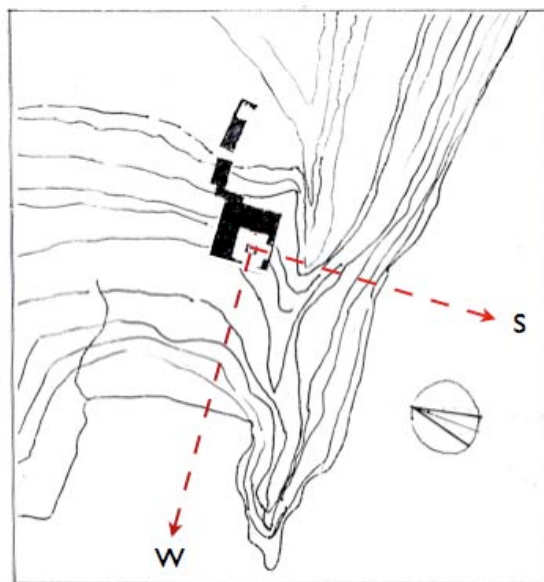


**Figure 38** Muuratsalo. The stepped western courtyard opening.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

Hertzberger observes that this kind of window opening ‘confirms the sense of being indoors in this external space as against the immense landscape around.’<sup>47</sup> The framed opening in the outdoor wall correlates to a framed painting on an indoor wall: both crop and frame a landscape view.<sup>48</sup>

### 8.4.3 Courtyard: horizons, lines of vision, prospect and refuge

A horizon can be effective in directing views and intensifying prospect symbolism. For Appleton, a horizon ‘marks the edge of an impediment to the line of vision . . . Potentially, therefore, the horizon has a major role to play in the symbolism of the prospect.’<sup>49</sup> Norberg-Schulz (see Chapter 4) has linked the character of Nordic architecture to that of Nordic landscape space and its horizons; the Muuratsalo views typify Finnish landscape, ‘endless, extensive space that follows a curved trajectory toward an always receding horizon’.<sup>50</sup> Sanaksenaho describes a prospect of a Muuratsalo sunset, conjoining sun, lake and horizon: ‘Twilight has stolen in, the sun is near the horizon now, right at the vanishing point of the meandering lake.’<sup>51</sup> Horizon and lines of vision are important factors in assessing prospect-refuge symbolism at Muuratsalo.



**Figure 39** Muuratsalo. Diagram, lines of vision: clear to south, obstructed to west.  
(Drawing after Aalto, J. Roberts 2008)

Prospect is a matter of looking out: a visitor to the Muuratsalo house has two distinct lines of vision out to different lake horizons, to west and south. The western line of vision extends through the forest, toward the horizon and the Muurame church tower (Fig.37, 38, 39). A *vista* is enabled by the wall's stepped opening, yet also constrained by the amount of wall, and its large steps; the horizon view is further frustrated by layers of obstacles: the rampant vine, the artificial screen, the forest trees and saplings (Fig.38). Attempting a vista of sky and water, but obstructed by intervening material, the western line of vision effectively dissolves into a fractured view through a deeply layered screen. This obstruction of the western vista ultimately reduces prospect, but increases satisfaction by intensifying the sense of refuge: the viewer can comfortably see water, rocks, even people in the forest below, while remaining largely hidden. Thus the courtyard arguably forms a *composite refuge*, consisting of architectural elements, the *earth refuge* of the natural site, and the *vegetation refuge* of vine, tree trunks, branches and leaves.



**Figure 40** Muuratsalo. Line of vision south from courtyard.  
(Photograph courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

The southward line of vision, by contrast (Fig.39, 40), in the direction of the sun, is not of shadows but of shining surfaces: framed by the courtyard threshold, the

vista extends past boulders and trees, across the lake, to horizon and clouds; bright surfaces create mild glare, rendering objects in silhouette rather than depth. The sun enters through the portal to warm the courtyard and rooms within the house. Appleton observes that in England's Lake District, valued by the Romantic poets, a typical view 'consists of an open prospect across the water in the foreground to an arboreal refuge in the middle distance surmounted by a carpeted, prospect-dominant surface, which leads the eye upward to a horizon.'<sup>52</sup> Similarly the north-south line of vision at Muuratsalo connects courtyard space with bright surfaces, and includes the 'arboreal refuge' of a timbered hill and a distant horizon. Smooth, bright surfaces, *simple vistas* and *horizontal vistas* combine to affirm the prospect dominance of the southward line of vision.

The courtyard arguably contains significant elements of both prospect and refuge. The various satisfactions of the experience of the courtyard can be identified and at least partly explained through the terms and insights of Appleton's landscape discourse.

#### **8.4.4 Courtyard and cultural aesthetics: urbanism in the landscape**

While a connection with natural landscape is central to the Muuratsalo experience, Aalto's design also contains artificial components. Exaggerated scale, dramatic effects of space and surface, and formal geometry of house and courtyard suggest the presence of cultural and urban elements in the Muuratsalo project. Selected Italian urban archetypes (noted in Chapter 6) may expand understanding of the courtyard, and are considered below.

The idea that the Muuratsalo house contains transplanted or abstracted Italian urban elements is a pillar of the Muuratsalo literature, as noted below. Aalto sustained a constant memory of Italy, and a dream of importing Italian archetypes to improve the landscapes of Finland, from the 1920s: 'In my mind there is always a journey to Italy . . . such a journey is a *conditio sine qua non* for my architectural work.'<sup>53</sup>

Treib notes that ‘Aalto’s approach toward building in the landscape . . . transposed the Tuscan manner to the forests of Finland.’<sup>54</sup> Weston writes that for Aalto the Italian hill town was a ‘paradigm’ of harmony between nature and creative man: ‘The town was subservient to the topography, which was in turn heightened by man’s intervention—a cultural symbiosis.’<sup>55</sup> Schildt observes that ‘Italy for him remained synonymous with Venice and Tuscany. He returned to them time and time again, whereas to other parts of the country . . . he only made casual visits.’<sup>56</sup> Jussi Rausti outlines Aalto’s method, as much as his urban preferences:

He did not carry Florence in his mind as a reference from the past; it was full of ongoing life . . . Aalto could breathe the air of good places . . . He simply stepped into them. He loved Venice, but never described the architecture, he just lived there . . . He became a Venetian.<sup>57</sup>

Aalto also understood that cities were imperfect; Riitta Nikula observes that ‘the rural landscape was closer to Aalto’s heart than the urban scene’.<sup>58</sup> Aalto’s sketches from 1951 show Spanish rural houses with tiled monopitch roofs and small windows, elements which also seem to inform Aalto’s architectural strategies.<sup>59</sup> Aalto said in 1966 that he had ‘never seen a beautiful city. There are some good parts of cities.’<sup>60</sup> He nominated two ‘just about perfect’ urban models: Venice, where the Piazza San Marco ‘has succeeded in almost every way in accommodating its citizens’; and Siena, ‘just about unbeatable in its organic character.’<sup>61</sup> Venice is rarely mentioned in the Aalto literature, yet its partly enclosed square, with one corner opening to the lagoon, would seem to inform the Muuratsalo square.<sup>62</sup>

While the aesthetics of the Muuratsalo courtyard can be partly understood through Appleton’s landscape symbolism, what might be termed ‘urban symbolism’ also appears to inform Aalto’s architectural method. A model for applying Appleton’s landscape theory to urban examples is yet to be provided; further research may

also uncover the significance of urban and vernacular precedent in the aesthetics of the Muuratsalo house.

#### 8.4.5 *Coulisse* and theatricality: combining prospect and refuge

While the 4.5m wide courtyard portal offers the prospect symbol of a *vista*, Appleton's theory also facilitates a reading of the two freestanding brick walls as a pair of *coulisses*—a theatrical term for flat scenery, a bush or a wall projecting onto a stage.<sup>63</sup> This item of stage scenery offers a chance to hide while simultaneously revealing a view beyond, adding a dimension of drama to the architectural composition (Fig.41). Architect Stephen Kite, writing in 2003 on the psychology of the architectural threshold, describes Appleton's coulisses as 'framing wings that intensify the sense of recession of a prospect while . . . allowing opportunities of concealment.'<sup>64</sup> Threshold conditions such as the coulisse suggest 'the immense sense of security that these in-between physical realms . . . can offer.'<sup>65</sup>



**Figure 41** Muuratsalo. Looking south and west from courtyard.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

Architect Christian Gullichsen (son of Harry and Maire Gullichsen, clients/owners of the Villa Mairea), praises Aalto as 'a great actor' who enjoyed amateur theatrics at school, and points out a theatrical aspect of Aalto's personality: 'Almost all his buildings strike a pose, like an actor entering the stage . . . Aalto often subordinated the whole to a brilliant introduction. One or two really good facades were enough; the rest would follow.'<sup>66</sup> Aalto's sense of

theatre—seen in his sketches of Greek theatres, his repeated designs for theatres and auditoria, and the inclusion of outdoor theatres in numerous projects, including his Helsinki studio—seems to be re-enacted in the enclosed outdoor space of the Muuratsalo ‘playhouse’, occupying four squares of the house’s nine-square compositional diagram.

