



SACRED EXPERIENCE AND PLACE
IN CITIES

by

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Abstract

This study is about the prospect for sacred environments
in the city, in terms of direct experience of place.

Attributes of the sacred experience are abstracted from
several documentary accounts and a number of possibilities
for their occurrence in the city are suggested.

The physical environment is examined at two scales: city
form and the particular site.

The aspects of city form considered include spatial
separation, geomorphism, and the concentric city.

For the particular site, attention is given to site
selection, spatial concepts, qualities of sacredness,
human modifications, and the context of the experience
in relation to the place.

Finally, possibilities for incorporating sacred experi-
ences and places in the city are outlined, in terms of
user needs, with note of the designer's role.

The prospect given is cautionary, but generally favorable.

Thesis Supervisor: Kevin Lynch
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INTRODUCTION

This is about moons and labyrinths and the twilight hour. And it is about our experience of such things in the city: "useless" things that rattle our dreams and, now and then, steal us away from our daily tasks.

The places they collect are sacred environments, formed of fragments of our lost worlds and tides of dim cultural memories, and lit by the frontiers of our fantasies. Sometimes the places are in the city: it could happen more often.

The qualities that go into their making are, I have found, as hard to pin down as a butterfly drunk on spring. After some thought, I looked at them from several sides: the experience itself, the shape of the city, and the particular site. They may occasionally float between the lines as well.

SACRED EXPERIENCE

The frothing of the hedges
I keep deep inside me.

Jean Wahl¹

A great number of our activities and experiences are affected by the places in which they occur. Some experiences may consist almost entirely of the interaction of a person with a particular place: many vacation tours have this attribute, with visits to monuments or celebrated locations, and "sight-seeing" in general. Some activities, such as swimming or small-plane flying, depend on direct use of a particular kind of environment. In addition, we design many of our public places to foster specific activities (the sports arena, the camp site) or to invite open participation (the city park, the open plaza).

The ways in which a person experiences a particular environment will vary with his past associations with it or a similar place, the purpose of his visit, and the cues he perceives when he is at the site. In some situations these cues will be carefully structured to encourage or discourage certain behavior, such as at a sports event; in others, cues will be more open and non-directive, the city park for example. In addition, behavior will be dictated by one's own code of propriety and store of imagination, by the sensed mood and

tempo of the place, by its strangeness or familiarity, and by time demands.

Sometimes a particular place will take on unusual significance for its visitor, provoking his heightened emotions and awareness, involving him deeply with a particular moment and setting. These occurrences may be totally surprising, or the culmination of similar less-intense feelings that have been accumulating. The feeling may be one of deep well-being or one of terror; the landscape may take on a sudden familiarity or an awesome strangeness. Both fictional and historical accounts are peppered with such experiences and place-types: haunted houses, sacred groves, the burning bush, the call of the wild, mystical deserts, running off to sea.

Poets and the founders of religion and madmen (not always exclusive categories) seem particularly prone to such experiences. Perhaps this is because they deal with their feelings more directly; perhaps we simply have more documents of their experiences, in "holy writings," poems and novels. In The Varieties of Religious Experience, William James suggests a certain predisposition in persons prone to sudden religious conversions, many of which are place-bound. Such persons are, he says, of an emotional

sensibility, and suggestible. Aldous Huxley has drawn a parallel between the mescaline-induced experience of one's surroundings, and the schizophrenic's sense of his environment: both are intense and direct, unmediated by rational perspective. While the causes of such experience may be different, the quality of a dissolved barrier, of an extraordinary awareness is found in both James' and Huxley's accounts.

Another attribute common to many intense and direct experiences of place is the attainment of a sense of deep meaning in one's life: a correspondence between one's dreams and imaginings and the outer reality.

Everyone has moments of strong affinity with certain environments--in strange landscapes on misty days, or when a familiar place inexplicably takes on a heightened meaning for us. Such moments may not procure total enlightenment for us, but they can provide a certain freshness in our "world views" or new understandings about the relation of previously disparate ideas; they may create a certain bond with a place. The more intense such an experience is, the more difficult it may be to accept (however contradictory this attitude is with our endless search for direct and memorable experience). Jacob Isaac has said:

If one of us should really be compelled by the call of the tree...he would run to a psychiatrist, not the tree.²

It may also be that we are not attuned to be responsive to our environments unless so directed (stoplights, "keep off the grass", rest areas) and that we no longer expect them to be responsive to us, except in functional ways. The places we live and work, especially in the city, serve so many common-sense purposes that they have, in many cases, ceased to provide us with spiritual support.

I will discuss qualities of place in the next chapter, but one example here can illustrate the two-way conditioning of our experiences and the places available to them. The home would seem to be the most personal and intimate of spheres for an interplay of person and place. Sometimes it is. Gaston Bachelard says:

Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house.³

But it may often lose that quality in our busy lives, becoming only a place to come between outside activities, without its own particular meaning or tradition.

Many urban settings are similar in function, serving practical functions, but void of subjective importance to us. It is of course necessary to have efficiency in cities, and it would be confusing to experience the "hidden meaning"

of each locale while we are set on purposive activities. But in a city environment, where fast pace, constant change, and diversity of activity are the rule, we also need places and times for regenerative experiences in our daily lives.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will attempt a somewhat "loose" definition of sacred experience, followed by some examples which illustrate the more precise qualities common to such experiences, and a brief outline of some possibilities for sacred experience in the city today.

The sacred experience of place is the point of origin of a dream: the bonding of one's inner world with his outside world. And the place in which this happens provides the roots for the dream, its way of taking hold.

The word "dream" in this sense has a multiple meaning, and pertains to the array of experiences that make up our personal, inner worlds: these include our deepest wishes and memories, hopes and fears, fantasies and imaginings--the unwritten poems and novels we carry within us. The sacred experience is the point at which we "find" them, uncover their link to the outside world, and perhaps become able to share them with others. "Origin" refers to this founding quality, and to the personal nature of such an

adventure: although a sacred experience may be shared, it must also be experienced directly "originally," by each individual, or it becomes descriptive, a play-act.

In a similar vein, Gaston Bachelard describes the onset of the poetic image in an individual consciousness as the moment in which the idea takes hold, a moment of emotional immediacy. Dreams, in their various manifestations, and however often repeated or refined by us, share this quality, so long as we are dealing with them directly, in terms of our own understanding. The concept of "origin" has some subtle but important implications for a consideration of sacredness. The derived or spectator experience may gradually lose its potency, as its "newness" wears off. Repetition and symbols can enhance the strength of certain experiences, but rite and symbol alone seldom provoke a personal discovery or sense of a place. In religious history, the sacred experience is traditionally repeated by means of ritual or myth, more recently as dogma. The sacred place is commemorated by monuments or temples or markings. But even a certain care and zealousness in "translating" such experiences and places do not ensure the perpetuation of their original power for the individual. Eventually, myths become literature, and rituals an entertainment:

Thus the Corn Dance (for modern man) has no transcendental significance. It is viewed rather as an enactment of social solidarity and vigor.⁴

Monuments lose their relevance and become markers of forgotten concerns, and vacation tours replace the pilgrimage. The careful delicate moment in which a man meets his god, or finds enlightenment becomes institutionalized:

Great religions have been born...and then too have died, stifled by their own attempts to perpetuate, codify and evangelize the mystic vision.⁵

Periodic renewal of some traditions may serve to enhance the meaning of events whose origins are obscure: Roger Fretigny and Andre Virel cite the instance of a tribe in New Guinea

which daydreams its cosmology and then illustrates it in beautifully worked masks. Then each year the masks are burned so that the imagination can exercise its right to create living myths.⁶

Other cultures discard ineffective traditions. The Isletan Indians in New Mexico perpetuate a selective oral history, refusing to keep a written record: "When the stories are no longer told," they say, "it will be because there is no longer a need for them."

"Original experience" may sometimes seem difficult for

modern man in an age when the written record dominates, packaged entertainments proliferate, "applause" signs blink before live audiences, and in a poignant triumph of derivative experience, the movie review substitutes attendance at the filmed event.

But there are healthy signs as well, including the general alertness and responsiveness of the city dweller, the tendency toward audience participation and spontaneous "happenings," and the concern with environmental quality.

Literary and historical accounts of sacred experiences often tend to ring a little hollow, because they abound in superlatives, and because they require so many words to depict an often momentary event. Also, they are subject to all the vulnerabilities of derivative experience outlined above. In discussing the mystic vision, P.D. Ouspensky speculates that the poor quality of visionary accounts is due to the fact that, for the person involved, the experience is a totally new event, and he has no words to convey his feeling.⁷ Whatever the case, certainly numerous persons have tried. We may have to take on faith Coleridge's admonition,

"Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
For he on honeydew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of paradise."⁸

but we can get some sense of his meaning.

Accounts of Sacred Experience

The traditional sacred experience is the religious conversion, and I will excerpt from one account to show its similarity to the reports of some other, non-religious "sacred experiences," which follow.

"...In a mournful melancholy state I was attempting to pray; but found no heart (for it): ...was...disconsolate, as if there was nothing in heaven or earth could make me happy...then, as I was walking in a thick grove, unspeakable glory seemed to open to the apprehension of my soul. I do not mean any external brightness...but it was a new inward apprehension or view that I had of God...My soul was so captivated and delighted...that I was even swallowed up in Him...I continued in this state of inward joy, peace, and astonishing, till near dark...and felt sweetly composed in my mind all the evening following. I felt myself in a new world, and everything about me appeared with a different aspect from what it was wont to do...."⁹

This excerpt portrays a feeling of complete change and "newness"--the transcendence and absorption that characterizes an intense sacred experience. Although the place in which it occurs is a traditionally sacred one, a grove, it is not a focus of the experience here.

The predisposition of a person, as both James and Ouspensky have noted, will determine the general form that the experience takes, and its focus: a poet may "find" love or ecstasy;

a religious person, his god; and a philosopher his concept of unified meaning.

The place often has least to do with the most intense sacred experience. There may be a descending order:

1. The "conversion" which radically changes the person;
2. The profound experience, which changes the person, but only temporarily;
3. The "normal" or "gentle" sacred experience, which is repeatable and mind-expanding, without detaching the person completely.¹⁰

The latter is easier to plan for, and most closely associated with place.

The following four accounts include a child's experience, that of a woman in the desert, the adventure of a naturalist, and a metaphorical account of a group experience. All of them share a certain sense of awakening that suggests the surfacing of a new awareness, or a dream; and they have in common the creation of a bond with the place, which in the religious experiences seemed secondary (although the first account is followed by a rather rude dispersion of this bond).

The child, a six-year old boy portrayed by Jean Paul Sartre in "The Childhood of a Leader:"

He looked defiantly at the big nettle patch; you could see it was a forbidden place; the wall was black, the nettles were naughty, harmful plants, a dog had done his business just at the foot of the nettles; it smelled of plants, dog dirt and hot wine. Lucien lashed at the nettles with his cane crying "I love my mama, I love my mamma." He saw the broken nettles hanging sadly, oozing a white juice...he heard a small solitary voice which cried "I love my mamma, I love my mamma"; a big blue fly was buzzing around: a horsefly, Lucien was afraid of it--and a forbidden, powerful odor, putrid and peaceful, filled his nostrils. He repeated "I love my mamma," but his voice seemed strange, and he felt deep terror and ran back into the salon, like a flash. From that day on Lucien understood that he did not love his mamma.¹¹

Later that week, he finds a less responsive environment:

Lucien sat down at the foot of the chestnut tree. He said "chestnut tree" and waited. But nothing happened...there was a smell of hot grass, you could play explorer in the jungle; but Lucien did not feel like playing. The air trembled about the red crest of the wall and the sunlight made burning spots on the earth and on Lucien's hands. "Chestnut tree!" It was shocking: when Lucien told mamma, "my pretty little mamma" she smiled and when he called Germaine "stinkweed" she cried and went complaining to mamma. But when he said "chestnut tree" nothing at all happened. He muttered between his teeth "Nasty old tree" and was not reassured, but since the tree did not move he repeated, louder, "Nasty old tree, nasty old chestnut tree, you wait, you just wait and see!" and he kicked it. But the tree stayed still--just as though it were made of wood. That evening at dinner Lucien told mamma, "you know, mamma, the trees, well...they're made out of wood."¹²

However far this portrait strays from Wordsworth's more romantic version of "the youth, who ... Still is Nature's Priest/And by the vision splendid/Is on his way attended," it presents some elements of the sacred experience: a sense of power in the place for the nettle patch-- forbidden power, from which Lucien makes a surprising discovery; a heightened sensory perception in the smells and buzzing, the oozing and the echoed voice; and Lucien's strong emotional response, here of terror. All of these qualities contribute to Lucien's immersion in the place and moment, until he breaks and runs. His second experience reveals the effects of trying directly to provoke a human response from his environment with no success, although strong sensory qualities are there as they were in the nettle patch.

