The sun is taking forever to fall. This morning I wanted time to stop and now it just about has. Of course, with the lack of shadows and the gradual occlusion of the sun behind the gathering haze, there is no visible sign of passing time.

I hike out of the dunes at 4:30, meeting three people on the way who say "Hello" — the loudest sound I have heard in nine hours.

At night, lying in my sleeping bag with my eyes closed, I can still see the place in all its detail. But the sense of what I have seen eludes me. Was that place more real to me, did it have more meaning or significance to me than, for example, a place in a town where two streets meet?

The next day I visit Zabriskie Point. The sign interpreting this place tells of geologic history and of Christian Zabriskie, who oversaw borax operations in Death Valley until 1933. The relevance of his name to this place is slight, yet no less than many other place names. I find this way of naming places disturbing because it overlays some level of social meaning on a dramatic natural scene, as if the name gave this place a human purpose and a greater validity than its natural character.

Locations, specific spots are existential; they only exist and are void of meaning until we give them one or find one. Meaning can turn location or position into place. Ultimately the reality of a place is unknowable except within the limits of a point of view, such as human activity, geologic history, or visual drama.

Even then, places are known only to a limited extent. Their true nature is hidden, changing, affected by passing conditions, weather, people and seasons. We bring our preconceptions, knowledge and interest to a place's reality and overlay them. We wonder if what we see and experience has any relationship to to what we brought.

Regardless of our ideas, each place has its own reality, its own inherent sense of identity, different from the reality of anywhere else and ultimately unknowable in the fullest sense. A location is a place, then, because we call it so, we give it a name, use it, recognize it and pay heed.

The spot in the dunes, my station for nine hours, became distinct for me and different from the areas around. It was a place. Although I stumbled upon it, I found identifiable qualities that differentiated it from its surroundings and from my other place memories: the bowl of space, the strange pattern of sand dune topography, the patterns of light and wind, the sounds of breeze and birds.

In a place like the bowl in the dunes, where no human-made element is perceived, we are unable to use our typical frameworks, that is, function or social meaning, for evaluating places. We cannot ask about its traffic capacity or its history of accidents. Such a place can only be considered on its own terms: the natural causes that made it and the forms or natural effects of those causes. The purely natural place has no inherent social meaning. It only is what it is.

To really understand a place like the bowl in the dunes, we cannot be told a name, glimpse at a few facts on a sign board or even read a guide book. We have to sit and watch and let information come to us in its own way and its own time.

The University of Oregon Science Complex

In compiling this special report on the expansion of the University of Oregon science complex, *Places* asked several people involved in the project each to tell their part of the story.

Significantly, all of their reflections are filled with the involvement of others. Each author — architect Buzz Yudell, Stephen Harby, Christie Johnson Coffin and Charles W. Moore; artists Alice Wingwall and Kent Bloomer; and J. David Rowe, John Moseley and Lotte Streisinger, members of the University administration and faculty — speaks both of collaboration between architects and users as well as how individuals bring their own ideas to bear on such an undertaking.

Our report concludes with critical assessments by Mark Pally and Robert Campbell, who approach the place from external vantage points. Timothy Hursley's elegant photographs, which accompany many of these articles, tell a story of their own.

We also weave throughout this report a roster of people who channeled their experience and energy into this project — a reminder that good places depend on the care and contributions of many people.

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