The massiveness of the building appears as a contrived gesture, perhaps part of Aalto’s ‘play’—here, between building and landscape. As the Greek theatre exploits its natural setting,<sup>67</sup> so Aalto also exploits the natural advantages of the site—the slope, the outlook, the small natural rock platform, the granite spur—to make a quasi-theatrical space. The levelled area contrasts with the slope; high walls restrict and direct views, the defined open space contrasts with the uncleared forest. Contrasts and juxtapositions, and the unusual scale of the courtyard walls, combine to give dramatic effect to the Muuratsalo house.

#### **8.4.6 Enclosed garden and refuge**

The surprise and dramatic effect of the outdoor room is observed by Aben and de Wit in their study of the medieval and modern enclosed garden: ‘On entering a space with thick walls through a heavy door, you would logically expect to find yourself indoors. All the more surprising, then, when that indoors turns out to be outdoors.’<sup>68</sup> A similar sensation of spatial inversion is experienced at Muuratsalo when the visitor arrives at courtyard level, turns away from the rocky path to cross the threshold between landscape and building, and enters the courtyard, where red brick, conventionally an outdoor material, lines the contained space (Fig.42).



**Figure 42** Muuratsalo. White painted outer walls, red brick courtyard walls.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

Treib describes the Muuratsalo courtyard walls as an architectural ‘inversion’, where white painted outer walls and roughly patterned brick inner walls reverse the more usual order of external rough walls and smoother walls within.<sup>69</sup> From within the courtyard, as from other viewpoints, the pantile wall edges imply Mediterranean terracotta roofing (the roof is actually clad with bituminous membrane), and by inference symbolize *a natural secondary vantage point*, suggesting viewpoints from which a wider outlook might be gained.<sup>70</sup>

Appleton, reflecting on the medieval castle, and the castle’s enclosed garden, remarks that ‘The most potent refuge symbol associated with the garden is the garden wall’.<sup>71</sup> However, at the same time as the whole house symbolizes refuge, it also offers symbolism of *indirect prospect*—extending the viewer’s field of vision, as discussed earlier in the present chapter. As an object seen in landscape space, and as a spatial enclosure, the idea of castle opens prospect-refuge interpretations of the Muuratsalo house.

#### 8.4.7 North and east: side and back doors

A visitor enters the courtyard through the portal and notices a large window and a panelled door in the opposite wall, opening into the house proper. However, visitors may also enter the house from either north or east through a vestibule at the northeast corner. An ‘informal’ entry, through the northern, ‘side’ door (rather than the eastern ‘back’ door), takes a visitor returning from sauna, lake or forest up a vestigial turf-and-timber stair—a miniature of the iconic stairs at Säynätsalo Town Hall—before entering the house itself (Fig.43).



**Figure 43** Muuratsalo. Northern entry with turf stairs.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

In the same elevation, the high western edge of the sloping roof above the main northern living wing—a white masonry peak jutting upward and outward from the forest—contributes to the exterior drama of the building (Fig.44). This peak may be identified as an *artificial secondary vantage point*, commanding an imagined further field of vision over lake and forest.



**Figure 44** Muuratsalo. Living room wing, seen from north.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

The eastern entry to the house is at the end of a walking track through the forest, leading down from the carpark to the house through tall pines. The visitor passes the loose ‘tail’ of white timber outbuildings and enters the house through the vestibule located at what seems like the ‘back’ of the house, at the northeast corner, where bedroom and other windows are loosely composed amongst small scale elements and less-expensive construction (Fig.45).



**Figure 45** Muuratsalo, ‘back’ east view. Bedroom wing to left; vestibule door and ‘tail’ to right.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

Both entries, through the small scale of the building and of openings, convey a sense of accessibility and refuge from the ‘wilderness’ and open space of the woods and the lake. Sanaksenaho describes the approaches to the house: perceived from uphill, the eastern ‘back’ side, the house ‘has small features, a composition growing gradually out of shacks and outbuildings.’<sup>72</sup> Views are restricted by buildings and topography; the low building walls and the numerous doors and windows emphasize the refuge apparently offered by the modestly-scaled architecture.

Beside the tall granite rock, this eastern outdoor area (the ‘tail’ of the original project) has a different spatial identity to the formal geometry and spatial drama of the courtyard. An agglomeration of low-cost materials and experimental construction, the additive spatial order of rocks, tree trunks, buildings and diagonal track forms a loosely enclosed yard. This agglutinative approach of forming an architectural whole, in architecture as in the Finnish language, as Glanville observes (see Chapter 6), ‘building by building, room by room, and . . . function by function’,<sup>73</sup> seems to embody ‘the idea behind Porphyrios’ interpretation of Aalto’s spatial conception as “heterotopic”, rather than the “homotopic” conception of the other modern masters.’<sup>74</sup> This section of the Muuratsalo house is composed of linked boxes, much like Aalto’s house in Helsinki (see also Chapter 6); here, set outdoors, the idea recalls a method of building in the landscape found in the Finnish vernacular architecture so highly esteemed by Aalto.<sup>75</sup>

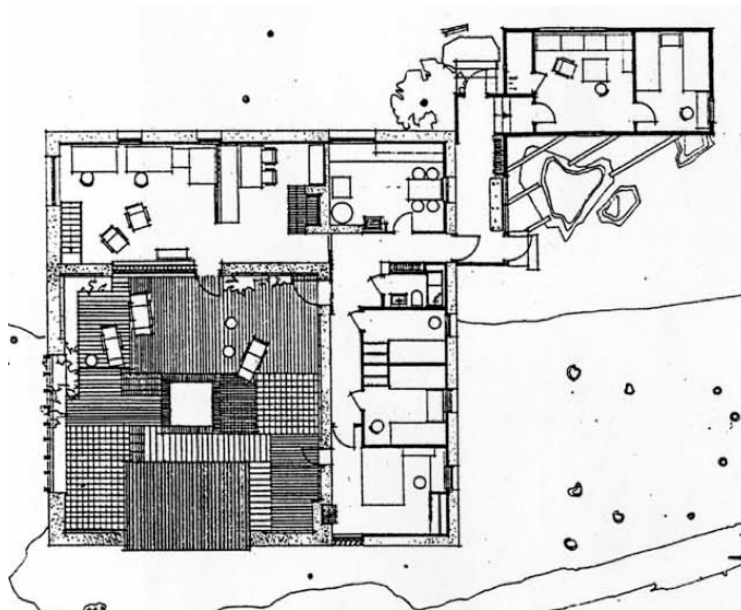
Stanford Anderson describes this method, using Aalto’s words, as ‘methodical accommodation of circumstance’.<sup>76</sup> Menin observes a loosening of formal control, ‘a petering out of buildings, to the fragmentary wood shed’;<sup>77</sup> she links this kind of decentralised synthesis to the enclosing typology of the old Niemilä farmstead, and to the Villa Mairea, where building forms similarly ‘begin to bleed into the forest.’<sup>78</sup> Yet, despite its looseness, this process provides individual and collective refuge: the early vernacular buildings were built for shelter from weather and wild

animals, and progressively assembled into protective farmsteads, the whole providing limited prospect, but significant enclosure and refuge in the vast spaces of the Finnish forest. The dominant landscape symbolism in this section of the Muuratsalo project appears to be that of refuge.

## **8.5 Analysis and experience: inside: prospect and refuge**

### **8.5.1 Windows, views, prospect**

The interior of the Muuratsalo house is of a different spatial order to both the landscape and the intermediate courtyard; the house essentially encloses a combination of rooms, while windows organize the space of the room, ventilate and illuminate, and open various prospects to the outside.<sup>79</sup> From inside the Muuratsalo house, extensive and different views are gained through windows in all elevations; the living room has one large fixed window to the south, looking onto the courtyard (Fig.46), from which a long *vista* opens through the portal opening in the south wall. Sun and other elements enter the courtyard, and sunlight illuminates rooms, particularly the living room, through the roofless space.



**Figure 46** Muuratsalo. Floor plan. North to top of plan.  
Drawing by Alvar Aalto. (Drawings courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

In 1926 (as noted in Chapter 6) Aalto pondered the identity of Le Corbusier's 'Esprit Nouveau' pavilion (1925): 'Is it a hall, beautifully open to the exterior . . . or is it a garden built into the house?'<sup>80</sup> The Muuratsalo courtyard may be discussed (as above) as a kind of 'urban fragment'; yet from inside the house, rather than an urbanistic element, the courtyard forms a 'beautifully open' adjunct to the domestic interior, extending house space outwards towards trees and lake.