The childhood experience also represents for us, however true in fact, a time of both security and direct encounter with endlessly new experiences and places. Often our adult dream worlds are structured around poignant, sometimes nostalgic, memories of this lost world, which "we are seeking all our lives to find."¹³ Certain places and experiences then become important to us because they reawaken faded memories of our childhood, offer us a direct contact with a part of our past.

The second experience, from which I will also quote at length, concerns the visit of a middle-aged woman to an Arabian town with her merchant husband, as depicted by Albert Camus in "The Adulterous Woman." Although the town is strange to her, she is familiar with the desert.

The stairs (of the fort) were long and steep... As they climbed, the space widened and they rose into an ever broader light, cold and dry... The bright air seemed to vibrate around them with a vibration increasing in length... as if their progress struck from the crystal of light a sound wave that kept spreading out... and as soon as they reached the terrace... it seemed to Janine that the whole sky rang with a single short and piercing note, whose echoes gradually filled the space above her, then suddenly died and left her silently facing the limitless expanse.... At some distance... could be seen broad black tents. All around them a flock of motionless dromedaries... formed against the gray ground the black signs of a strange handwriting, the meaning of which had to be deciphered. Above the desert, the silence was as vast as the space... Janine, leaning her whole body against the parapet, was speechless... Over yonder... at that point where sky and earth met in a pure line... it suddenly seemed there was awaiting her something of which, though it had always been lacking, she had never been aware until now. In the heart of a woman brought there by pure chance a knot tightened by the years, habit, and boredom was slowly loosening... it seemed to her that the world's course had just stopped and that, from that moment on, no one would ever age any more or die. Everywhere, henceforth, life was suspended--except in her heart, where at the same moment, some-¹⁴ one was weeping with affliction and wonder.

Her husband, who visits the fort with her, is quickly disinterested, and they leave at his request. But Janine returns to the fort late that night, in response to a vague "call" she is not even sure she has heard.

...In the vast reaches of the dry cold night thousands of stars were constantly appearing and their sparkling icicles, loosened, at once began to slip gradually toward the horizon. Janine could not tear herself away from contemplating those drifting flares. She was turning with them, and the apparently stationary progress little by little identified her with the core of her being, where cold and desire were now vying with each other. Before her the stars were following one by one and being snuffed out among the stones of the desert, and each time Janine opened a little more to the night. Breathing deeply, she forgot the cold, the dead weight of others, the craziness or stuffiness of life, the long anguish of living or dying. After so many years of mad, aimless fleeing from fear, she had come to a stop at last. At the same time, she seemed to recover her roots and the sap again rose in her body, ...she strained toward the moving sky; she was merely waiting for her fluttering heart to calm down and establish silence within her. The last stars dropped...then, with unbearable gentleness, the water of night began to fill Janine, drowned the cold, rose gradually from the hidden core of her being and overflowed in wave after wave....¹⁵

Here, as in Lucien's nettle-patch experience, is a heightened sensation, but in addition the senses and elements begin to overlap and merge: light and sound, space and silence, and the stars and desert stones. The deep emotional response and the sense of the moment's power are

repeated, here without terror but with a gradual calm and gentleness. The magnification of the suspended moment is preceded, and to some extent made possible by the sharp break from Janine's daily routine. This break is heightened by a perceptual prelude, not recounted here: Janine's frustration and her feeling of boundedness by her daily world (found also in many religious experiences); and by a physical prelude: the ascent up the steep stairs. A sense of mystery prevails, and of strange signs: the handwriting of the camels; for Lucien in the previous account it might be the buzzing of the horsefly. Three other aspects of the experience fit with a romantic notion that is common to fictional accounts, but also has parallels in actual experience: the open natural landscape, the surprise of its occurrence, and its almost unbearable intensity.

The third "sacred experience" is recounted by the naturalist Loren Eiseley in The Immense Journey. On a solo expedition, he floats down a nearby stream on a sudden impulse, even though he has a deep fear of water from a near-drowning incident in his childhood:

...I had the sensation of sliding down the vast tilted face of the continent...I was streaming alive through the hot and working ferment of the sun, or oozing secretively through shady thickets. I was water and the unspeakable alchemies that gestate and take shape in water, the slimy jellies that under the enormous magnification of the

sun writhe and whip upward as great
 barbeled fish mouths or sink indistinctly
 back into the murk out of which they arose.¹⁶

An unsuspecting, somewhat modest man takes on a powerful natural element, and having overcome his initial resistance to it, finds himself with a strange new identity, until he bumps a floating log, and is brought back from his senses. In addition to his "breaking through" an old fear, Eiseley is acutely sensitive to the natural world: this predisposition to respond to the environment is also vital to the eventual experience he recounts here. Although the final form of the experience is a surprise to him, it is clear that he expects something of the experience, which was not the case with the previous two accounts.

Finally, the "group experience", which has religious overtones, as metaphorically drawn by Wallace Stevens in his poem "Sunday Morning":

Supple and turbulent, a ring of men
 Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn
 Their boisterous devotion to the sun,
 Not as a god, but as a god might be,
 Naked among them, like a savage source.
 Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,
 Out of their blood, returning to the sky;
 And into their chant shall enter, voice by voice,
 The windy lake wherein their lord delights;
 The trees, like serafin; and echoing hills
 That chant among themselves long afterward.
 They shall know well the Heavenly fellowship
 Of men who perish and of summer morn.
 And whence they came, and whither they shall go
 The dew upon their feet shall manifest.¹⁷

The power is here: of sun, and chant, and summer and blood; the sacrifice implied. The lake and trees and hills enter in, become part of the act, and play out its denouement.

The shared experience finds its presentday counterpart in the celebration and the feast, the communal festival; as well perhaps in the bloody urban riots, the solemn demonstrations for peace. In Stevens' "orgy", and in the urban riot, the line between sacred and profane may be a thin one, as may be the distinction between an immersion into chaos, and an "immersion" into profound meaning. The new awareness may necessitate giving up (even only temporarily) our old patterns and orders, by "going through" a seeming chaos first:

Eliade has pointed out that the psychic regression to chaos (Freud's return to childhood, the primitive man's river-dunking, et cetera) is the necessary condition for renewal or rebirth and that its ritual form is often the orgy or Saturnalia. The return to primordial chaos symbolizes for the savage the rebirth of the universe and the beginning of a new time-cycle, and for the consciousness the return to one's true being and the renewal of life.¹⁸

But, although the sensory impressions or preludes may be chaotic, the sacred experience itself is an organizing force whether by new insights or the formation of a strong bond.

Of these four accounts, three are fictional, although "Lucien" may be partly autobiographical, and all of them are non-urban. They are excerpted in some detail because they describe a wide variety of actors, and of places, and because, in their extremity, they share clear instances of aspects of the sacred experience of place. But perhaps because of their largely fictional nature, they seem somewhat unreal and fantastic, something that "could never happen to me." One reason I have chosen them is for this quality: to expand a sense of the possible. But Loren Eiseley has also pointed out the human tendency to prefer catastrophic and cataclysmic explanations of events, because they are within our mortal timespan, and thus more easily (and romantically) grasped: for example, the Great Flood vs the endless working of a drop of water on stone.¹⁹

Gentler experiences may often be found in poetry:

Her secret was
 Listening to flowers

 Wear out their color."²⁰

Or:

Far off I heard the springs of earth praying.²¹

Both of these examples are personal and direct; both indicate a bond with the place, an understanding of its "magic".

Other gentle experiences call in feelings from our childhood:

The warm, calm nest
 In which a bird sings

 Recalls the songs, the charms,
 The pure threshold
 Of my old home.²²

These experiences are no less "sacred" by their simplicity. They share the same qualities as the more intense ones.

Qualities of Sacred Experience:

The sacred experience of place, then, has some or all of the following qualities: It is direct and personal, with possible perceptual or emotional or activity preludes (including frustration, as well as anticipation); it constitutes a sharp break from daily routine; its heightened sensory awareness and the sense of suspended time--a magnified present--create a bond of the person and place, a feeling of connection with the web of life (thus, it is often in a "natural place"); it involves our spiritual awareness, and has strong power, (which may be frightening or embracing); finally, it retains a subtle mystery, hidden signs.

As shown, these qualities apply to a wide range of experience, from the gentle fleeting moment to the explosive disruptive event. The gentler experiences should be part of our daily lives; the more intense ones, a perhaps

joyous surprise. For the former, music is a great "carrier": wandering songsters might roam the city, creating tunes that respond to the feeling of a place: a small ode piped to the single flower in the pavement crack, a grand march for the expansive plaza; a staccato jig mimicking the hurried pace of the passerby, a joyous salute to overheard laughter. Natural sounds might be magnified, or amplified: rustling trees, surfaces that echo rain sounds, wind tunnels. Simple efforts might remind us of events we overlook, without being too directive: the sun dancing through the small hole of a camera obscura, planned for that effect; small sailboats, or their simple makings, distributed to children at city fountains or, with some discretion, for puddles and gutter "rivers" on rainy days. A rain dance to celebrate rainy days, or a sun dance to dispel them. A special chime for sunrise and sunset, or for a harbor city, for high tide and low tide. The welcome of strangers to the city by an activity roster, arranged by mood or the five senses. Each of these events can serve to "waken" the person to parts of his environment that can feed his dreams, and make him feel part of these places.

The experience also has possible forms that are suitable to the more momentous sacred occasions. A celebration of a certain place and moment may be enacted as a street dance, a formal pageant to lead persons to a given site

or event; a feast of local foods and wines; or a place reserved for solitary meditation. Transitions of specific sites might be commemorated by simple ceremonies in which everyone participates:²³ this could include one hundred people each breaking ground for a new public building by digging a spade-full of earth; or as many persons bringing a personal written memorial, as simple as "goodbye", to the site of a demolished building, to be buried there. Community celebrations, such as the regular festivals in Boston's North End, would enhance territorial distinctions within the larger city.

The dispersion of the feeling that a sacred experience engenders could be reinforced by leaving something at the site--a poem, a plant. Holy water is carried from sacred springs, but does not necessarily carry the power of the sacred experience with it. Perhaps the effect must simply be personal and interior, as Billy Bray's after his conversion:

As I go along the street, I lift up one foot,
and it seems to say 'Glory'; and I lift up the
other, and it seems to say 'Amen'; and so they
keep up like that all the time I am walking.²⁴

FOOTNOTES: SACRED EXPERIENCE

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18. Eliade, Mircea. The Sacred and Profane, p. 58.
19. Eiseley, Loren. op. cit., pp. 20-21.

