



Refuge

Description

Nature affords places to hide when things get tough: “When a Martian gets upset he never talks about what is bothering him. He would never burden another Martian with his problem unless his friend’s assistance was necessary to solve the problem. Instead he becomes very quiet and goes into his private cave to think about his problem, mulling it over to find a solution. When he has found a solution, he feels much better and comes out of his cave” (38). This is from John Gray’s *from Venus*. (If it isn’t obvious, for



As well as retreating to caves, groves, and

other naturally occurring refuges, people build artificial structures (buildings). People also resort to culturally and socially defined refuges, and even digital spaces.

Asylum

I’ve been reading Tia DeNora’s book on musical *asylums*. *Asylum* is another word for *refuge*. An asylum provides “ontological security.” It’s a space for validation, providing a sense of fit,

comfort and focus. The asylum seeker withdraws from formal interaction with others, the flows of information that make incessant demands on us.

You can transport yourself to a place of refuge: a special room perhaps, or some private activity, exercise, drugs, and entertainment – your regular cave.

But resourceful people also convert or refurnish their environments into asylums, wherever they find themselves. Examples of such adaptations include: getting engrossed in conversation, dressing up, participating in organised religion, getting into arts and other practical activities (choirs, bands, cookery, gardening, blogging). In other words, just about anything that [engages](#) us, actively, qualifies as resourceful adaptation of one's circumstances into a self-made, resilient refuge.

Recovery

The payoff from either finding or making asylum is *respite*, recovery of self (56), and relief from the pressure to perform and conform. In the case of DIY asylum creation the asylum-maker benefits by assembling stronger resources for the next call to act in her dealings with others.

To rely on ready-made asylums carries the risk of alienation, loss of social skills, and a shrinking social presence. People who make their own asylums risk a tendency to egoistic and overly-assertive behaviour. But such resourceful asylum makers are in a better place than the retreating kind of emotional cave dweller. Tia DeNora draws on and develops these insights from the seminal work by the ethnographer, Erving Goffman.

Amongst the many techniques for creating their own asylums, people can listen to music, and deploy technologies such as smartphones and personal listening (and viewing) devices: digitized music, coupled with miniaturization (iPods and iPads, MP3 players, smartphones), offers many more possibilities for musically inflecting and managing spaces and thus, in the process, for seeking musical asylums (63).

Back to nature

I'm extrapolating from DeNora here. Nature also provides places of refuge: groves, trees, caves, patches of sun or shade, water, rocks, and cover depending on the needs of the species. The language of the refuge also matches that of [soft fascination](#), described in another [post](#). Natural places (natural refuges, [gardens](#)) aid recovery and resilience ready for the next challenge.

To recover from the stress of the day go out into the garden or the countryside and allow yourself to become fascinated by the intricate complexity of the natural world. If nature is not the refuge then at least there's sanctuary in its study, contemplation, adaptation, and invention.

Digital media (smartphones etc) are also tools for making refuge. They deliver soundtracks for living, but they are also tools that can help us discover, bring closer things that are out of reach, filter, record, and enable new forms of engagement and sociability in unlikely settings.



References

- DeNora, Tia. 2013. *Music Asylums: Wellbeing Through Music in Everyday Life*. Farnham, England: Ashgate.
- Goffman, Erving. 1962. *Asylums: On the Social Situation of Mental Health Patients and Other Inmates*. New York: Anchor Books.

Notes

- Also see post: [Soft fascination](#), [Unlocking nature's secrets](#) and other blog posts tagged [nature](#).
- The first image in this post is the Oribe Pavilion by Kengo Kuma. It's a mobile tea house made of polycarbonate, in honour of the artist and master of the tea Furuta Oribe (1544-1615). The artist wanted to create a space reserved for contemplation in the respect of Zen aesthetics. It's on display in the courtyard of the government office in Syracuse, Italy.
- The second image is from a bird hide on a nature reserve near Brampton, England.

Category

1. Nature

Tags

1. music
2. nature
3. refuge
4. soft fascination

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Author

rcoyne99