In Aalto's Helsinki house, the Villa Mairea, and the Muuratsalo house, windows are not only portals for light and devices for looking out, but elements, even places for sitting by. Aalto's windows form a threshold between indoor and outdoor space, compounded by their location, scale, construction and function in the room: the windows form the room and control its uses. The seat by the window also supports books and plants, and aligns internal circulation. Some windows bring light in onto ceilings or walls; other windows offer views, directly or obliquely. Prospect-refuge symbolism of the Muuratsalo windows is discussed below.

### 8.5.2 Peephole views

Markku Lahti notes that a monitoring, if not commanding, view opens from the Muuratsalo kitchen out to the north slope, to the route by which guests might approach the house by land.<sup>81</sup> Appleton has the term *peephole* to describe such a vista, limited in both its vertical and horizontal directions—i.e., a view from a small window.<sup>82</sup> The potential to observe arriving visitors from the corner kitchen, to see without being seen, offers real and perceived strategic advantage to the observer within, and is a primary strategy of prospect-refuge, providing a sense of security on a remote island.

Views through 'peephole' windows offer secure views of approaching visitors.; A 'peephole' view to the west beneath the loft (Fig.47) is observed by Sanaksenaho: 'The living room rises graciously towards the descending slope and the lake, to which there is a little view.'<sup>83</sup> The living room—the 'head' in Aalto's early sketch

elevation (Fig.28)—rises against the fall of the land: interior space, with ‘a little view’, rides over and into landscape space, confirming their different identities.

While the ‘head’ of the house rises into the forest, the atelier inside is indirectly (and ideally) illuminated by the three peephole windows of the loft; seen from outside, from the north, the windows seem to denote limited accessibility, hence an artificially constructed refuge, as would a castle window.



**Figure 47** Muuratsalo. Painting loft above; drawing boards and ‘peephole’ windows below.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

In the bedroom wing small openings –two solid timber doors the size of windows–let into the brick of the courtyard’s eastern wall: one opens from the corridor into the courtyard; the other opens from the main bedroom at the end of the corridor into the courtyard. The small size of the doors in the mass of the wall, their odd elevation above floor level (about 400mm above the courtyard level), and their minor role in the use of the rooms and the courtyard, makes them prospect ‘peepholes’, but also contributes to with the refuge symbolism of the courtyard wall. Appleton describes the refuge effect of apparent penetration into a wall:

Anything which suggests ease of penetration is conducive to the symbolism of the refuge. Thus [a wall] if breached by entrances . . . becomes less formidable as an obstacle and more inviting as a

retreat. Windows, alcoves, recesses, balconies . . . all these suggest a facility of penetration into the refuge.<sup>84</sup>

Porphyrios describes how ‘the great variety of brick and tile coursing unfolds with the wild profusion of a quilt.’<sup>85</sup> A peephole in this ‘quilt’ is also a potentially dramatic exit, a recess barely wider than the thickness of the wall in which it is cut.

### **8.5.3 Interior prospect: the painting loft**

At the living room’s western end, the ‘head’ of the house, are work spaces on two levels, each partly defined by furniture and peephole windows. On the ground floor plan (Fig.46) tables indicate space for work ‘between swims’; this holiday office is a room-within-a-room, a refuge for thought and experimentation on paper. It is a small space within the larger volume of the living room, bounded by a wall, a corner and a steep stair and lit by different peephole windows to north and west. It is enclosed overhead by a low timber ceiling (the floor of the suspended loft above), which, with the timber flooring, makes a partial ‘cave of wood’ at the western end of the living room; its spatial definition is more evident in section than plan. Norberg-Schulz describes the traditional Finnish ‘cave of wood’, pointing out how the timber vaults of old Finnish churches ‘express this desire for a cavelike interior; their vaults’ smooth surfaces . . . creating a sense of sky’.<sup>86</sup>

Spatial differentiation seems more intensely realized in the painting loft or atelier above the western end of the living wing, a small timber platform hanging in a tall well-lit room, illuminated by three vertical windows to the north and the room’s ambient light. It recalls Appleton reflection that ‘a bird may build its nest in a hole in a tree, constructing a refuge of its own making within another fortuitously available.’<sup>87</sup> The loft’s refuge is layered: its timber hangers resemble paired columns, while curtains and horizontal slats add further layers, enclosing the loft deeper within house space.

The loft acts as a real and symbolic refuge, and also offers symbolic *interior prospect* over the living area (Fig.47). Hildebrand observes interior prospect in Wright's Heurtley house (1902), where 'one does not just look across different zones of a single space, but rather from one demarcated space into another, the columnar elements establishing the boundary through which vista is seen.'<sup>88</sup>

This condition of interior prospect complements the secure retreat of the painting loft. Sanaksenaho observes that from the loft there is 'a long, diagonal view over the living room to the [interior] fireplace and the entrance door. The living room is reminiscent of a miniature stage.'<sup>89</sup> Hildebrand notes that interior prospect elements 'make the interior experience analogous to that of looking past the trees at the edge of the forest to view the meadow or the grove beyond.'<sup>90</sup> The security of such conditions is observed and enjoyed as, in Appleton's words, 'environment as a strategic theatre for survival'.<sup>91</sup> The interior prospect from the refuge of the loft into the main room may be seen as analogous to, and a smaller version of, the prospect extending outwards to the south from the refuge of the living room, past the courtyard fireplace, across the greater 'stage' of the courtyard and through the opening of the gateway, towards the lake.

The loft, suspended within the house, can be seen as a retreat from the city, the landscape, even domestic life; it is not a hideaway, but a safe haven for creative work, a harbour within a harbouring courtyard house, which overlooks a natural cove. Repetition of such themes appears to intensify their effect. The loft recalls Bachelard's summary of the primary benefit offered by the house: 'the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the daydreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace.'<sup>92</sup>

#### **8.5.4 From the living room: vistas and thresholds**

A significant visual and spatial experience occurs when the visitor steps into the Muuratsalo house for the first time, turns, and looks out the main window of the

living room. The visitor contemplates the southward view to the courtyard and the lake through a generous three-pane double-glazed window, solidly framed in timber, with a low bench inside (Fig.48).<sup>93</sup> The window and the adjacent slatted door form a visual threshold between inner and outer worlds, taking the viewer's eye from indoors, out across the brick terrace of the sunny courtyard, and away across its margin, through the white-rimmed gateway in the south wall to the shining lake and wooded horizon to the south. This visual sequence of room, window and courtyard offer, in Appleton's terms, *horizontal vistas*, with potential for further information at the lake's distant edge, and possible views from the furthest horizon.

Visual elements of landscape seem to be repeated in the design of both the courtyard and the house, as a result of orientation and visual sight lines (discussed above). The distant wooded horizon, and the granite sill of the natural rock—its tapering end visible outside the portal—form visual thresholds; they have built analogues at the courtyard portal, and again at the windowsill threshold. The screen of trees framed by the 'coulisses' of the portal seems to be repeated in the vertical window mullions; this framed view is a *simple vista*, resulting in 'the confinement of vision to a restricted passage.'<sup>94</sup>



**Figure 48** Muuratsalo. View south from living room into courtyard.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

While there is a visual connection through the windows and courtyard, the threshold formed by the window and door is also physical: the heavy door, with layers of glass and vertical timber set in deep timber frames, the double glazed window, the slim but deep mullions, the tiled sill and the timber bench (with heater beneath) thicken the wall space. Further, interior floor level is at least 300mm above the level of the courtyard: the single dramatic step up onto a timber floor intensifies and confirms the spatial transition of the threshold.

Landscape architect Catherine Dee discusses thresholds in *Form and Fabric in Landscape Architecture* (2001), an illustrated primer on morphology of landscape space; Dee contends that physical thresholds such as gateways ‘give spatial configuration to people’s need to adjust from one situation or experience to another.’<sup>97</sup> By comparison, window and frame act as ‘visual rather than spatial thresholds. They visually link one environment with another . . . Windows and frames mediate the experience of landscape in providing ‘prospect-refuge’ experiences.’<sup>98</sup> The courtyard portal acts to introduce the visitor to the house from the landscape beyond; the prospect-refuge experience of the living room window, however, is also arguably of a physical, spatial threshold, through the wall’s thickness and the physical step. While the visual threshold of the window appears to connect room, courtyard and landscape, the physical threshold paradoxically seems to separate inside from outside.

#### **8.5.5 Janus and the Finnish home of two faces**

Aalto commented on a related threshold phenomenon in his ‘Doorstep to Living Room’ essay:

We might say: the Finnish home should have two faces. One is the aesthetically direct contact with the world outside; the other, its winter face, turns inward, and is seen in the interior design, which emphasizes the warmth of our inner rooms.<sup>99</sup>

Janus was the two-faced Roman god of doors and gates, as Aalto would almost certainly have known.<sup>100</sup> There appears to be a ‘two-faced’ inside-outside detail at the courtyard portal: the red brick face with deep mortar joints turns inward, while the whitewashed face looks out; a vertical timber dowel trims between the two conditions (Fig.49).