20. Noel Bureau quoted by Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, p. 177.
21. Marcel Raymond quoted by Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, p. 179.
22. Jean Caubere quoted by Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space, p. 100.
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SACRED ASPECTS OF CITY FORM

On a large scale, the particular form that a given culture uses to express its concept of sacredness varies with the character of its beliefs, the shape of the surrounding landscape, and its overlapping secular ambitions. Certain constant form qualities thread through these many variations to express sacredness on a large scale. Many of these form qualities exist in modern cities, and others are periodically revived, to serve a diversity of purposes.

The following summary is a recount of some ideas and their corresponding forms that were particular to sacred cities in the past. The emphasis here will be on large scale form, and its sacred qualities, or the context of the particular sacred place within the larger settlement.

Spatial Separation

Robert Redfield describes precivilized folk society as that in which "almost any aspect of nature was thought to have its indwelling, awe-compelling force."¹ Chants and stories, wall scratchings and rough stone menhirs were created as some of man's earliest attempts to create harmony with these "magic" forces. Some places were set off as sacred by intricate sacred rituals in which chosen places

and objects were revealed as manifestations of the sacred and came alive. The differentiation of the inside from the outside may have begun as the separation of the familiar from the unfamiliar: the tilled land from the untilled, the hunting route from the surround.

Later, more formal elements emerged. The earliest neolithic cities such as Jericho in Palestine and Catal Huyuk in Anatolia (both built over 8000 years ago) are sharply separated from the surrounding territory by continuous walls. Within the boundary, Jericho had a stone tower, then 28 feet high; Catal Huyuk had clearly differentiated shrines with altars and idols, intermixed with the housing: sacred centers were formed inside. The dichotomy between outside and inside continues in the double walled cities of the Assyrians, including Babylon, where both the forbidden inner city, or kirhu, and the surrounding center city, libbi ali, were enclosed by sturdy walls "whose gates were named according to the will of the god of gates."²

In addition to spatial separation, other aspects of sacredness found in a particular site (listed in the following chapter) applied to the city as well: the natural qualities of the land, the response to certain land "spirits", and the earth or sky focus. At the larger

scale of the city, the sacred and "profane" functions of these features were often intermixed (as they sometimes were at the local site).

Geomorphism: The dominance of strong, natural land features characterizes the geomorphic trend in human settlements. Although not uniquely religious in character, geomorphism complemented well the sensitivity to nature that was part of many early spiritual beliefs. The earliest village towns and market towns, built on this system of organic accumulation, suggest a plan dramatically, perhaps necessarily, bound to the pattern of the larger landscape-- in accord with it, and protected where necessary by natural barriers. The need for fortification was evidenced in the early citadels: built in high places, and accessible only to the intentional visitor, they also provided ideal religious sites in many respects. An example of geomorphic settlement is found in Machu Picchu in Peru, which rises ritually up the mountain peak over five terraces to the sacred plaza of the intihuatana, (the stone pillar to which the Inca tied the sun each winter solstice to guarantee its shining on the maize crop). This sacred pillar is approached by a path that winds through the city, up ascending terraces, with views of both natural rock formations and the dwellings nested within the mountainside.

Geomorphic design is still evident today in American Indian pueblo settlements, in the recent revival of village-like communes in our country, and in the work of a number of architects, such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Richard Neutra. Paul Horgan describes the pueblo towns of ancient New Mexico:

The Pueblo town looked like a land form directly created by the forces that made hills and arroyos and deserts...the dazzling openness all about...with its ageless open secrets of solitude, sunlight and impassive land...Everything in the landscape was sacred, whether the forms of nature or those made by people--altars, shrines, and the very towns which were like earth arisen into wall, terrace, light and shadow, enclosing and expressing organized human life.³

Feng-Shui

A later design idea, based on abstracted principles about the landscape, is akin to geomorphism in its sensitivity to landscape influences, but departs sharply from it in its realized form. In many ancient Chinese cities, including Peking, the search for a favorable location followed the dictates of Feng-Shui, the Lore of Wind and Water. Feng-Shui determined the place in which the planned city, as well as its palaces, houses, tombs, etc., would have the freest possible access to the beneficent influences of the landscape, and be best protected from its evil influences. The system was a complex one, involving an early scientific

charting of oracles in conjunction with the particular features of each landscape. Feng-Shui combined the pairing of opposites (the yin/yang doctrine) with temporal progression based on the cycles of the seasons and directional orientation.

The philosophic basis for site location extended to minute detailing of the settlements as well as the customs of the Chinese people:

Basic to the entire Feng-Shui is the conviction that man is an infinitesimal fragment of nature, and that he must seek to understand the forces around him in order that they, in their turn, will befriend him and include him in the cosmic process...A recognition of unity between spirit and nature is held to be the ultimate goal of wisdom.⁴

Feng-Shui, says Otto Fischer, sometimes resulted in siting that was at odds with a logical provident arrangement: for example, a swampy hollow might be an ideal site according to Feng-Shui, or one in which tillable land was at a minimum.

Earth and Sky Gods

The earliest deity of which we have archaeological evidence was the Mother goddess, manifest as earth, in soil and the more permanent stone. Tombs and caves were sacred places: the dead returned to the womb of the earth. Stone and

rock symbolized "the eternal and the divine". S. von Cles-Reden writes of the importance of stone to the ancient Cult of the Dead in building tombs and monuments to harbor

"the numinous quality that was felt to reside in (the dead)...Tombs thus became the center of a cult in which the close community of a clan or tribe continued beyond the dead."⁵

This preoccupation recurs in pre-dynastic Egypt, in the temple city of the pharaoh Zoser at Sakkara. The uninhabited "Town of the Dead" is dominated by the first pyramid, a divine tomb for Zoser. Early Greek cities often focussed the views leading to and from their sacred temples on earth forms, particularly distant mountains.

The sky was the sacred focus for early sun-worshipping cults, and possibly the focus as well later, for those with more abstract beliefs in which:

The divine is outside of nature, no site is intrinsically any holier than another, and sites are hallowed by an historical incident.⁶

Vincent Scully suggests that the form of the particular landscape may have guided the choice of an earth or sky orientation. He cites the southern Mediterranean tradition, during the 2nd millenium B.C., of earth sanctuaries and tombs built in the shelters and hollows of the Cretan landscape. The distant focus for Cretan palaces was to the land, toward the cleft in the horned mountain; contemporary

cultures farther north, in the English downs, who had similar megalithic structural methods, focussed either upward to the sky, or to a distant empty horizon:

Certainly the English downs form a landscape which celebrates the power of the sky, and they create the ideal setting for religious monuments, which unlike those of Crete, seem intended to invoke not only the earth but the heavens... The earth seems to arch up gently, wholly open to the sky...and the sacred places of Stonehenge, Woodhenge, and Avebury's Sanctuary are set upon the mounded platforms of higher land.⁷

The mounds are not always high; the heavenly focus may depend on the feelings created by other features: an orientation to the sun or certain stars, the open expanse of land around it.

The Concentric City

The Sumerians, arriving in the Mesopotamian delta about 3500 B.C., brought an aptitude for trade and shipbuilding, invented writing, and built concentric towns. Lewis Mumford says:

Every feature of the early city revealed the belief that man was created for no other purpose than to magnify and serve his gods. That was the city's ultimate reason for being.⁸

Perhaps. But the sacred precinct of the temple site, the temenos, served man as well: both economic and religious functions were directed there by the priests. The dwellings

clustered below, around the base of the ziggurat supporting the temple; both were surrounded by open land. It is clear the spatial focus of the city was on the temple, as the sacred site.

The concentric city was later revived in the first millenium B.C., by the Hittites, the Elamites and others, who added a circular wall outside the fortification wall, thus creating a second, outer focus. In the case of Cincirli (a Hittite citadel in Anatolia), the outer wall--built in a perfect circle against tremendous topographical odds--suggests a cosmological significance that, like Feng-Shui in China, superseded the geographical sense of the place.

A variation of the circular city is found in the stellar form of 17th century designs for cities in Germany, Italy, and France--perhaps most dramatically achieved at Versailles in the palace of the "Sun King". The precedent for the star-shaped city (which was more often an ideal than a reality) may have been circular cities with dissecting radials, such as Khwarizm (U.S.S.R.), Baghdad, and Gur in Persia.

Terraces and Processional Paths: These features of early Sumerian cities are found again in pre-dynastic Egypt, in Hellenic cities, in Peking, in Versailles, and again in the modern elevated plazas of our cities. In Peking, the terraced procession to T'ai-ho Tien (the Hall of Supreme Harmony) was designed to "arrest movement and increase anticipation" by wide vistas interspersed with two great halls before the final one.⁹ By contrast the processional paths of early Egyptian pharaohs, as man-gods, in towns such as Giza and Cheops were oriented by geometric calculation to the North Star.

Numerology: Many cultures have used the sacred value of certain numbers as part of their design plans. The Chinese employed intricate number systems in all aspects of design. Sumerian-Babylonian numerology rested on 6 "the divisible female number", and on its male counterpart 7, "indivisible, unattached to other figures."¹⁰ 3 has long been a sacred number, in earlier as well as in Christian traditions. In design, numbers affected the division of cities, the height of buildings, and their hierarchical order. The sacred Egyptian 4 is everywhere evident in their pyramids and courts and rectilinear cities (which form had, of course, its practical counterparts).

In general, the use of the larger city landscape as holy seems to have been more strongly supported in the chthonic, geomorphic settlements. As history progresses, geometry, the sky gods, and intellectual concepts intervene:

The divine is outside of nature, no site is intrinsically any holier than another, and the sites are hallowed by an historical incident.¹¹

The single concentration of the sacred site in the center of the concentric city, a focus often strengthened by solid walls, would seem to have a strong impact on the surrounding city. But we find the moneychangers in the temple; and, somehow, though the gods are virtually "cornered", they seem to be absent. Perhaps the qualities that serve to reinforce sacredness in the particular site serve other functions at a larger scale: the separation of the city from the outside world and the central focus may have provided its gods with a stronger, but less pervasive, identity. And the awesome monuments and the elaborate rituals suggest a culture at play with its intellectual abilities, whose spiritual needs are more abstract now.

Implications of City Form

In our urban environments today, qualities of the two form types discussed above, geomorphic and concentric, might each be adapted for particular purposes. Geomorphic form would seem most applicable to supporting the spiritual quality of the "daily" environment, giving a constant reminder of the natural landscape rhythms and forms. San Francisco, California and Santa Fe, New Mexico are two examples of this quality. Perhaps because of this, and for other reasons as well, each city seems to project a strong "spirit" of its own.

San Francisco is noted for its forty steep hills, which offer constant, intense changes in vista--shrouded in a periodic mysterious fog; for the lushness of its vegetation; and for the island quality of being almost surrounded by water (giving the feeling one is at the edge of the world). And perhaps its aura of sacredness is enhanced in the apocalyptic threat posed by the San Andreas Fault.

In Santa Fe, the adobe buildings are a direct extension of the earth from which they rise. The roads, many of them still dirt, twist impossibly for cars, and lose themselves in small startling cul-de-sacs. Its six-story height limitation (recently changed, I believe) invites

the setting sun to soak its landscape with magic colors, and the Sangre de Cristo mountains are visible from many parts of town.

The concentric form might offer a prototype for the single, intense sacred experience (as suggested in "form concepts" in the following chapter): the spatial sense is one that detaches the person from the "outside" world, and pulls him toward its "core". As a tower-city concept, the image would seem inappropriate to our day and age. But, Auroville, a concentric city for 50,000 people, is now being built near Pondicherry, India with the express purpose of being a Sacred City. Its avenues curve in arcs from the boundary (a hundred-meter-wide canal) to the center:

None of the streets or avenues will be straight-- each will meander among private single-story houses and wide open spaces. Fountains and squares will surprise the visitor around each curve. The overall effect, Auroville's designers hope, will be one of peace and tranquility--a never-ending succession of discoveries and perspectives.

