



Box 1—Detail from a scene in Andrej Tarkovski's movie *Stalker* (1979): the ruins, turned into a ditch, follow the optics of Renaissance perspective, while the compound orientation of the Stalker stretched out on the muddy moss and the Black Dog are oriented according to the optics of Mediaeval perspective. In this scene, the centre (in Christopher Alexander's sense) would articulate in the [superposition](#) of two perspectives. That is, the moving centre of the filmic narrative: or the centre featuring the proximal realm of the Zone.

“The pond does exist. Our trouble is that we don't know how to define it exactly. But the trouble comes from referring to it as a ‘whole.’ That kind of terminology seems to make it necessary for me to draw an exact boundary ... That is the mistake. / When I call a pond a center, the situation changes ... the fuzziness of edges becomes less problematic. The reason is that the pond, as an entity, is focused towards its center. It creates a field of centeredness.” Christopher Alexander – [The Nature of Order – Book 1: The Phenomenon of Life](#). Question: can centres query *perspective*?

Extending the discussion of *occurrences* and *activities*—a bit like tasks and occasions—in terms of *mutual availability to one another*, features the proximal in *environmental* terms. Whether they become *ecological*/not depends on the extent to which we resort to problems/solutions (Alexander in [The timeless way of building](#))—in working with *patterns*: the latter residing in a *matrixial* relation between problems/solutions in Alexander's earlier works. In other words, bringing our attention to the *between-space* of /problem solutions/, is likely to home in on proximal availability *and* centres.

In the projects described and discussed by Norman Potter (1990) the parts of the work defined in terms of problem-solution is reflected in his *curatorial* approach to industrial and artisanal artefacts: jobs defined in the context of his larger projects, gathered in *Models and construct—margin notes to a design culture*. The industrial jobs, selected a products, come from *afar*. While the artisanal elements are *site-specific*: delegated to local crafts-(wo)men. Which contributes to situate each project as a *centre*: unmarked by a boundary. Or, rather, by a fuzzy/unmarked boundary.



Box 2—Andrej Rublev's icon of Abraham and the Angels at Mamre (1425), it implies the viewer rather than drawing the viewer into the picture (cf. **Box 3**).

So, as in a [fox-hunt](#), we are able to *hold* the centre: which is also what is implied by Fredrik Barth (1972) when he sees tasks and occasions gathered in what he calls *encounters*: featuring in the social organisation of encounters. As Norman Potter concludes the precepts of the Literalist movement: “20. Make, do; scorn to publish: encounter!” But here we must ask: is there a decisive difference between the centre that organises perception (Alexandre), and holding the centre; whether it is in the sense of a hunting-party of horse (wo)men's attention, as they ride in a group without running into each other, or a *holding-pattern* in the sense of a flight-pattern in

readiness to land a plane? In other words: is it the same if a centre holds a complex of mutual available *occurrences* or *activities* as a whole? In other words, are occurrences *and* (⊕) activities equivalent in regard of *centres*, and their holding of wholes? Is it necessarily good/ecological?

The problem is literally put into perspective in Mediaeval and Renaissance perspective, confusingly called *reverse perspective* and *perspective*: likely because the study of perspectival elements in Mediaeval church art were *studied* in the wake of the articulation of perspective in Renaissance art. That is, before becomes after the subjectivity of study in “discovering” Renaissance art before Mediaeval art. Objectively, Mediaeval art features *perspective* and Renaissance *reverse perspective*. In the Mediaeval parallels meet in the *viewer*, in Renaissance they meet in the *horizon*.

So, the centres move between the spectator and the horizon. In this scope, Alexander’s *centre* appears on a sliding *scale* (in between). And there is a question as to whether it can be held in any other way than working at levelling events and activities, by working with *facilitation* (of which Buckminster Fuller’s *trim-tabs* are a case in point). It doesn’t solve any problem, but facilitates in a way that it becomes possible to run clear of the trouble. Trouble differs from problem. A problem exists in a space of solutions. *A trouble may be cleared by facilitating between mutually available entities.*

That is, whether these entities are occurrences, activities or both. Facilitation, however, is always specific—not generic as cause-effect—but yet are ruled by a generic parameter: *levelling*. In his piece on the essay as *form*, Adorno formulates a criterion of levelling. Which is that the form of the essay should *match* the form in question (if the writer is a critic). But *if* the essay of the critic acts as a trim-tab to a work of art, *then* the question emerges whether the work of art really is complete, or completed, without it. When the levelled artwork/written piece is a whole, the centre will move.

The centre will neither be remote as the *perennial* horizon of the Renaissance perspective, nor will it be *personal* as the intimate intersection if the viewer (caught in the gaze of the tableau). It will be, like Alexander’s centre, located elsewhere: in the *proximal*. It means that we can be interested in *levelling* in terms of the exchange within *and* beyond the proximal. In other words, facilitation may not only occur within the *environmental* realm of the proximal, but in an *ecological* realm that includes the personal and perennial, and thereby also relate to matrixial patterns of problem-solutions.

In this sense, Alexander’s *centres* allow us to comprehend what we might call, from lack of a better term, *difficult wholes*. That is, wholes that will *not* even be approximated by drawing “an exact boundary...” (Alexander, above). Yet, it may be *explored* by drawing a boundary: *not* exactly, but featuring different *cuts* of the whole (different image-text cut [like what is done, using a template, in all of the handouts, such as this one here). Here, drawing bounding lines does not occur in quest of exactitude, but in an environmental scouting for possibilities of levelling, facilitating or *designing* (in a sense to be determined).



Box 3—Detail of *Annunciation* (predella panel from the St. Lucy Altarpiece) Domenico Veneziano c. 1442–1445, Tempera on panel, 54 x 27.3 cm. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Here the viewer is drawn into the painting (invited to walk to the door at the backdrop).

In this vision, designers are in one aspect the gardeners of the proximal realm. In Italian, *disegno* means both drawing and intent/play. If we can understand a *stroll* as a 4D-version of *drawing*, the works of walking will include *hanging*: making close-cuts in the terrain in which we walk to hold the centres that we intercept, and what these have in store: and let it play out in the following. Holding the centre we are *not* in the centre. *Neither* are we completely peripheral. We become involved/implicated in the exchanges of the proximal realm, from where we can hatch an ecological usership.

That is, we can move from the steps/strips of a diary, through the orb of environmental relations, to a composite ecological pattern. There must be some *math* for this...