**Figure 49** Muuratsalo. Left: Courtyard portal. Right: detail: note dowel trim.  
(Photograph J. Roberts 2008)

Aalto’s notion of the ‘two faces’ of the Finnish house also pertains to an indoor-outdoor ‘thermal threshold’, between living room and courtyard (noted above), where sunlight penetrates the living room (see Fig.48). Aalto has forged a site and building strategy which accurately integrates climate, landscape and architecture, so that the sun may enter and warm a room in the Finnish forest on this afternoon in late summer. Solar access and passive solar comfort—givens of contemporary ‘sustainable’ house architecture<sup>101</sup>—derive here from the design’s accurate alignment of layers of factors: sun angles, landscape, terrace, walls, room and window.

The thermally secure Muuratsalo interior, with its fireplace and double glazing, may be regarded as an intensified *artificial refuge*, where the feeling of thermal comfort is as significant as visual or spatial delight; for Aalto the fire in the Muuratsalo courtyard evoked ‘a pleasant, almost mystical feeling of warmth.’<sup>102</sup> In his 1930 essay ‘The Housing Problem’, Aalto wrote that ‘biological

requirements of life include air, light, and sun. [Light and sun are] crucial requirements of living comfort'; he also argued that the orientation and penetration of sunlight into rooms ought to be determined 'with the accuracy of one degree.'<sup>103</sup>

Architect Stanford Anderson, speaking in Jyväskylä shortly after the visit to the Muuratsalo house, commented on the 'conviction in Aalto's attention to human need'.<sup>104</sup> Weston argues that Aalto's work presents an example to contemporary practice: 'Through their adaptation to the particularities of place—of people and landscape, culture and climate—Aalto's buildings offer themselves as precedents for a truly "ecological" architecture.'<sup>105</sup> Sustained reflection on courtyard and house thresholds seems to indicate an aesthetically satisfying synthesis of biological, mythic, spatial, psychological and thermal factors in Aalto's own summer house of 'two faces', set intimately close to living trees, rocks and water.

#### **8.5.6 Interior refuge symbolism**

As pre-existing landscape elements, the small natural cove and the long arm of granite along the western edge of the site characterize the Muuratsalo house site. The sense of refuge felt inside the building may be described as a continuation of refuge offered by the locality, the clearing in the trees and the presence of the granite rock.

The tall living room contains prospect and refuge elements, as discussed above. The bedroom wing, by comparison, is relatively low and dim, and may be described as refuge-dominant (Fig.50), unified by a corridor joining low-ceilinged rooms (bedrooms, bathroom, storage) built of inexpensive materials. The spaces extend like buds on a branch, each steadily larger, from the storage niche by the bathroom to the southern main bedroom (see plan Fig.46). The rooms lie under a v-shaped ceiling beneath the roof gutter; their high windows seem to be more for light than views; the main bedroom's south-facing window is little more than a

peephole to the lake. The small scale and programmatic privacy of rooms and the low, reflex-angle ceilings compound a sense of built refuge.



**Figure 50** Muuratsalo. Corridor of bedroom wing.  
Note deep reveal, view to forest. (Photograph courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

The compact corridor is lit by a high horizontal window; two narrow openings, between doors and window shutters—unglazed, with high sills and snug-fitting timber doors—open into the courtyard, providing a strictly constrained prospect, through the courtyard's western wall, of the forest (Fig.50, 51). These intimate, ambiguous openings (perhaps recalling old farmhouse or monastery fittings) ventilate and orient the corridor space; the light in their deep reveals illuminates the corridor floor. They create another substantial threshold between inside and outside space, also linking with the landscape beyond.

The bedroom wing of the house fulfils Appleton's general classification of *artificial refuge*, of the building as 'planned sanctuary', symbolizing, he argues, 'man's assertion of his emancipation from subjugation by the powers of nature, however illusory that may be.'<sup>106</sup>



**Figure 51** Muuratsalo. Main bedroom; horizontal window in corridor.  
(Photograph courtesy Alvar Aalto Museum)

The freedom of the small ‘planned sanctuaries’ within the house is evident in their location at the far ends of house space: Aalto’s bedroom (Fig.51) at the south end, and the painting and drawing areas at the western end of the house, are private realms where adults work, dream, imagine or play. They are small, low-ceilinged refuges of liberty within the larger retreat of the house. Aalto said that ‘Nature is the symbol of freedom’:<sup>107</sup> the retreats-within-a-retreat represented by these rooms, located close by the natural world, can be seen with spatial, perhaps psychological, intensity through the framework of Appleton’s theory.

## **8.6 Overview and reflection: prospect and refuge**

### **8.6.1 Prospect: approach, outside, inside**

From an approach by water, the Muuratsalo house site has both real and symbolic prospect from its elevation, granite formation and open forest. The house offers *indirect prospect* symbolism when seen from the distance: tall white walls in the shadowy forest, punctuated by high narrow windows, promise extended views. The threshold of the southern portal, beside a sloping bench of smoothed granite, acts as a physical moment, a turning point of prospect, with commanding views up and down the hill, a view into the courtyard, and glimpses of other windows. The apparent strategic advantages of the prospect-rich site, on sloping land overlooking water, establish the character of the Muuratsalo house.

From outside the building, prospect is symbolized and obtained along lines of view south and west from the courtyard, through the openings in the courtyard walls; *indirect prospect* is symbolized in the details of the pantile wall edges. Inside, prospect is gained from the living room window and its threshold, and through the various *peepholes* of the smaller doors and windows; there is *interior prospect* from the painting loft. Prospect-symbolic elements of the house intensify, at a smaller scale, existing prospect-symbolic conditions of the site.

### **8.6.2 Refuge: approach, outside, inside**

For visitors approaching by water, the Muuratsalo house on its site, once seen, acts as a symbolic and functional refuge. It is sited in a forest, on a hillside on a remote island. Its walls are unusually high; seen from its approaches, the house appears secure and defensible; its small windows and large openings combine in a visitor's perception to give the appearance of an accessible, survival-enhancing refuge.

Outside the house, the courtyard is partly open to the south, but is enclosing and protective, and only visually open, to the west. The designed breaches in the courtyard walls, the patterned brickwork of walls and terrace evoke the *artificial refuge* symbolism of an old building or a ruin; the two narrow doors in the courtyard's east wall seem to offer refuge, snug in a quilt of mixed bricks. The theatrical *coulisses* of the southern walls and the opening in the west wall offer a mix of bodily security and visual outlook; combined with the adjacent natural rocks and trees, the artificial walls provide both a symbolic and functional refuge for the visitor.

## **8.7 Overview: experience and prospect-refuge symbolism**

### **8.7.1 The visitor's experience**

On the way to Muuratsalo, by road and by ferry, and on foot, the visitor experiences the Finnish landscape at different scales: forest, lake, islands; scraped granite boulders, pine and birch trees, reeds and water's edge—along with horizons, sky, weather and other variables of the visit (number, kind and mood of visitors, time of day, season, quality of light, reason for visiting, etc.)

Within the landscape setting of the Muuratsalo island, the visitor experiences and gauges the courtyard, the rooms, the materials and forms, the openings and views of the Muuratsalo house. There is also the everyday mystery: the visitor might ask, paraphrasing Appleton, 'What is it that we like about Aalto's Muuratsalo house, and why do we like it?'

To frame an answer, in central Finland, in the courtyard of one of Aalto's most personal works, the visitor is pleased to have access to the analytical tools of Appleton's prospect-refuge theory. Appleton has given landscape (and, by extension, architecture) a discourse that names and categorizes elements (doors, windows, walls, tiles, fireplaces) as they act together to symbolize prospect and refuge, giving a balance of protection and outlook. Appleton's prospect-refuge theory is a means of interpretation, linking the desk-bound historian or theoretician with Appleton's 'man with the rucksack',<sup>108</sup> just as Aalto aspired to connect the international architect (himself) with the 'little man in the street', countering abstraction with architectural elements that recall real landscapes.

Appleton's theory provides concepts and words that enable the visitor to look at windows and see *peepholes*; to look at a pantiled roof cornice and sense *indirect prospect*; to look through a screen of slats and vines and see a *simple vista*; to see in the opening between two walls the drama of a *coulisse*; to recognize a shining horizon or a sunlit white building as a symbol of prospect; to sense *artificial refuge* in a thick wall with a small door. With Appleton's language of prospect

and refuge, the visitor has words and a discourse to explain experiences of landscape and building.