On the innermost part of the ring, a Garden of Unity will be found encircling a lake whose running waters will supply Auroville's canals, fountains and paddy fields. Here, it is believed, will be the core around which the rings are gravitating in wave-like motions, like Yin and Yang of Eastern Spiritualism.¹²

Here, the use of curving arcs as connecting avenues, visually deposited in a central garden and lake, softens the singular focus the tower city has. Or, a spiral city

might be designed with the sacred garden in the center accessible to only those who pursue it.

On as large a scale as the city, though, the most effective attention might be that given to the interplay of spatial rhythms throughout the city--a pervasive texture, "pooling" into concentrated sanctuaries, or event locations--but not a "sacred city" as such.

FOOTNOTES: SACRED ASPECTS OF CITY FORM

1. Redfield, Robert. The Little Community, pp. 22-23.
2. Moholy-Nagy, Sybil. The Matrix of Man, p. 96.
3. Horgan, Paul. "Place, Form, and Prayer", Landscape, Winter 1953-54, pp. 8-9.
4. Fischer, Otto. "Landscape as Symbol", Landscape, Spring 1955, p. 27.
5. Cles-Reden, S. von. The Realm of the Great Goddess, p. 11.
6. Isaac, Erich. "Religion, Landscape, and Space", Landscape, Winter 1959-60, p. 17.
7. Scully, Vincent. The Earth, the Temple and the Gods, p. 23.
8. Mumford, Lewis, quoted by Sybil Moholy-Nagy in The Matrix of Man, p. 39.
9. Moholy-Nagy, Sybil. op. cit., p. 53.
10. Ibid., p. 93.
11. Isaac, Erich. op. cit.
12. Kaiser News, "Markets of Change" Series, # 2, 1970, Oakland, California.

SACRED PLACE

Some qualities of sacred places remain very much the same over time and across cultures. Countless elaborations occur, of course, and the particular beliefs attached to the sacred place vary immensely. Still, the sacred place seems to retain a being of its own. Carl Jung has said,

And every soil has its secret, of which we carry an unconscious image in our souls; a relationship of spirit to body and of body to earth.¹

Rilke writes of inner and outside space, and their relationship:

Space, outside ourselves, invades and ravishes things:
If you want to achieve the existence of a tree,
Invest it with inner space, this space
That has its being in you....²

He distinguishes the space we can measure from the space we can feel; the objective description of space from the subjective experience of it. For this study, I will borrow from Rilke and use the term outside space for objective space, and inner space for subjective space. Both kinds of space have sacred implications. Jorge Luis Borges has said:

"There is an hour in the afternoon when the plain is about to say something."³

In the sacred place, we can experience that voice, or come closer to it. Here the inner and outside spaces overlap,

and begin to merge: the place becomes less separable, or perhaps inseparable from the experience we have of it: "It is not a question of observing, but of experiencing being in its immediacy."⁴

Inner Space: I would characterize this place-experience as having certain life qualities, in which one's inner space takes on a special character, comes out of its hiding, and finds a counterpart in the outside world. Perhaps what happens in such a direct and personal experience is that we create for ourselves, with our awareness of the place, what was previously "hear-say". We experience ourselves a little closer to the center of things, perhaps to their sources.

Many writers have tried to describe this: Eliade characterizes the sacred event as the re-creation of the world. Paul Klee says "the artist has gone beyond the visible, has processed it within himself, buried it in him."⁵ Rene Huyghe says of Rouault's art: "We must start from the center, at the very heart of the circle from where the whole thing derives its source and meaning: and here we come back again to that forgotten outcast word, the soul."⁶

The simple experience has reverberations of these feelings. One may feel that at a certain moment he saw a tree grow; or he may feel the inner need for sun he shares with that flower; he may sense a distant echo in the "talking" of a brook. The place-experience may be a conscious attempt: in some earlier self-imposed attempts at concentration, I tried to understand what it would be like to be a stone, by incorporating stone-ness, with vague illusions of working up to an entire landscape. (I believe I almost succeeded at the level of pebbleness, and once, for obscure reasons, I became a button.)

Sacred Place and Experience: The sacred place will reinforce these experiences, and give them space. It serves as an echo, which may be clear and precise, or mysterious and obscure. The place and the experience overlap: in many ways the place reinforces a certain centering feeling--a circular stillness, a mysterious power that expands and returns. The place beckons and eludes, becomes magic. The person begins to understand the "aliveness" of the place that he shares with it.

The qualities of sacred experience (listed previously) find counterparts in the sacred place. For example, the sharp break from routine is echoed in the spatial differentiation of the sacred site. Its heightened sensory

awareness is supported by the strong qualities of light and darkness, and other rich cues: such as fragrance, a certain stillness. The feeling of subtle mystery may be accentuated by a labyrinthine approach, selective darkness, sometimes by danger; the feeling of power, by the increasing intensity of the access and entry. These qualities of place are discussed in more detail below.

The Outside World: Certain ideas and qualities of the physical world are found repeatedly in the sacred place. Although these characteristics do not, in themselves constitute its sacredness, they provide the context for it, and serve to deepen its meaning.

In the following pages, I will describe: some methods of site selection; some spatial concepts that serve to differentiate the sacred place; general qualities of sacredness that are found in the physical world; natural elements associated with sacredness, and some human modifications, including modern urban possibilities. The examples given generally refer to historical planned sites, and are usually followed by modern day counterparts.

Site Selection

Theo Crosby has said, "There is a popular knowledge based on things seen, and an esoteric knowledge based on things known."⁷ ("Known" in the sense of a shared intuitive understanding.) The location of a sacred site has probably always involved the invocation of both kinds of knowledge. The physical and spatial features of a sacred site reinforce the "known" qualities, the numinous mystery of a certain place. Early sacred sites, in which the man-constructed elements were simple, consisted mostly of simple markings or menhirs, or relied on strong natural forms for definition, as in the sacred cave. Later, as building skills were refined, and the land gods slipped away into the sky regions, site selection came to have less to do with finding an earth-contained holiness, and the sky gods were periodically "consulted" by oracle and divination for their opinion on the most auspicious site.

The documents of sacred site selection are often myths and legends, and so metaphorical. Thus, according to legend, Rome was sited where Romulus and Remus escaped from the river into which their wicked great-uncle Amulius had thrown them; Bethel was constructed where Jacob saw the Heavenly Ladder.

The presence of a distinctive form, spatial isolation, and approximation to an ideal form probably served as criteria, conscious or not, for site selection as well. Scully has documented the location of every early Greek temple in sight of a horned or cleft mountain.

On the other hand, Fitzroy Raglan has collected a number of sometimes curious rituals that seem to have little, if anything to do with the actual landscape features. The pursuit of the god's favor for a site often involved following certain animals, usually cows, until they lay down or a certain time had elapsed; the Bechuana sew the eyes of a bullock together and build a village on the site where it is found after four days.⁸ Other cultures leave certain offerings (such as rice, flour, or fire) in a potentially favorable site, and build there if the gods indicate approval either by taking the offering or leaving it undisturbed (probably an unfailing event!). A Yugoslav farmer who wishes to build rolls a cake down the hill: if it lands face-down, the hill spirit approves.⁹ In other places, sacrifices are made to invoke the favor of a god to a pre-selected site.

Whatever the ritual, its purpose is to uncover the inner qualities of a site, those not visible or measurable by objective means. Probably some combination of ritual and

physical promise determine the location of most places. Possibly, the oracular context became more important as the "realm of sacredness" expanded to include the sky gods, and as the sacred cultural symbols (icons, etc.) became more complex. Or, the land itself may have begun to lose the particular energy and balance which demonstrated its regenerative powers. This is an inherent risk in any mostly constructed environment, including the city today.

Spatial Concepts

In The Sacred and the Profane, Mircea Eliade characterizes sacredness for early religious man in terms of differentiating some of his spaces:

For religious man, space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others. The Lord says to Moses, "Draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." (Exodus 3:5) There is, then, a sacred space, and hence a strong significant space; there are other spaces that are not sacred and so are without structure or consistency, amorphous.¹⁰

Wherever we find evidence of sacred places, we find that they usually constitute a break from "ordinary space". They may be separated from the surrounding territory in several ways:

- by a central focus;
- a carefully drawn boundary;

a planned access, with a special entry;

a change in spatial feeling; and

the uniqueness of the place.

Some or all of these qualities in a place will serve to set it apart, permanently or momentarily; this spatial separation may be further emphasized by features at the site which suggest the place as a "microcosm" of the universe.

Central focus: The focal point of a sacred place may be a shrine or temple, an altar or tomb, a monument or totem, or a symbolic marking such as a stone. Or it may be as simple as a flower. In the planned sacred site the focal point is generally at some remove from the entry, often tabu in part or whole to the uninitiated. Sometimes it is oriented to visible landscape features outside the place, or to the sun or a star. The focus may mark, for its adherents, "the center of the world," an "inner space" concept that is not contradicted even when several "world centers" are in sight of one another. Many rituals take place around some central vertical axis, which may be a tree or pole. Eliade calls this the axis mundi, the place where earth and sky connect, where man can communicate with his gods. For example, the Kamlaroi prepare a special "sacred ground" for their initiation rites, in the center of which they place a pole 9 feet high "with a bunch of

emu's feathers tied on the top."¹¹ For other cultures, mountains are believed to be "the pillar supporting and linking heaven and earth." In some villages, a blue stone in the center of town is said to mark the Navel of the Earth.¹²

Sacred buildings may serve as this central focus, and parts of them reinforce it. The kivas of many American Indians have a hole in the top, to let the sky spirits enter. In addition to the vertical axis at the center, and the sacred building, there is often an inner sanctum of concentrated holiness, which only the initiated may enter. This is found in many temples as well as some of the kivas. The Navajo Indians construct elaborate sand paintings in the center of a circle set apart for certain healing rituals. These central elements function both as an orientation point, and as the place in which man communicates with the forces he feels are present in the place, its gods or spirits or magic. Sacred central points can organize a whole city, even the world, as in Mecca.

In the city today, centers are often less obvious. There is the town plaza, as in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Parks, especially small ones, may center a neighborhood. Other places might be found: the site of the earliest building,

around which the town grew. I eliminate the CBD because of its intense prosaic functions, but others might find it has sacred potential. Certain landmarks could certainly serve, with some attention, as potentially sacred places: Bunker Hill Monument in Boston, Coit Tower in San Francisco, perhaps even Washington Monument.

Boundary: The boundary may be a path, a wall, or a moat; or it may be delineated by corner posts. The wall can serve as a defining element for the sacred place; sometimes we find walls within walls, marking off successive concentrations of sacredness, as in Plato's Atlantis. The function of the boundary is to separate the sacred from the profane and perhaps to concentrate the sacredness within. The ancient Etruscans, when founding a city, ploughed around the site with a bull and a cow and later built a wall there.¹³ In some Kenyan tribes, the shaman kills a goat and "sprinkles the blood and the contents of the stomach round the boundary" of an auspicious site.¹⁴ In witchcraft, we find the tracing of the protective circle. Sometimes the boundary is consecrated by the sacrifice of a man or animal. In Tahiti every pillar of a sacred house was built over the body of a man;¹⁵ for other cultures the blood of a fowl or animal substituted for the human sacrifice. "Sacrifices" also pertained to the axis mundi, cited above, and the threshold, which will be discussed below.

In the city today, boundaries are plentiful. Of particular interest in terms of sacredness might be those that serve no particular function: the ring of trees in a city park, the buildings that surround an unused lot, or the edges of a pool of sunlight at a certain time during the day.

Planned Access: Labyrinths and winding paths are found again and again in myths and legends. Some sacred sites are located so that the only access is a difficult one. Decorated caves in France and Spain are often in the "dark, almost inaccessible recesses of damp limestone mountains, sometimes as much as half a mile from the entrance."