### **8.7.2 Conclusion: Muuratsalo aesthetics: knowledge and experience**

The architectural literature contains cultural, historical, even psychological critiques of Aalto's summer house; accounts of visiting the Muuratsalo house show a range of responses. Yet the satisfaction of house and setting has had limited explanatory theory beyond the phenomenological approaches of Pallasmaa and Norberg-Schulz (as noted in Chapters 3 and 7).

The visitor's familiarity with the historical literature informs the experience of the Muuratsalo house; architectural theories and Appleton's landscape theory (partly following Hildebrand's method) inform later reflection on the aesthetics of the house. Landscape, site, house, courtyard and rooms arguably contain significant elements symbolic of opportunities 'to see without being seen'.

Spatial concepts complement the insights of prospect-refuge symbolism: Higuchi's geomancy opens new understanding of site selection and habitat; Norberg-Schulz's philosophies relate architectural space to landscape. Aben and de Wit inform reflection on courtyard space; Dee's landscape view of the threshold expands architectural notions, and supports the critical viability of prospect-refuge theory; Bachelard's philosophy of house space informs an appreciation of interior aesthetics. Appleton's landscape theory, mediated by architectural spatial thinking, provides a tool to understand architectural aesthetics, in a critical perspective capable of embracing both architecture and landscape.

## CHAPTER 8 NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, revised edition (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1996/1975), p.173.
- <sup>2</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.172-78.
- <sup>3</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.30.
- <sup>4</sup> Grant Hildebrand, *The Wright Space: Pattern and Meaning in Frank Lloyd Wright's Houses* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), pp.30-31.
- <sup>5</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.175.
- <sup>6</sup> Matti Sanaksenaho, 'Visiting the Houses of Aalto', in *Alvar Aalto Houses: Timeless Expressions*, edited by Nobuyuki Yoshida (Tokyo: A+U Publishing, 1998), p.213.
- <sup>7</sup> Severi Blomstedt, Foreword, in Jari and Sirkkaliisa Jetsonen, *Finnish Summer Houses* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), p.9.
- <sup>8</sup> Jetsonen and Jetsonen, *Finnish Summer Houses*, p.10.
- <sup>9</sup> Jetsonen and Jetsonen, *Finnish Summer Houses*, pp.180-89.
- <sup>10</sup> Jetsonen and Jetsonen, *Finnish Summer Houses*, p.11.
- <sup>11</sup> Jetsonen and Jetsonen, *Finnish Summer Houses*, pp.48-53.
- <sup>12</sup> Jetsonen and Jetsonen, *Finnish Summer Houses*, p.80.
- <sup>13</sup> Sarah Menin, 'Retreating to Dwell', in Sarah Menin, editor, *Constructing Place: Mind and Matter* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p.231.
- <sup>14</sup> Menin, 'Retreating to Dwell', p.236.
- <sup>15</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Experimental House at Muuratsalo' (1953), in *Alvar Aalto: Sketches*, edited by Göran Schildt, translated by Stuart Wrede (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1978), p.116.
- <sup>16</sup> Aalto, 'Experimental House at Muuratsalo', p.116.
- <sup>17</sup> Aalto, 'Experimental House at Muuratsalo', p.116.
- <sup>18</sup> Hildebrand, *The Wright Space*, p.72.
- <sup>19</sup> Hildebrand, *The Wright Space*, p.64.
- <sup>20</sup> Hildebrand, *The Wright Space*, p.64.
- <sup>21</sup> Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Mature Years* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), p.102.
- <sup>22</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Architecture in the Landscape of Central Finland' (1925), in *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, edited by Göran Schildt, translated by Timothy Bingham (Helsinki: Ottava, 1997), p.22.
- <sup>23</sup> Markku Komonen, 'Experiments with Materials at the Architect's Own Expense', in *Alvar Aalto: The Brick*, edited by Hanni Sippo (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Museum /Alvar Aalto Foundation, 2001).
- <sup>24</sup> Sarah Menin and Flora Samuel, *Nature and Space: Aalto and Le Corbusier* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).
- <sup>25</sup> Marjo Holma, Päivi Lukkarinen, editors, *Experimental House, Koetalo Muuratsalo*, Architecture by Alvar Aalto no. 9 (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Museum, 1996). Other drawings from *Experimental House: Low Resolution Drawings and Photos*, CD prepared for *Building Designing Thinking: 3rd International Alvar Aalto Meeting on Modern Architecture*, August 30-31, 2008, Jyväskylä, Finland (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Museum, 2008).
- <sup>26</sup> Documents, photographs and Aalto's article/statement, all selected by Aalto, are found in Karl Fleig, editor, *Alvar Aalto: Volume I 1922-1962* (Basel: Birkhauser, 1963), pp.200-03. Recent extensive photographs of the Muuratsalo site are found in Marjo Holma and Markku Lahti, *Alvar Aalto: 'A gentler structure for life'* (Helsinki: Rakennustieto Oy, 1996), p.29.
- <sup>27</sup> Richard Weston, *Alvar Aalto* (London: Phaidon, 1996), pp.124-25.

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- <sup>28</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1980), pp.42-45.
- <sup>29</sup> Jetsonen and Jetsonen, *Finnish Summer Houses*, p.80.
- <sup>30</sup> Demetri Porphyrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism: Studies on Alvar Aalto* (London: Academy Editions, 1982), pp.1-4.
- <sup>31</sup> Schildt, Alvar Aalto: The Mature Years, p.275.
- <sup>32</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.138.
- <sup>33</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.94.
- <sup>34</sup> 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), p.175.
- <sup>35</sup> Sanaksenaho, 'Visiting the Houses of Aalto', p.215.
- <sup>36</sup> Writing on 'contradiction juxtaposed', Venturi observes that in Modern architecture 'contradictory juxtapositions of scale involving immediately adjacent elements' are extremely rare. Venturi's reading of Mannerism, Italian urbanism and Aalto suggests directions for future research. See Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977/1966), pp.66-67.
- <sup>37</sup> David Leatherbarrow, *Uncommon Ground: Architecture, Technology and Topography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), pp.90-91.
- <sup>38</sup> Comment made by architect Richard Leplastrier in conversation with the author; Newcastle, NSW, August 2008.
- <sup>39</sup> Aben and de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden*, p.10.
- <sup>40</sup> Anita Berrizbeitia and Linda Pollak, *Inside Outside: Between Architecture and Landscape* (Gloucester, Mass.: Rockport, 1999).
- <sup>41</sup> Philip Goad, *New Directions in Australian Architecture* (Balmain, NSW: Pesaro Publishing, 2001), p.27.
- <sup>42</sup> Markku Lahti, 'Alvar Aalto and the Beauty of the House', in *Alvar Aalto: Toward a Human Modernism*, edited by Winfried Nerdinger (Munich: Prestel, 1999), p.57.
- <sup>43</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.77.
- <sup>44</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.81.
- <sup>45</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.77.
- <sup>46</sup> Malcolm Quantrill, *Finnish Architecture and the Modernist Tradition* (London: E. & F.N. Spon, 1995), pp.109-11.
- <sup>47</sup> The description is of Le Corbusier's Mother's house, Vevey, Switzerland (1924-25); see Hertzberger, *Space and the Architect*, p.13.
- <sup>48</sup> Windows are discussed in contexts of views, space, and paintings in Hertzberger, *Space and the Architect*, pp.19-23, pp.192-97.
- <sup>49</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.80-81; see also Table 4, 'Surfaces and horizons', p.96.
- <sup>50</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands: Nordic Building* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996), p.44.
- <sup>51</sup> Sanaksenaho, 'Visiting the Houses of Aalto', p.215.
- <sup>52</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.214.
- <sup>53</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Journey to Italy' (1954), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, pp.38-39.
- <sup>54</sup> Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', p.51.
- <sup>55</sup> Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, p.102.
- <sup>56</sup> Göran Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Early Years* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984), pp.135-36.

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- <sup>57</sup> Jussi Rausti, cited in Riitta Nikula, 'The city in the writings of Alvar Aalto', in Timo Tuomi, Kristina Paatero, Eija Rauske, editors, *Alvar Aalto in Seven Buildings* (Helsinki: Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1998), p.156.
- <sup>58</sup> Nikula, 'The city in the writings of Alvar Aalto', p.155.
- <sup>59</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, pp.191-200.
- <sup>60</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Town Planning and Public Buildings' (1966), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.212.
- <sup>61</sup> Aalto, 'Town Planning and Public Buildings', p.212.
- <sup>62</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, pp.176-77, Figs 295-98.
- <sup>63</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.94-95.
- <sup>64</sup> Stephen Kite, 'Modernity and the Threshold: Psychologizing the places in-between', in Sarah Menin, editor, *Constructing Place: Mind and Matter* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p.186. Kite (p.183) also notes Hildebrand's study of Wright's houses.
- <sup>65</sup> Kite, 'Modernity and the Threshold', p.182. Kite refers also to the staircase of Schinkel's Altes Museum, Berlin (1822-30), as seen by critic Adrian Stokes; see R. Wollheim, editor, *The Image in Form: Selected Writings of Adrian Stokes* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.316.
- <sup>66</sup> Kristian Gullichsen, 'Villa Mairea', in Pirkko Tuukkanen-Beckers, editor, *Alvar Aalto: Points of Contact* (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Museum, 1994), pp.65-66.
- <sup>67</sup> Vincent Scully, *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods: Greek Sacred Architecture*, revised edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979/1962), p.206.
- <sup>68</sup> Aben and de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden*, p.5.
- <sup>69</sup> Various architectural inversions in the Muuratsalo house are noted in Marc Treib, 'Aalto's Nature', in Peter Reed, editor, *Alvar Aalto: between humanism and materialism* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1998), pp.58-59.
- <sup>70</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.81.
- <sup>71</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.171.
- <sup>72</sup> Sanaksenaho, 'Visiting the Houses of Aalto', p.215.
- <sup>73</sup> Ranulph Glanville, 'Finnish Vernacular Farmhouses', *The Architectural Association Quarterly*, February 1978, p.49.
- <sup>74</sup> Glanville, 'Finnish Vernacular Farmhouses', p.49.
- <sup>75</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Karelian Architecture' (1941) in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.116.
- <sup>76</sup> 'The Karelian builders and, by extension, the architect as viewed by Aalto, must attend to circumstances: climate, landscape, site, culture, materials, tectonics, and more.' Stanford Anderson, 'Aalto and "Methodical Accommodation to Circumstance"', in Tuomi, Paatero, Rauske, *Alvar Aalto in Seven Buildings*, p.143.
- <sup>77</sup> Sarah Menin, 'Fragments from the forest: Aalto's requisitioning of forest place and matter', *Journal of Architecture*, Vol.6: no.3: Autumn 2001, p.290.
- <sup>78</sup> Menin, 'Fragments from the forest', p.290.
- <sup>79</sup> Charles Moore, Gerald Allen and Donlyn Lyndon, *The Place of Houses* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000/1978), pp.102-107.
- <sup>80</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'From doorstep to living room' (1926), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, pp.51-52. The image is from Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Oeuvre Complète Volume I, 1910-1929* (Zurich: Les Editions d'Architecture, 1995).
- <sup>81</sup> Markku Lahti, 'Alvar Aalto and the Beauty of the House', in Winfried Nerdinger, editor, *Alvar Aalto: Toward a Human Modernism* (Munich: Prestel, 1999), p.57.
- <sup>82</sup> Appleton observes that where a vista is simultaneously restricted in both the vertical and horizontal plane, 'a further reduction of the field of vision takes place and the resulting prospect may be called a *peephole*.' Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.79-80.

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- <sup>83</sup> Sanaksenaho, 'Visiting the Houses of Aalto', p.215.
- <sup>84</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.94.
- <sup>85</sup> Porphyrrios, *Sources of Modern Eclecticism*, p.10.
- <sup>86</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Nightlands*, p.45, also Plate 21.
- <sup>87</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.92.
- <sup>88</sup> Hildebrand, *The Wright Space*, p.36.
- <sup>89</sup> Sanaksenaho, 'Visiting the Houses of Aalto', p.215.
- <sup>90</sup> Hildebrand, *The Wright Space*, p.36.
- <sup>91</sup> Appleton, *Experience of Landscape*, pp.118-19.
- <sup>92</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, translated from the French by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994/1964/1958), p.6.
- <sup>93</sup> Holma and Lukkarinen, *Experimental House / Koetalo Muuratsalo*; Komonen, 'Experiments with Materials at the Architect's Own Expense.'
- <sup>94</sup> Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.77.
- <sup>97</sup> Catherine Dee, *Form and Fabric in Landscape Architecture: a Visual Introduction* (London and New York: Spon, 2001), p.171.
- <sup>98</sup> Dee, *Form and Fabric in Landscape Architecture*, p.175.
- <sup>99</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'From doorstep to living room' (1926), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, pp.51-52.
- <sup>100</sup> s.v. 'Janus', *The Macquarie Dictionary*, 3rd edition (Macquarie University, NSW: Macquarie Library, 1997).
- <sup>101</sup> Francoise Fromonot, *Glenn Murcutt: Works and Projects* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), pp.34-35.
- <sup>102</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'Experimental House, Muuratsalo', p.116.
- <sup>103</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'The Housing Problem' (1930), in Schildt, *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, p.81.
- <sup>104</sup> Stanford Anderson, 'Thinking in Architecture', *Ptah. 08* (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Foundation, 2009), p.86.
- <sup>105</sup> Weston, *Alvar Aalto*, p.227.
- <sup>106</sup> Appleton, *Experience of Landscape*, p.92.
- <sup>107</sup> Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: The Mature Years*, pp.269-70.
- <sup>108</sup> Appleton, *Experience of Landscape*, p.45.

## Chapter 9 Conclusions

... what it is that we like about landscape, and why we like it.

Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, p.255.

### **9.0 Chapter 9 Introduction**

In concluding the research dissertation, this final chapter contains reflections on research methodology, process and findings. It summarizes aims and achievements of research as included in the dissertation. It sets out research goals, benefits and thesis structure, and considers the literature and field experience, as they contribute to research achievements.

The chapter also outlines research findings on prospect-refuge theory and architecture, and diagnoses problems of using Appleton's theory. Research findings are reflected in recommendations and outlines for future research involving Aalto's work and Appleton's prospect-refuge theory.

### **9.1 Research aims and achievements**

#### **9.1.1 Research topic and question**

Given its aim to consider what made some architecture renowned, special or appealing, the dissertation investigated a research topic: *landscape as a component of architectural aesthetics*.

The study brought together two topics—the aesthetic appeal of Alvar Aalto's house architecture; and landscape as context and aesthetic complement for architecture—to form the research question: *Can the appeal of Aalto's Muuratsalo house be understood in terms of landscape aesthetics, with particular reference to Appleton's prospect-refuge theory?* This generated research activity between the fields of architecture and landscape.

### **9.1.2 Summary of research achievements**

The dissertation initiated and completed a number of processes to research landscape and architecture, and focused on the use of Jay Appleton's prospect-refuge theory to investigate aesthetic preference for Alvar Aalto's Muuratsalo summer house. Thesis structure reflects the sequence of research activities.

Introductory remarks and personal ruminations were set out in Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, a review of architectural and landscape literature, as background to regarding architectural aesthetics through a landscape lens, was argued as methodologically suitable and sufficient.<sup>1</sup>

In Chapter 3 Aalto centenary literature was discussed, to show architectural history's recent adoption of landscape ideas, and view of the legacy of Aalto, a 'designer of landscapes'. In Chapter 4, three landscape topics familiar to architectural history and theory—the construct of nature, the topic of landscape, and the realities of the site—were shown to be important instances of architecture's understanding of landscape. In Chapter 5 landscape methodology was introduced through examples common to architecture and landscape history: the garden and the terrace. The landscape paradigm seemed suitable to expand insight into Aalto's buildings and landscapes, and to contribute to an expanded understanding of architectural aesthetics.

Chapter 6 drew attention to Aalto's life experience, his house designs and ideals, and biological, atavistic and urban/cultural elements in his thinking and design methods, as well as his affinity for landscape; his work seemed appropriate for analysis using landscape theory. In Chapter 7, background, details and uses of Appleton's prospect-refuge theory were set out, along with notes on architectural spatiality.

In Chapter 8 Aalto's and Appleton's ideas were brought together in a case study involving a site visit to Aalto's Muuratsalo summer house, a 'quest' to consider the validity of the theory as a tool for analysis of architectural aesthetics. The

concepts and terminology of prospect-refuge theory did indeed identify prospect-refuge symbolism in the Muuratsalo house, and gave a method for architectural analysis.

## **9.2 Research methodology: book and building**

The research question, centred on architectural aesthetics, prompted a conjunction of two bodies of work: the house architecture and ideas of Alvar Aalto, and the landscape theory and ideas of Jay Appleton. While Appleton's prospect-refuge theory applies to, and derives from, experience of diverse real-world landscapes, it is argued and contained within a single book.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, while Aalto set his thoughts out in words on occasion, his philosophy was built in his architecture, 'works cast in matter itself—no words can help', as he said;<sup>3</sup> his work, it has been argued, needs to be experienced directly to be fully understood.<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning of research, a visit to Finland, to use landscape theory to see an Aalto building in context, was a desired but elusive research component. The research process of researching Aalto in Australia, far from his built work, meant reliance on the Aalto literature (architectural history and theory writing, drawings, sketches, images, etc.) as primary research resource.

## **9.3 Research goals, benefits and structure**

The research process was, like Appleton's 'quest', initially a search for an explanation of what made Aalto's house architecture special.<sup>5</sup> The process used both architecture and landscape to look at architectural aesthetics. The key research benefits were acquisition of research skills; knowledge of landscape history and Aalto's work; and firsthand experience of Aalto's house.