E.O. James cites the cave at Niaux which can be reached only by a "dangerous, tortuous" path.¹⁶ Mountain sites present similarly difficult access. Ritual entry paths to Greek temples are indirect and often circular. This contortion is not accidental: it reflects the physical and spiritual effort that must be expended to attain the sacred, to prepare for the sacred encounter. Its ritual counterpart is the rite of initiation. The winding access may also serve to reinforce the central focus, as in early temples in both Japan and Greece which afforded tantalizing and varied perspectives of the sacred structure as one approached it.

The access in the city today may be found, in its labyrinthine qualities, in the Financial District of Boston, in dark alleys that open to a wide vista, or that fall into a park (usually by accident). The most effective access, in terms of sacredness, may be the least obvious one: a tunnel created by a low overhang of greenery, an unused culvert, the indirect path along a river. It could be the dark, odorous descent into the subway, or a "stepping stone" journey along adjacent rooftops.

The Entry: "Doorways", Carter Wheelock states, "are always symbolic of the passage to another state or identity or world."¹⁷ The threshold, the door, and the gate all serve as this transition point. Eliade cites many images that recur in myths and sagas to express the insurmountable difficulties of entering the Sacred World: "gates in the shape of jaws, the 'two razor-edged restless mountains', 'the two clashing icebergs', 'the active door', 'the revolving barrier', the door made of the two halves of the eagle's beak."¹⁸ The Japanese Tea House is entered by a low door, which the visitor must stoop to enter.

Initiation rites are expressed as "an opening of doors". Lord Raglan notes that the access to the holy place is sacred "not only because it leads to the dwelling of a divine being but is itself the abode of divine beings."¹⁹

Doorways have their own guardian deities. Often therefore, the threshold must not be touched. For the Hindus the threshold marks the division between "the spirits without and the spirits within". It is the abode of Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and good luck, and anyone who sits there is likely to be afflicted with haemorrhoids."²⁰ In Samoa, water spilt on the threshold will anger its guardian deity.²¹ The doorway is the break in the boundary that separates the sacred from the profane. The Etruscans, when ploughing this boundary are said to lift their plows at the sites of the future gates or doorways.

A threshold ritual that exists, in concept at least, today, is carrying the bride over the threshold. Holy water is often found at the entry to a sacred place, as in a Catholic church. Forecourts and terraces may serve as the transition between the approach and the focus of the sacred place. A wealth of ornament may further emphasize the importance of the door. It may be heavy; or locked, except for special occasions. The "holy of holies" in the tabernacle at Jerusalem was sealed by a heavy curtain, which is said to have torn when Christ died.

Today, the "key to the city" is a more common idea than a gate. Entries, though, wherever they occur, may have

special characteristics that are pertinent to sacredness: unusual size, whether large or small; weight; certain mysterious sound qualities, such as creaking or rattling; particularly "blank" doors that give no cue of what lies behind them; a waterfall, from an overhanging ledge; or, the crack in a wall. All of these kinds of entries may serve to both announce and guard the place beyond.

A Change in Spatial Feeling: The sacred place is often set off by a peculiar spatial form, or one different from the surrounding area, as in both caves and mountains, probably used to communicate with earth gods and sky gods respectively. Sacred structures often effect this change by ascending platforms or terraces; the access to the Great Hall of Harmony in Peking, though not steep, is said to have been planned to give the impression of ascent.

In the city, a change in spatial feeling is often indicative of a change in function, as from residential to commercial. The sacred potential might be more likely found within a particular site, where the change is abrupt, as in a cluster of closely-spaced buildings in a generally spacious neighborhood; or where the change is gentle, as in the hill crevice in a park. The feeling of spatial change may be supported by sound qualities, such as a

change from clatter to stillness.

Uniqueness of Site: A sacred grove may have a different kind of tree than the surrounding ones; the temple is both more elaborate than the houses men live in, and its functions differ, which is reflected in its form. Hot springs are often sacred sites: the water in them differs in temperature and force from other water.

In the city, one should look for oddities, with indeterminate functions, such as the small wood building flanked by skyscrapers, or the place that seems wild and overgrown in a trim setting. Dominant geographic characteristics, such as a harbor, or startling vistas may offer special possibilities for sacredness.

The Microcosm: All of these qualities help to part the chosen site from the outside world. Within the boundaries, another world is found, often in the image of "microcosm of the universe". In Egypt, for example, temples were built in the semblance of the world, with the floor as the earth and the roof as the sky. In Assyrian temples "the canopy over the deity's throne was called 'heaven', and there was a large tank in the forecourt symbolizing the cosmic ocean."²² The sacred place becomes the "divine

model", and so incorruptible.

In our cities, we may find examples of the "token" tree, or the explanation of cosmic cycles in the science museum. But these are lacking the integrated concept of the micro-cosm.

Qualities of Sacredness

Permanence and Impermanence: As man's arts developed, and his building skills, the sites became monumental, and the continuation of their sanctity seen as dependent on the permanence of the structures which documented them. Impermanent sites are also found: Navajo sand paintings, marking sacred ground, are destroyed, then rebuilt for each ceremony. In aboriginal Scandinavia, according to H.R.E. Davidson, "ritual paintings had to be produced in secret in a special shelter, and destroyed or hidden when the special rite for which they were made was completed."²³

Initiation rites are often marked by new ground consecration ceremonies for each occasion. Some Shinto rites in Japan involve setting up a temporary sacred place with a light framework. (I have not been able to find evidence whether the same sites are used each time in these examples.) This repetition and renewal of the sacredness

of a given setting suggest the powerful force of regeneration as an attribute of sacredness, and reflect certain cosmic rhythms that demonstrate this idea: the sun comes and goes, as do the tides, and the seasons. The sacred effort insures the connection with these cosmic rhythms.

Light and shadow emphasize sacredness: light has the connotation of "giving life", the Creation, and the escape from Chaos. Darkness and shadow portray the mystery of sacredness, its elusiveness, the unseen and hidden. The labyrinthine approach to a sacred place is often dark, and the inner sanctum may be dark, tabu; or, sunlight may come through an overhead opening in the center of the sacred place, evidencing the "communication" with the god.

Roundness and Stillness: The circle symbolizes unity, eternity, wholeness, purity. It is found repeatedly in sacred places, and as a sacred symbol (for example, the Buddhist Yin-Yang symbol). Its lack of beginning and end, the stillness it suggests in enclosure, and its centeredness all symbolize sacredness.

Sensory Qualities: The involvement of the person in the sacred place may be fostered by sensory qualities that denote either purity or sensuality, or both. Rich incense

odors, inviting or forbidding textures, sacred foods (such as nectar, fruits or honeysuckle), strange sounds (the cottonwood, sacred to some American Indians--called the Talking Tree; bells and chants and drumming sounds)--all create a unique atmosphere that gives the sacred place its special character.

Mystery: This is perhaps the essential quality for a true sacred site. The mystery may be found in shadow and ambiguity, in narrow passages, or in the unexplainable exposure of a hot desert sun. It may be accompanied by a sense of strong power, and by a sense of danger, or tabu. A place that is highly "legible" in all aspects, that has no secrets, will probably not be sacred: sacred places don't belong in guidebooks.

All of these qualities are found in the city, and perhaps serve as the basic "spiritual clay" with which the designer can work. They will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter.

Natural Elements

Certain natural elements have been associated with sacredness since ancient times. They have associative values, variously seen as inherent or representative,

which suggest sacredness; they often evoke the sacred qualities mentioned above. When combined or elaborated or set apart, their sacredness is concentrated, and subtle reverberations may occur to deepen and expand its meaning.

Natural elements that are particularly evocative of sacredness include:

Stone--which express permanence, power, and constancy;

Sun--the life-giving force;

Water--"the preformal modality of all cosmic matter;" having no form itself, the source of all forms, containing all possibilities: the fons et origio;

Desert--the unknown, the endless horizon, the tabula rasa;

Tree--life, youth, immortality, wisdom: in all of these, endless regeneration;

Cave--secret retreat, return to the source;

Mountain--permanence; awe; the pillar to heaven.

The ideas expressed by these elements become even more forceful when they are combined or differentiated. For example, the sacred grove may enhance the power of the sacred tree, so long as the grove itself is differentiated. Sacred groves are found in Nigeria, Greece, and Japan; in Ghana many sacred groves were lost with the

construction of the Volta Dam, disorienting those who depended on them as much as the loss of their homes.²⁴

The grove also has several of the spatial qualities mentioned above, including centeredness and, usually, a clear boundary.

In addition to the sacred grove, the sacred mountain may combine many ideas that reinforce its sacredness: its nearness to the sun and sky, the special effort necessary to reach it, the central peak; its remoteness and the thin air, in addition, contribute to a sense of purity. Hilltop sanctuaries are found in the mountain worship of many peoples; examples include the five sacred mountains (Wu-chen) in China; Kanchinjunga in Tibet; Sumeru in ancient India; Alburz or Hara Berezaiti in ancient Persia; Sinai, Hebo, Hor, and Zion from the Old Testament; and Olympus in Greece.²⁵ According to Ichiro Hori, who cites the above examples, each of these mountains was believed to be a "cosmic mountain", the Center of the World. Here, sacrifices and prayers were offered and divine revelations and oracles received; towers were built. In the Buddhist tradition, the sun, moon, and planets are believed to revolve around Mount Sumeru.²⁶ Later, "mountains" are constructed, in the form of the ziggurat and the pyramid.

The sacred spring, often found at sites of hot springs, erupts from the deepest recesses of the earth, displacing or dissolving all in its path:

And from this chasm in ceaseless turmoil seething
 As though the earth in thick, fast pants were
 breathing,
 A mighty fountain momentarily was forced;
 Amid whose swift, half-intermittent bursts
 Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail...

And mid these dancing rocks, at now and ever,
 It flung up momentarily the sacred river.²⁷

A far cry from the plaza fountain in today's city! In addition, we find the Chinese idea of water as "blood in the veins of the earth". Along a similar line, Delphic "fumes from the earth", causing sacred intoxication.

Human Modifications: Ancient and Modern

"From the height of flat-roofed Tibetan monasteries an exquisite mystery descends, down along roads padded with sand to the very edge of the sea; there it spreads itself out in numberless, extravagant temples, studded with trembling bells."

Andre Malraux²⁸

Many "human" touches are seen in the examples given above: the early stone menhirs, the cave markings, and later the ziggurat and temple evidence man's participation in the creation of his sacred world.

The temple perhaps reflects one of the most elaborate forms

of constructed sacredness. A general discussion of the temple's cosmic symbolism is found in The Temple and the House by Fitzroy Raglan. Vincent Scully describes, in some detail, the Greek temple as sacred architecture, in The Earth, the Temple, and the Gods. Here, I will only mention briefly some aspects of it which emphasize links to pre-existing sacred qualities. Temples vary widely in form according to their cultural context. The model is the Greek temple here.

A winding approach performs the same function as the ancient labyrinths leading into caves, or the path up and around the sacred mountain or hill: it prepares the pilgrim for the actual sites. Second, the open court reflects the sacred clearing in which the strong focal elements are often centered. The columned pavillion may be seen as the canopy of heaven, its columns reminiscent of the sacred tree. The pillared recess is the formal cave, the deepest and holiest sanctuary. The temple was usually made of stone; its dome, when present (in other cultures) fortified the cosmic sacredness of roundness; its pools, fountains and moats, of water. The effects of sun and shadow were carefully interspersed. In its performance as microcosm (cited above), each of these elements was codified according to the particular beliefs of the

culture, and the gods and spirits so evoked through them.

Modern Forms: In the city today, certain constructed forms may combine many sacred qualities by accident or design. The playground for example, might be designed to emphasize all of the features the temple elaborated: the labyrinth, the clearing (magic chalk circles, sand paintings) the cave, and pools or fountains of water.