The method yielded results through a reading of the Aalto literature, especially on the Muuratsalo house. Evidence from the literature was gathered on the basis of

relevance to a prospect-refuge argument. The structure of the dissertation evolved from this approach, and from its sequence of literature review and case study.

#### **9.4 Research knowledge: literature and experience**

The study developed to combine two different kinds of research: a review of landscape and architecture literature, and an analysis of Aalto's summer house. Only selected literature could be focused on the experience of the house; similarly, not all aspects of the Muuratsalo house could be explained by the landscape theory. Thus a selection of the literature is used to argue about selected aspects of the house.

##### **9.4.1 Research literature**

Both architecture and landscape literature covered a broad scope. While the more general architectural literature concerns itself with buildings, selected architectural literature is concerned with perception (Pallasmaa), picturesque theory (Macarthur), place (Norberg-Schulz), psychology (Menin and Samuel) and aesthetics (Hildebrand).

The landscape literature—generally less familiar to architectural readers—is epistemologically broad and inclusive. Its range reflects the interests of writers: from ecology (McHarg) to history of gardens (Turner), reception of gardens (Hunt) and poetics of gardens (Moore et al); to mapping (Cosgrove) and analysis of landscape space (Steenbergen and Reh); to spatial structure (Higuchi), and landscape urbanism and infrastructure (Waldheim); to key words (Vroom) and language (Spirn; Bonyhady and Griffiths); and vernacular landscapes (Jackson).

##### **9.4.2 Research experience: visit to Aalto's summer house**

Case study data was gathered during one field trip, a 4-hour afternoon visit to Aalto's summer house, within the context of a conference excursion. The

occasion included photography, sketching, note-taking, focused and unfocused looking, amidst general conviviality, appropriate to a summer house, recalling Aalto's idea of 'work between swims'.

In this brief window of time, key elements—site, views, topography, geology, vegetation, orientation, jetty, sauna, courtyard, house, rooms and details—and relationships were identified for later reflection (see Chapter 8). Other visitors were not involved in the process, which involved only the researcher and the house and site as experienced.

### **9.5 The field trip as research method**

The field trip, regardless of brevity, was invaluable for research. Site, courtyard and house were revealed in various ways during the visit. The research process would lack dimension without this rare visit, which provided physical context (Finland, Helsinki, Lake Päijänne, the house site, the contemporary suburb of Muuratsalo, Säynätsalo and Jyväskylä) and architectural, intellectual and social perspectives (Aalto's house and studio, the Alvar Aalto Museum and Alvar Aalto Institute, the conference, and knowledgeable Finns).

The 2008 Finland visit was an initiation into the imaginative realm of a master architect. The research visit brought a new awareness of Aalto's method as it reveals landscape, artifice, and his personality; use of prospect-refuge theory also gave fresh insight into architectural methodology.

### **9.6 Research findings**

Research findings are related to the research question: Can the appeal of Aalto's Muuratsalo house be understood in terms of landscape aesthetics, with particular reference to Appleton's prospect-refuge theory?

Findings conclude positively, that the appeal of Aalto's house can be understood through use of Appleton's theory of landscape aesthetics. While the aesthetic appeal of the house seems to be related to landscape factors, it is also acknowledged that house aesthetics are not due solely to landscape symbolism or other landscape factors.

#### **9.6.1 Findings: prospects and refuges, actual and symbolic**

Review and analysis of the literature, followed by the field visit, confirmed a propitious lake island 'habitat', and a carefully selected house site. The house is sited and oriented to exploit landscape and climate, establishing spatial and visual relations with the shaded forest, convex rock formation, lake views, sun and sky.

As noted in Chapter 8, prospect and refuge symbols are particularly evident in two areas—relation to landscape and architectural composition. Relation to landscape tends to be prospect-dominant, while architectural spaces tend to be refuge-dominant, although there are exceptions to both cases.

#### **9.6.2 Prospect and refuge examples**

The Muuratsalo house appears to have significant elements of *prospect*, both actual and symbolic. There are views over water from the elevated, sloping, open forest site. There are vistas from the courtyard and the living room; there are peephole views from the house's numerous smaller windows. There is interior prospect from the painting loft. The house also offers indirect prospect symbolism from outside.

The Muuratsalo site and house also offer real and symbolic *refuge*. The house and semi-enclosed courtyard are sited on an open-forest slope, by a rock formation. Seen from below, the fragmented walls suggest a hiding place. The courtyard is level and contained; its western opening offers both refuge and prospect. The L-

shaped enclosure of the house backs against north and the hill, buttressing the courtyard space; its small sheltering rooms partly open to the warm south.

### **9.6.3 The contribution of architecture**

While research set out to argue that the appeal of the Muuratsalo house might be understood as related to landscape factors, it is acknowledged in conclusion that house aesthetics are unlikely to be due solely to landscape symbolism or other landscape factors. The present study was not intended to support, and does not make, such a claim.

Architecture, however, is arguably connected with archaic survival behaviours in living environments, and may also have importance beyond its own methodological boundaries. Colin St John Wilson wrote in 2007 of the universality and ‘timeless’ importance of Aalto’s work:

The universality of Alvar Aalto’s influence belies the strength of the ideas behind the buildings that he designed. His deep understanding of nature and of the fundamental needs of human beings holds a timeless value and continues to be a source of inspiration and wisdom not just to architects but to people of all disciplines.<sup>6</sup>

Implicit in Wilson’s message is the value of architecture and architectural thinking for other disciplines, and for society generally. It is hoped that the present architectural study may have interdisciplinary value.

## **9.7 Prospect-refuge theory: building and site; cultural and natural**

Aalto’s architectural strategies at Muuratsalo seem to realize ideals set out in his writings in the 1920s. Aalto’s experimental summer house is a refuge, a laboratory, a playhouse, where he locates and builds architectural ideas—vernacular, modern, Mediterranean—in the Finnish landscape.

Appleton's theory provides new terms for an organized description of 'what it is that we like about Aalto's site-related architecture and why': it gives a method to look at a building and explain what makes that building special, or what makes people feel good in a particular place. Its analysis applies through all levels of scale, and at various levels of space: locality, site, the house on its site, outdoor spaces, threshold, interior spaces and single elements (windows, doors) are included in its scope.

In particular, its discourse applies to landscape, buildings, the zones in-between landscape and buildings, and the relationships between a building and its site or locality. Frampton's description of Aalto as a 'designer of landscapes' seems to be an appropriate summary of Aalto's method: while not a 'landscape designer', Aalto designed the summer house within a landscape framework. Use of Appleton's theory leads a visitor to see not just prospect-refuge phenomena, but also to observe relationships between architecture and landscape.

### **9.8 Problems of prospect-refuge theory**

An integral aspect of the house is the volume of historical material in its composition, notably Finnish vernacular architecture and Italian urbanism. Other significant elements with historical backgrounds include courtyard walls, steps and thresholds, the firepit, and various doors and windows.

Such historical significances are difficult to explain within the present study. They have spatial, haptic and emotional qualities; they may have atavistic and symbolic significance. Complex associations, involving cultural and natural materials, space and sensation, can be observed in architectural elements (e.g., thresholds, or at the northern grassed stair) throughout the composition.

Prospect-refuge theory is essentially a landscape theory. It has been used in an architectural setting, with little adaptation, in the present study; the theory may be used to reveal much more about aesthetic preference in architectural and urban

elements, such as those noted above. Such work, using Appleton's theory, may also require an enhanced, architecturally adapted 'version' of his method.

### **9.9 Recommendations: landscape in education; fieldwork in research**

The research process produced a new awareness of the value of landscape in understanding architecture. Landscape helped reassessment of Aalto's legacy (see Chapter 3); it also offers a means to understand the appeal of Aalto's house. The validity of a 'lens of landscape' for regarding architectural aesthetics suggests the broader value of landscape in architecture education. While landscape has potential to extend the reach of architectural thinking and practice, the 'real-world' ontology of landscape suggests the value of field experience in architectural education, at undergraduate and post-graduate levels.

#### **9.9.1 Landscape and education**

The research process involved a lengthy process of familiarization with the landscape literature (as noted in Chapter 5), at a Master's level. The novelty (and obscurity) of landscape discourse to architects became evident through the research process, at presentations of drafts and papers to audiences largely unaware of landscape methodology.

Awareness of landscape forms a pathway to understanding design issues involving the natural world. A formal framework for thinking about landscape seems appropriate and necessary at a time when 'sustainable design' is prominent in architectural discourses. Conjoint Professor Richard Leplastrier spoke recently of the need for contemporary architectural education to include formal study of landscape.<sup>7</sup> Inclusion of landscape methods (landscape history, theory, praxis, aesthetics, etc.) in 'built environment' education has the potential to engage students and professionals in an improved understanding of contested areas where the natural world and the manmade environment intersect.

### **9.9.2 Fieldwork in research**

Research experience confirms what may have been long suspected: historical research into architecture requires a combination of desk-based research and field experience. The careers of Scully and Venturi were underpinned by sustained preparation and fieldwork.<sup>8</sup> While Aalto seems a special case for firsthand experience, other architecture needs to be experienced in context: Utzon's Sydney Opera House, and the work of Le Corbusier, highly aware of the value of site, landscape and location, offer particular examples.<sup>9</sup>

A researcher of architectural history needs to be informed by two kinds of knowledge: familiarity with key texts, and confirmation and expansion of that knowledge by an actual visit to the work of architecture. The activity of visiting a site involves negotiating topography, seasons, weather, transport and social subtleties. This activity brings its own rewards, as well as a deeper sense of the architect's achievement in imagining and making a fine building in a particular place.

It is recommended that research in architectural history include field trips to relevant sites and buildings. Research frameworks—methodology, dissertation structure, key works, literature review, submission schedules, papers and conferences, grant applications, etc.—may be strategically organized so that research can benefit from real-world experience of architecture, landscape and urban examples.

### **9.10 Future research**

Three immediate areas of interest arise from the research process and findings. Appleton's use of an *evolutionary argument* for environmental preference, and recent use of a similar argument in other fields, suggests that it may have application in architecture; Appleton's terminology may also be developed further to become a more relevant analytical tool for investigating architecture. Aalto's *sites* and the landscape settings of his architecture may be regarded using

prospect-refuge theory or other methods, to fill an existing gap in architectural knowledge. An extended study of Aalto's landscape or *urban precedents* may reveal aspects of prospect-refuge symbolism in their appeal, leading to an explanation for their preference in partly biological or evolutionary terms.

#### **9.10.1 Research direction 1: evolutionary aesthetics in architecture**

The evolutionary argument for aesthetic preference is a leading aspect of Appleton's prospect-refuge theory (as discussed in Chapter 7). Cosmides, Tooby and Barlow and Pinker<sup>10</sup> have developed the validity of the idea of inherited behaviour; evolutionary themes are noted by Pallasmaa and used in architecture by Hildebrand.<sup>11</sup>

The evolutionary argument is appearing in various disciplines. It is a commonplace in zoology,<sup>12</sup> in Pinker's writings on neuroscience, and Buss's work in psychology.<sup>13</sup> It has more recently been taken up in music,<sup>14</sup> literature<sup>15</sup> and art.<sup>16</sup> Architecture and landscape architecture, given their interdisciplinarity and connection with natural world conditions, seem to contain fertile ground for further evolutionary-based research. Studies may be made of renowned buildings, gardens, urban spaces, etc., in Australia or elsewhere, to consider the role of evolutionary factors in their renown.<sup>17</sup>

Appleton's theory may also be developed further to become a better tool for investigating architecture. Appleton's theory (see Chapter 7) was written largely for landscape appreciation, and lacks a wide-ranging vocabulary to refer to architectural aesthetics. Research to adapt the theory to architecture may develop terms and approaches appropriate to the spaces, elements and materials of architecture. An improved terminology (informed possibly by the work of Bachelard, Norberg-Schulz, Hertzberger and others) would likely improve the uptake and further use of prospect-refuge theory in architectural space contexts.

### **9.10.2 Research direction 2: Aalto's sites and landscapes**

While research into the houses of Alvar Aalto is relatively straightforward, research material on Aalto's sites is difficult to find, as his sites are barely documented, and not exhaustively described in the critical literature. Nordic and other European scholars (as yet untranslated) may have studied site and context in Aalto's work.

There may also be significant archival material to inform an analysis of Aalto's site methods, which are not documented to date. A sustained study of Aalto's approach to landscape might consider such topics as: site analysis, site strategy, orientation, landscape geometry, poetics and reference to local and Mediterranean models in Aalto's site strategies.

### **9.10.3 Research direction 3: prospect and refuge in Italian urbanism**

If preference for Aalto's architecture may be partly accounted for using prospect-refuge theory, this raises a question of other determinants of architectural preference. It seems insufficient to describe as 'cultural' those elements of architectural or urban precedent (walls, rooms, windows, stairs, corridors, etc.) whose aesthetic appeal is not immediately landscape-related. Just as prospect-refuge theory pointed to deep-seated emotional preference for Aalto's architecture, so the aesthetics of earlier urban models for his work (Venice's Piazza San Marco, the Campidoglio, etc.) may also be discussed using landscape aesthetic theory.

There is scope for a study of the influence of Italian urban archetypes (in art, urban design, garden design, site strategies, and architecture) on Aalto's house and civic designs, using Appleton's theory as a basis for critical investigation and comparison. A research method as recommended above—literature review followed by field visits, augmented by archival research—would form new knowledge of the influence of historical elements in Aalto's work.

Informed by Porphyrios' study of Aalto's methods, and underpinned by Norberg-Schulz's spatial theory, such a study would offer an explanation of the appeal to Aalto of architectural sites and urban spaces of enduring popularity. Carried out at the level of a doctorate, and building upon the present study's methodology and findings, such a study would contribute to further understanding of Aalto, and of aesthetics in architecture and urbanism generally, and demonstrate the 'inspiration and wisdom' evident and latent in architecture.

As noted in Chapter 1, Frampton wrote of Aalto's 'capacity as a designer of landscapes'; it appears from this study that to think about Aalto's architecture without its landscape context, or without an awareness of his landscape attitudes, is to remain unaware of the scope of Aalto's legacy. This study seems to bring us closer to forming a theoretical framework which might be used to bridge the gap between landscape and architecture, one which appears to present a means for better understanding the work of Alvar Aalto.

## CHAPTER 9 NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Chris Hart, *Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Social Science Research Imagination* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), p.13.
- <sup>2</sup> Jay Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, revised edition (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 1996/1975).
- <sup>3</sup> Alvar Aalto, 'In Memoriam: Eliel Saarinen', in *Alvar Aalto in his own words*, ed. Göran Schildt, trans. Timothy Binham (Helsinki: Ottava, 1997), p.246.
- <sup>4</sup> Michael Trencher, *The Alvar Aalto Guide* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), p.1.
- <sup>5</sup> Chapter 2, 'The Quest', Appleton, *The Experience of Landscape*, pp.22-51.
- <sup>6</sup> Colin St John Wilson, 'The Orthodoxy of Alvar Aalto', in Juhani Pallasmaa, Tomoko Sato, editors, *Alvar Aalto Through the Eyes of Shigeru Ban* (London: Black Dog, 2007), p.19.
- <sup>7</sup> Richard Leplastrier, opening address, 'In Transition', M.Arch exhibition, School of Architecture and Built Environment, University of Newcastle NSW, November 2009.
- <sup>8</sup> Vincent Scully, 'Architecture: The Natural and the Manmade,' in Vincent Scully, *Modern Architecture and Other Essays*, selected and with introductions by Neil Levine (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003; Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977/1966).
- <sup>9</sup> Wendy Redfield, 'The Suppressed Site: Revealing the Influence of Site on Two Purist Works', in Carol J. Burns and Andrea Kahn, editors, *Site Matters: Design Concepts, Histories, and Strategies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005).
- <sup>10</sup> Lida Cosmides, John Tooby, and Jerome H. Barkow, 'Introduction: Evolutionary Psychology and Conceptual Integration', in Jerome H. Barkow, Lida Cosmides and John Tooby, editors, *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary psychology and the generation of culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (London: Penguin 2003).
- <sup>11</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, 'The mind of the environment', in Birgit Cold, editor, *Aesthetics, Well-being and Health: Essays within Architecture and environmental aesthetics* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001), pp.212-13; Grant Hildebrand, *The Origins of Architectural Pleasure* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
- <sup>12</sup> Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Harvard, MA: Belknap Press, 1975); Edward O. Wilson, *Biophilia: The human bond with other species* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp.103-18; John Alcock, *The Triumph of Sociobiology* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- <sup>13</sup> David M. Buss, *Evolutionary Psychology: The New Science of the Mind*, 2nd edition, (Boston: Pearson Education, 2004/1999).
- <sup>14</sup> Steven Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals: The origins of music, language, mind and body* (London: Phoenix, 2006).
- <sup>15</sup> Jonathan Gottschall and David Sloan Wilson, editors, *The Literary Animal: Evolution and the Nature of Narrative* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005); Joseph Carroll, *Literary Darwinism: Evolution, Human Nature and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- <sup>16</sup> Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, and Human Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- <sup>17</sup> See for example John Roberts, 'Enclosed Garden and Terrace: Using Landscape Ideas to Review Two Recent Australian Houses', in *History in Practice: 25<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Australia and New Zealand, Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria, 3-6 July 2008, edited by David Beynon and Ursula de Jong (Geelong: SAHANZ, 2008).

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