A second possibility is an old warehouse; there is a partially abandoned one at the edge of the Boston harbor. Made of old brick, its door is wide but off the street. One imagines its creaking; it could be made to creak. One enters from the salt air and bright mist into a musty gloom. A temporary storage wall narrows the space inside, and pushes the visitor momentarily toward the decaying wood wall. Suddenly an overhead beam comes alive with dancing white lights, overlapping and playing with one another: a camera obscura made by a crack in the board wall. At the end of an open space, perhaps fifteen feet away, is a shelf about altar-high. But the shelf is ignored at first, because there is a fire above it, perhaps four feet high, licking at the wall. A combination of fear and curiosity draws the visitor closer until its source is visible: another crack, a second light

show, golden this time. Odd things are stored here and there: the hull of an old boat, bicycle wheels--water things, round things....

A third "prototype" could be the abandoned subway station, with all the symbology of the sacred cave: the dark, narrow descent, the stone walls with markings, round pillars, hidden crevices, perhaps seeping water, strange echoes, a bat or two...

Ruins of buildings, if structurally safe, often have their own ghosts to contribute. Franklin Park in Boston has at least two such sites: one, in which only the rock corners stand, is next to a clearing with a rock "altar" having dish depressions in its top stones; a low, empty culvert leads to it from one side; a stone wall partially surrounds the site. The second ruin is a stone wall along a valley with eleven arched windows, at least two of which focus directly on elements with sacred possibilities: the highest tree in the area, and a magnificent grove of trees nearby. A stone path winds off along a valley to a boulder (now inscribed with an Emerson poem).

All of these sites are special in some ways; with some care, their potential sacredness might become real.

City Experience and Place

The sacred experience involves the person in a new conceptual world in which he:

abandons his fixed world momentarily;

attaches new meaning, through direct experience, to an object or place;

reorders his perceptions according to the insights provided by this new framework.

The places in which this happens are generally those which offer spatial support to this experience by:

separation from surrounding space, and from utilitarian functions;

some sense of mystery and/or ambiguity; and

by a rich sensory quality.

Of the spatial attributes discussed in this chapter, it would seem that the most general, the "qualities of sacredness", (such as mystery, stillness, etc.) are the most directly applicable to the design of sacred places in cities today. The "concepts" (boundary, planned access, central focus, etc.) are adaptable to this design insofar as they provide a framework within which to approach and "find" the sacred concentration. "Microcosm" and "permanent" structures seem antithetical to the modern

sacred experience--one in which the person constructs a new vocabulary of meaning for himself.

In the chapter on "sacred experience", a general "cosmic" sense of understanding was preferred to the particular cultural expression of it. This preference assumes that urban experience:

generally separates us from the sources of production and of experience (derivative experience and packaged products as an economy);

interrupts or short-cuts the complete organic cycle; and

tends, however unsuccessfully, toward a complete and rational order to its parts.

The sacred experience offers the possibility for disassembling the "packaged" attributes of our urban life, reinserting the shorted circuits, and examining both (perhaps re-ordering them) in a context removed from the alternative production cycles.

Place types that suggest themselves according to these guidelines include:

abandoned sites (ruins, towers, warehouses, subway stations);

boundaries and transition points;

sequential corridors;

parks that link districts;

productive or intimate gardens; and

roofs and cellars.

FOOTNOTES: SACRED PLACE

1. Jung, Carl. Psychological Reflection, p. 24.
2. Bachelard, Gaston. The Poetics of Space, p. 200.
3. Borges, Jorge Luis quoted by Carter Wheelock in The Mythmaker, p. 22.
4. Bachelard, Gaston. op.cit., p. 234.
5. Klee, Paul. The Inward Vision, p. 24.
6. Bachelard, Gaston. op.cit., p. xvii.
7. Crosby, Theo. City Sense, p. 7.
8. Raglan, Fitzroy. The Temple and the House, p. 16.
9. Ibid.
10. Eliade, Mircea. The Sacred and The Profane, p. 20.
11. Eliade, Mircea. Rites and Symbols of Initiation, p. 5.
12. Moholy Nagy, Sybil. The Matrix of Man, p. 67.
13. Raglan, Fitzroy. op.cit., p. 17.
14. Ibid., p. 18.
15. Ibid., p. 20.
16. James, E.O. From Cave to Cathedral, p. 1.
17. Wheelock, Carter. The Mythmaker, p. 61.
18. Eliade, Mircea. Rites and Symbols of Initiation, p. 65.
19. Raglan, Fitzroy. op.cit., p. 26.
20. Ibid., p. 27.
21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., p. 135-136.
23. Davidson, H.R.E. Pagan Scandinavia, p. 20.
24. Conversation with Kevin Lynch, April 1972.
25. Hori, Ichiro. Folk Religion in Japan, p. 144.
26. Ibid., p. 145.
27. Coleridge, S.T. "Kubla Kahn", Immortal Poems, p. 519.
28. Malraux, Andre. The Temptation of the West, p. 4.

PROSPECTS FOR SACREDNESS

"The particular thing is to learn how to get to the crack between the two worlds and how to enter the other world. There is a crack between the two worlds, the world of the diableros and the world of living men. There is a place where the two worlds overlap. The crack is there. It opens and closes like a door in the wind. To get there a man must exercise his will.

The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge

In the preceding pages, sacredness has been discussed, for the most part, in a somewhat purist fashion, and perhaps as an absolute good. It is not that at all. Nor does it keep us out of dark alleys or relieve us from back taxes. It has rather to do with a separate peace, found in "small sensations of time" and in "the great void of eternity". As human beings, we need to reach and stretch beyond our childhood soil, to play with all the possibilities of our dreams, to give them substance in the worlds we live in. We need responsive environments.

The Need for Sacredness

Yi Fu Tuan writes of the sacred as "that which pierces the commonplace world of cyclic repetitions, cause-and-effect, give-and-take."¹ Every person needs some moments in which he is both at the center and on the horizons of his consciousness; he needs, perhaps, the hope of "that

hypothetical instant in endless, linear time when for someone the enormous Library of Babel is justified." ²

The human spirit lives in the universe of the imagination. Gaston Bachelard has defined two kinds of imagination, the material and the formal.³ Both are present in nature as well as in the mind. The formal imagination deals in novelty and variety, in "free forms"; it is the realm of choice and extravagance, and "unnecessary beauty". The material imagination, on the other hand, deals with the primitive, the eternal, and the permanent in things, "form deeply sunk in substance." Sacredness deals with both elements, but especially, I think, with those elements of permanency, with the sources of things. The elements that are formal serve as echoes and reverberations; they deepen its meaning, and give it play. But without the substance, the extravagance becomes excess, the play a momentary diversion. In the Chinese oracle, the I Ching, Tui is the element of joy, and of playfulness, and left to itself, of frivolity. Without the play, the substance remains ponderous, sunken: the "formal" elements bring it to the surface. In an urban sense, these two aspects of the spirit can serve to provide a certain coherence for our personal understanding, a way to deal with three spiritual needs we have as adventurous human beings, perhaps the

same needs that inspire the creation of myths and temples:

1) The need for a history we can use, not simply remember: The sacred function of history is to get at the deep sources for our understanding, to regenerate events that have meaning to us. It is a history that is alive, one in which we can participate.

2) The need for a shared cosmos: Tat tvam asi is a Hindu phrase which expresses a sense of consciousness roughly translated as "all that out there is you yourself," or, more succinctly, "that art thou". A consciousness such as this deepens the harmony and mystery of our being. It is the ongoing "present" in the sacred scheme.

3) And, the need for a glimpse of eternity: In the concentration of the sacred moment, however gentle or momentary, we will have a glimpse of our destiny. There is no middle future here; the future is an horizon that gently curves along the arc of our imagination.

In city terms, the sacred context may serve the following functions for its inhabitants:

1) allow direct experience with which to examine stereotypes of meaning.

2) promote a feeling for the organic interdependence of the city as a human environment.

3) serve to integrate our subjective and objective worlds.

4) provide a context for mystery and magic.

The Prospects for Sacredness

In the following pages, I will discuss several aspects of sacredness today: some assumptions I am working with, some practical considerations and the designer as "shaman". But I should first like to examine, briefly, the prospect for sacredness in the city. In a way, it involves a sense of timing: we have not yet achieved the totally designed city, and the perfect program to direct all urban activity lies still deep in some computer. We are beginning to use our Mondays as holidays, and we still allow our children in the city. The city, in addition, nurtures its own hardy breed of artists, inured to special challenges, such as civic art and urban pageantry. A small Kansas town has transferred some of its Industrial Development funds to the project of planting apple trees on Main Street.⁴ And somewhere deep in Wet Mountain Valley in Colorado a man named Tom is building lutes for the apocalypse. The time to act is now.

Some Assumptions about Sacredness

1) Sacredness is accessible to each of us, on a

variety of levels.

2) It is place-dependent to some extent (discussed in "The Designer as Shaman"); its cultural context should be general enough to allow a transcendence beyond daily rhythms and customs.

3) The sacred experience is an unmediated experience, and as such, personally involving. This has two implications: there is no audience in the sacred grove; and there is no director.

4) The sacred place, though it deals with permanent qualities, is itself impermanent. It should be recreated periodically or buried. Each generation has to recreate its own sacred context.

Some Practical Considerations

The urban sacred place is not: a signature piece for its designer; alien from its context, the city; a testament to community or city identity; a monument. In a way, it is a kind of people's art; the designer may serve as a sorcerer, but he needs also to serve as catalyst and "head scout": searching out the appropriate ground, or activity; mindful of the entire fabric, including the many prosaic functions a city serves; looking for both the sacred places (where things begin, where they begin to change or to loosen a little) and for the places that best

serve utilitarian functions, and should be left to do this. Having found these, he may call on a wide range of resources, some of which will be discussed below, to release the particular spirit of a place in a way that will not destroy the fabric of the whole (which may be the function of the artist-designer as a revolutionary, but not as a "shaman"); but rather concentrate on its hopeful qualities, which may also produce, in its turn, serious change. I would suggest some axioms for the designer in this context:

1) to learn to recognize the profane, and leave it alone; or use it as the "chaos" out of which the sacred can take form. The designer here is not a missionary.

2) to work to "release" the potentialities of sacredness, not to "capture" them; but also:

3) to understand the implications of trifling with his magic: this is the lesson of the Sorcerer's Apprentice. It necessitates a cautious awareness of the indifference, and sometimes cruelty, in nature and in our own imaginations, and the responsibility for leaving some possibilities alone.

4) not to insist on very remote traditions, or completely new ones, but to let the appropriate ones grow in their own time.

5) to look for the simple centers of things:

...Things that are disconcerting to us show us suddenly how much simplicity there is in us, inspire in us the idea of an existence without ties to our own.

Andre Malraux⁵

I would add: of an existence that is very much our own. Finding a simple center requires "weeding out" before elaborating; it may require finding a star to track, or a subtle rhythm buried beneath the clatter of cars, or ignoring "cult" in any form. Finally, and especially important,

6) the designer must pick up after himself. This involves a concentrated awareness of the qualities of the "outside" world into which the participants will emerge: he might choose to emphasize things that are present in both, so that the experience has echoes; he might choose to provide a "decompression" chamber of sorts, a quiet place for assimilating the experiences. The experience may provide kinds of participation that are difficult to translate in the daily world, and he should be aware of the possible "let down" by too sudden an exit. Also, the sacred moment fades, and may have to be renewed from time to time, or begun again.

The Designer as Shaman

The sacred experience happens in Don Juan's "crack between the worlds": here, the inside information collects: sun-soaked bits of magic dust, the "virtual grain of hashish", and the seeds of our summer dreams. Things seen and things known merge here, giving our space dreams substance. The design of a sacred place or activity is a delicate and

exacting task: it requires a cosmic time sense, and an ear for sacred echoes. The "designer" might be the professional planner, or an activity coordinator or simply a group of persons "turned on" to the city.

As I imagine it, the designer-shaman should have comets and half-moons dripping from the folds of his or her sleeves, and a tool kit that includes: honey and linden, "the Titanium Platform of the 7th Starbowl", the clear cool green of a spring morning, fireflies in the shadows of alleys, velvet moss and dream herb, dim moon-eyed fishes, the light of the sun through silk, imaginary gardens with real toads in them, and the oldest rock in the deepest strata of the earth's mantle.

He should be able to close off the abrasive clatter of impatient cars, the piles of rat-chewed litter collecting in the ruts of oily alleys, the hum of the neon sign, and the intrusive megaphone blaring a worthy cause. Instead, he should catch at the peculiar skinny shadow that alleys often have, and their "sucking" labyrinthine quality; the sun dancing across a row of office windows at sunset, filling them each in turn with a moment of its own image; the sea smell that collects in a doorway far from the harbor. He should poke around in the weedy lot, the

crumbling ruin, for evidence of "aliveness" and for a clue as to how things arrange themselves when left on their own.

Then, in abstracting his search, he should look at these aspects of order in the city framework: the places things begin, the transition points, and the places that border activities. He should look for a certain disorder as well, as evidence of transitions. He should also seek out things that are immune to rational coding, that have emotion, poetry, magic, and vitality: the spirit of the counter-culture; the fantasy of Gaudi's monuments; the song of the wind, the tracks of certain stars. He might continue by searching out the curves and corners, the pockets and bumps he has discarded from his own previous designs, and reconsider them as "commas" in a sacred vocabulary, or "small cracks" between the worlds that fit into no rational scheme. Then, he should look also to the things at the root of the big "rational" elements--the skyscraper foundation, the sea bottom, the heart of the furnace. The function of such a search is to loosen the designer's own imagination, to find the poetry in things which he has previously considered primarily in terms of utility.

In the remainder of this section, I will suggest some possibilities for sacred activities and places in terms of

of the three spiritual needs I have mentioned above, and present some prototypes for each. The final section considers the pursuit of the "sacred texture" in a city-wide context.

Sacred Design and User Needs

Once the designer has found some of the cracks between the worlds, and sees some possibilities for sacredness to grow in them, he can begin to weave a fabric of spaces to tickle our hopes and dreams; to nudge us into an involvement with our origins; and to pull us toward one another in a spirit of celebration: in a harmony with the land in which we live. His design should, as always, be mindful of user needs. Here, they are the spiritual ones: the need for a "useable" history, the need for a shared cosmos, and the need for a glimpse of eternity.

1) A history we can use, not simply remember.

Robinson Jeffers said, "History falls on your head like rocks." History, in the sacred sense, is one that is still alive, one in which we can participate. Archaic societies recreated the events of creation, thereby nullifying a sense of historical, linear time. They lived within the rhythms determined by nature, and their myths reflected this periodic restoration of sacred events. It

is reflected also in the attitude of cultures that retain only what they use, as in the Isletan refusal to record sacred stories. It may involve "falsification" of history, changes to suit an evolving understanding: today, a portrayal of Hamlet with jeans and a beard might offend the aesthetic sensibilities of purists, but it can reflect as well the parallels of our culture with Elizabethan England. Games and sports also reflect a periodic re-enactment of accumulated knowledge and skill.

Perhaps the underlying aspect is carrying forward the living aspects of our pasts such as skills, or recreating our monuments each time they are needed. The elaborate snow statues that were created to celebrate the Olympic games in Sapporo, Japan this year were destroyed in three days (an interesting time span, from the viewpoint of sacredness) because they might topple and harm the children who played around them.

A San Francisco architect recently built an organic accumulation of a house from found things: stained glass, barn wood, used fixtures. At the finish, each of the carpenters designed a single panel to contribute to its already rich history, and so to recreate it for themselves. The house itself suggests a sacred sense of history; the

designer's disposition of it may also: when he had finished, he sold it to take a leisurely tour of Europe with his family, because he "knew he could build another". It was his "dream house" he said.

Perhaps new towns might be built this way. Stylistic purity might suffer, but if each person brought with him even fragments of the structure of his dream home--and if he left behind those of his portable possessions he never used--the town might grow more surely from the dreams of its inhabitants. Or, one might think in terms of leaving behind a beloved object that someone else could use.

In terms of existing historical monuments, some attempts might be made to find a use that allowed us to share in their particular past. The son et lumiere spectacle is one possibility; the visitor might participate in it by spontaneous drama or theatre. Museums might have spaces for contributions from visitors that would document their sense of the existing time: wet plaster walls, as palimpsests into which one could put objects of his own choosing, to reflect his personal sense of the current time--and which would eventually be intermixed with later contributions. Historical buildings might be staffed with wandering songsters who could recreate the songs and legends

of that building's past, perhaps interspersed with parallel songs from our own time. In many parts of the countryside, the ground is filled with shards and arrowheads from ancient Indian settlements. Some of these areas might be opened as public digs, where lay "archaeologists" could keep what they find, if it fit their dreams; or one might try to recreate a history from the artifacts.

Instead of verbal explanation at an historical site, one might recreate a sense of its past in its own terms: for example, a vertical sheet of earth exposing many geological eras might be "scored" with markings in the style of the time it represented at each level--cave scratchings, magic symbols, perhaps even a "guidebook" verbalization at the most recent level to represent modern description. Or, in the city, terraces might be designed that were level with different eras of its history, if the site suggested such a sequence. The interior of City Hall in Boston has a horizontal line of bricks which, according to the guide, has some spatial correspondence to the old market district nearby; and the bricks are the same as those in Haymarket.

Simple traditions, in their recurrence, can suggest a history that is alive: the familiar tradition of the Capistrano

swallows finds an echo in a curious annual holiday in an American town: "The Day the Buzzards Return to Hinkley, Ohio."⁶ Each year, within the week, the residents celebrate this. If Hinkley can celebrate buzzards, surely each city or community might find instances of living cycles worthy of note. If not, and they are less purist than I, they might consider the example of Manhattan, Kansas. Several years ago, the city fathers created its own "origin myth" to celebrate the Manhattan Centennial. They devised for this occasion a fabled hero in the style of Paul Bunyon, and christened him "Johnny Kaw" after the nearby Kaw river; they ascribed to him the feat of carving the river from the land, with his mighty scythe. Finally, the Johnny Kaw "myth" was consecrated by a song and by the creation of a fifteen foot statue in the city park. The story might have ended there because the myth did not really "take" at once--but a resident tells me that the children who now play near his statue in the park have begun to create their own stories about Johnny Kaw.⁸

At other times, existing traditions might be adapted to new uses in a formal way. The villagers of a small folk settlement on the southern coast of Crete celebrated the advent of electricity to their village with an ancient ritual festival.

These examples demonstrate traditions that are alive. The sacred history of a place may be discovered in patterns and cycles that have been forgotten. The designer's task as shaman is, I think, to help surface these and sometimes simply to give them space to grow as they will.

Form Prototype--The Labyrinth: In form terms, I would suggest the alliance of sacred history with the labyrinth. Sometimes we must return in our dreams to an earlier time, as well as adapting that history to us (as suggested above). We must re-experience it. The labyrinth is dark and winding, stone and close: shadows startle us; crows appear. We are confronted with fragments of our past that stick somehow like burrs--a line of a tune from a decade ago, an odor of home. Chants hover dimly in our hearing. The walls narrow occasionally and feel of wet velvet. We stoop to get through a low opening and our sight falls to a shimmering pool, which reflects us with large heads and shortened limbs, as children's laughter is heard, from somewhere....

The scene of this scenario is an abandoned subway stop, not so subtly adapted as a sacred site: one should probably hear train whistles there as well.

2) A Shared Cosmos:

The Navajo Indians have House Gods and Talking Gods, the first to bring harmony within their homes, the latter for harmony among all of their people. The harmony and mystery of all living things, the interplay among them, is the context for the "sacred present". It is "being caught up in the web of life", being filled with it. In the city it involves the exploration of organic relationships where they exist, and the allowance for letting other relationships change and create their own order. The place in which this is done must be a "safe" one, removed from specialized functions. Three of the activities that can express this sacred present are celebration, meditation, and gardening.

The celebration allows people to come together freely. "During a fiesta, the ranks and stations of life are violated."⁹ This may be chaotic; but it can also be the common ground which allows us to create our own order. The celebration fails when it becomes too rigid, pompous, dictates a coded response: loses its openness. Or, it may express itself in gimmickry, demanding attentions or excesses it cannot support: this is the risk of designing a celebration for rather than with, of designing to astonish. Often, the designer's task is simply to provide

a variety of "free spaces" at several scales that people can use when they want to gather; other times, he might design activities to direct attention to the constant, cosmic elements that demonstrate regeneration of life (water and the sun) and that demonstrate its natural cycles (stars, tides, seasons, day and night). The urban celebration seems to be coming into its own: we have happenings, participatory theatre, the decoration of urban malls by children, spontaneous parades. Recently at M.I.T., a symposium on Art and the Environment included a session on "Urban Celebration and Pageantry".

Sometimes, our understanding of "shared cosmos" necessitates solitude, reflection, private time to explore our personal part in the balance of life. The building form appropriate to this is the sanctuary. We could provide rest areas in busy urban centers, and corners of playgrounds for the solitary needs of the child. We might design ashrams on the edges of cities for meditation.

The garden: In a Babylonian sense, a tower cannot touch heaven but a garden might. A sense of "shared cosmos" includes an awareness of our relation to all living things, and to cosmic cycles. Every environment creates its own balance of life: the city will have one that may be as

rich as the rain forest. The sources of organic cycles are often lost to us. Packaged foods in super markets give us little sense of their source: an open air market is better, such as the ones in Boston and New Orleans; closer still might be the urban vegetable garden. Along the Fens in Boston anyone may rent, at a nominal fee, a small plot of land in which to grow vegetables or plants.

Along a similar line, we might "surface" the wide variety of life in a seemingly lifeless place. A "spade-full" of common city dirt, by various means of poking and prying (such as magnification) could show us that it is teeming with life; as might a glass of tap water (which might be disconcerting to some).

Water is an excellent unifying element: flowing together, mixing, creating new orders. In a harbor town, ways might be devised to expose the sea-floor life near its edge. Better still would be the opportunity to go down into the water oneself. Here, searching beneath the beer cans and litter, one might find a spark of life--or perhaps only recognize first hand the deadening effect of pollutants and trash in this respect, which interrupt its natural balance.

Weedy Gardens:

There is something in western culture that wants to totally wipe out creepy-crawlies, and feels repugnance for toadstools and snakes. This is fear of one's own deepest natural inner-self wilderness areas, and the answer is, relax. Relax around bugs, snakes, and your own hairy dreams. Again, farmers can and should share their crop with a certain percentage of buglife as "paying their dues"--Thoreau says, "How then can the harvest fail? Shall I not rejoice also at the abundance of the weeds whose seeds are the granary of the birds?"¹⁰

The Hopi Snake Dance celebrates snakes "as a part of our universe, of all living things."¹¹ Living cycles, their change and decay and regrowth, are often interrupted in the city by specialization, by packaged products and opinions, by an "antiseptic" attitude that allows no weedy gardens in our lives. Perhaps some of the above activities might promote Snyder's sense of relaxation.

In addition to celebrations, sanctuaries, and gardens, the sacred present--the sense of tat tvam asi--might be nurtured by temporarily "trading off" daily customs with cultures unfamiliar to us. This is a common benefit of travel. Or we might consider ways to incorporate the stranger in the city: urban transition points--airports, bus stations, city boundaries--are usually badly designed in terms of welcome or of giving a promising picture of the city. We might think of ways to make some traditional

"boundary lines" less rigid. In the Great Hopi Push of 1908 a territorial dispute was solved by each of the groups lining up at the boundary at sunrise, and pushing until one group gave way.

Some attention to the coordination of existing activities might also promote a harmony that we tend to lose in the city. The Greater Boston Metropolitan Cultural Alliance has been formed for this purpose. I am not personally familiar with the program but a newspaper report states its goal:

Too many...audiences...are experiencing cultural activities as fragmented parts of their lives. The public feels bombarded--like too many press releases--by organizations that are not mutually reinforcing. (Boston Globe, March 9, 1972, p 39)

(This group's choice of title does not seem to demonstrate the successful "mutual reinforcement" of its components.)

Form Prototype--The Sacred Clearing: The Labyrinth allows its pilgrim to wander among his memories, to make them real. The Sacred Clearing is the sunlit present where all aspects of life are present. The urban park might be designed to let in as much life as possible, and to set up casual experiments with the balance of life: introducing new plants or animals; "a constant close watch" on the

varieties of life and their changes; a pond with water from many places (The Water of All Waters); a hollow with trees planted for their sound in the wind (the Grove of Many Voices). A gong at sunrise, noon and sunset. Wet clay pits for children and dogs and others. Simple ceremonies: three groups of persons according to age, handing along a song or dance about that day from eldest to youngest, and back again. Weeds, bugs. The sacred present is the topsoil, the "rich mulch" of all life.

3) A Glimpse of Eternity.

...an edifice without dimension
a city hanging in the sky.¹²

To see some stars the astronomer must look slightly to the side of them: they disappear when he looks at them directly. This is the sense of the sacred future. It produces that special exhilaration that happens when something just on the edge of our awareness beckons us, and we stop to let it in; or, when an odd juxtaposition of normal things disconcerts us into an entirely new understanding of the way things happen.

In the sacred future, normal spatial proportions seem to take on a new quality. Time seems immensely protracted and infinitely expandable. Whistling winds and unseen

voices pervade the mists:

I hear...the breathing of the air, the wailing
of the unborn, the pressure of the wind.
I hear the movements of the stars and planets,
the slight rust creak when they shift their
position.
The silken passage of radiations, the breath
of circles turning. I hear the passing of
mysteries and the breathing of monsters.¹³

In the sacred future, the sense of space is changed; per-
haps to Robert Riley's sense of

strange and troubling spatial complexity of
the kind we experience in dreams, a quality
the essence of which always just eludes us.
We feel it, we understand it intuitively,¹⁴
but we cannot quite explain it rationally.

Riley suggests as a parallel a Maurits Escher print or a
Moebius Strip. The architecture in science fiction stories,
because it is bounded only by the imagination of its
authors, often portrays this feeling. With its soaring
architecture, the urban setting would seem to be an ideal
one for the sacred future, but somehow it is not often
realized: the giddy heights of skyscrapers often only
make us feel small, leave us behind. Another possible
setting, the futurist exhibition, too often seems inhuman,
unpeopled, or its spectacle dissolves into gimmickry,
becomes a "trompe l'oeil".

I am not at all sure how to transpose the sacred future
into a city. I think that, on a personal level, it involves

the feeling that our sacred future is something inside us, something "about to happen", that cannot be "plotted" in a linear time sense. It is something we cannot "squeeze" into our everyday worlds. For this reason, any attempts to produce the feeling of the sacred future should be independent of other uses. The design should "suggest" here, rather than "direct", and should set up the magic to do its own work: no explanatory signs in the sacred future. One could borrow from atmospheres the qualities that are mysterious, eerie: the violent, cold, and dry mistral wind of the Mediterranean; mists; twilight; the full moon. One might look for a place where he thinks dybbuks and demons could emerge, and enhance its strangeness, looking perhaps at all of the ways witches alter their own environments to provoke mystery or enchantment.

Form Prototype--The Threshold: The sacred future goes beyond the things we can explain. A form prototype could be best designed, I think, using twilight, mist, troubling spatial juxtapositions, and a whirr, as of wings. It seems a good challenge for the technical artist. I would begin with pulsing moons which one rises in the midst of, half-open doors the texture of cool silvery moss, gossamer webs, strange markings, the sense of an horizon enclosing us, falling comets scattering smoldering embers from which

greenish mists arise, and translucent gliding panels which throw back endless tunnels of images. The sacred future is the "brink": the planned event might be designed to trouble the visitor regarding his size, his time sense, his up and down--the movement, gliding; the light, sourceless.

The threshold aspect might emerge as an horizon seemingly dropping into nowhere, which then, approaching the visitor, swings him onto its arc. Or, it might be a horizontal bar of light, which, when touched, expands to enclose the person. It might be an unseen force of wind that the person must turn slightly to pass through: "the unknown passing to the strange."¹⁵

The Shaman as Designer

Taken singly, these spiritual needs suggest certain activities that, in themselves, seem hardly "sacred". Perhaps, in considering them outside-in, they become only ghosts of an elusive spirit that is still without a habitation. The final "success" of the sacred texture of a city may depend on a)the ways these activities and spaces begin, b)their links and overlaps, and c)their balance with the alternate production functions of the city. The temptation is to siphon off the sacred mist and

"carry" it, all adrift, into a single dizzying city tower-- until one remembers Babel.

Perhaps, after all, the solution lies, not in "redesigning the designer", but in introducing new kinds of persons as resource personnel for the planner-designer. This idea was suggested to me much earlier, and it seems, now, the moment for it. In addition to the artist, the guild might include an astronomer, a naturalist, an urban archaeologist, a blind man, and a witch. Their best use might be to haunt the city for its sacred places, and give them as form or activity "sets" to the planner-designer. More important, though, than collecting specialists might simply be finding somehow (a good thesis topic for someone) those who, whatever their daylight occupation, could apply to the city the spatial sense of:

parsec (about $3\frac{1}{4}$ light years);

baraka (the Moslem sense of blessedness that attaches itself to objects after years of loving use); and

kami (sacred Shinto objects, used as pivots to mirror sacred conceptions).

Finally, the guild should remember that the human spirit is an odd duck: it is not dependable. Just at the moment when we are (once again) on the brink of chaos and

everyone's cooperation is sorely needed, someone goes off on a search for the Loch Ness monster.

FOOTNOTES: PROSPECTS FOR SACREDNESS

1. Tuan, Yi-Fu. "Architecture and Human Nature", Landscape, Autumn 1963, p. 19.
2. Wheelock, Carter. The Mythmaker, p. 64.
3. Bachelard, Gaston. The Poetics of Space, p. ix.
4. Manhattan, Kansas. report of Katharyn Deatherage, resident, June 1970.
5. Malraux, Andre. The Temptation of the West, p. 86.
6. Conversation with Mara Ogulis, March 1972.
7. See also Filinger, George A. "The Story of Johnny Kaw". Manhattan, Kansas (booklet).
8. Conversation with Katharyn Deatherage.
9. Cox, Harvey. The Feast of Fools, p. 118.
10. Snyder, Gary. "Four Changes", unpublished pamphlet.
11. Handout at Hope Snake Dance, Arizona, August 1970.
12. Nin, Anais. House of Incest, frontispiece.
13. Ibid., p. 38.
14. Riley, Robert. "Architecture and the Sense of Wonder", Landscape, Autumn 1965, p. 23.
15. Masefield, John. "The Passing Strange", Immortal Poems, p. 249.

THE PROSAIC WORLD

Some notes about the real world seem in order.

Planning. Potentially sacred events and sites should begin small, in the terms of the people who will use them. They should be open to direct participation, adaptable to change in form and need, and perhaps inadaptable to the addition of overlapping practical functions. This is a delicate balance: it is tempting to enlarge small plans, to provide a sort of closure for them, and to include as much as possible. The person who designs for sacredness is an explorer, willing to try out a variety of "prods", openings, and small experiments to give substance to hopeful ideas. Perhaps the primary objective is to give city dwellers the confidence of an environment that is continually responsive to their dreams, and to show them by suggestion how they may use what is available to them for this purpose. The designer can assist in "clearing ground" by obtaining permits, rerouting conflicting uses, assuring safety, and overseeing maintenance. He should keep an eye out for those who feel threatened by events, and those who find them silly. The former might need encouragement or altogether different activities; in some cases they might bring political repercussions, which could possibly be forestalled by an astute planner. Silliness may have its place sometimes, or it may indicate

a misfit. On the whole, less planning would seem to be more feasible than more.

Life span. The beginnings of sacred events and places can be attended with initiation rites of various kinds: the dedication ceremony, the breaking of ground, or even quiet contemplation. My own feeling is that beginnings should be modest and hopeful and carry their own weight, letting the ceremonial aspects grow. But there may be times when the more exciteable grand beginnings are necessary to effect a break from our ordinary rhythms.

The death of sacredness is not always evident: some sacred events and places may simply lose their effectiveness or be smothered by sanctimony. Certain places and traditions could be officially "buried" as they begin to atrophy--again, by ceremony, or by relocation, or by having instituted a limited time span for them from the beginning. It will usually be much harder to let things go than to begin them. The timing and continuation of sacredness is an individual issue, not an arbitrary one. One rule of thumb might be to evaluate the importance of a place or tradition by the care and attention that its users give it, remembering also that transition periods may appear chaotic for awhile.

The designer should watch closely and listen carefully to those he would serve. They can give him his best cues.

Maintenance. Even when a place is impermanent, the care of it will determine its character. A bit of litter might easily smudge the magic. On the other hand, slick anti-septic environments are a negative inducement. Sacred places need loving attention. It seems some of the people who could help here include children, the elderly, and the counter culture: as garden keepers. The designer should also consider self-maintaining environments.

Safety. As Lucien's experience in the nettle patch demonstrated, overgrown places may have burrs. On a larger scale, as for example in a dark labyrinthean corridor, they might breed vandals as well as ghosts; accidents might be more likely. While no one is assured of safety from his own sacred visions, his physical safety should be reasonably secure. Fencing, barriers, lighting, and watching tasks could be imaginatively used for both practical and sacred purpose.

Order. Woodstock showed us that mud and disorder may be part of the magic; other festivals have shown us differently. Adequate facilities should be provided, as well as

reasonable access (depending on the intent).

Balance. A balance of activities in terms of time, location, participants, and size is preferable to pooling one's resources into the single annual spectacular.

Guidebooks. While one should not, I think, label the sacred river "Alph", preparatory information of a generative nature might be useful, on occasion. The designer should avoid "don't" and queues and almost always, words (except perhaps Words to Chant).

Personal visions. People may use spaces in ways that seem inappropriate. Some latitude should be allowed here, and the distraction, if it is one, possibly used to advantage. I remember a screaming child in Carlsbad Caverns who made wonderful echoes. A sensor might begin a gentle chant when the white noise reached a certain level. People are generally responsive, and might contribute new directions for the use of a place. Sometimes, though, dragons with bulging eyes should carry off those who steal other people's magic by a thoughtless gesture.

Expectation. One should not feel he has to experience something, and there should be a reasonable number of exits along the way: gentle exits.

Symbols. Abstract things should be open to a number of possibilities, so people can contribute their own meanings. Trying to guess the "right answer" will interfere.

Decompression. The sacred experience happens in a context. Any event that makes the outside world look shabby afterwards is not sacred.

Dirge. The sacred in terms of grief has not been considered here; it may be as important as the other kinds of sacredness. But the general dirge surrounding most-holies is more or less guaranteed to set the spirit adrift.

Pomp. Conscious pomp (pomp art?) may be in some contexts a means to carry us out of our everyday worlds. But self-conscious pomp usually creates only hollow echoes. Sacred echoes have resonance.

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