



Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter

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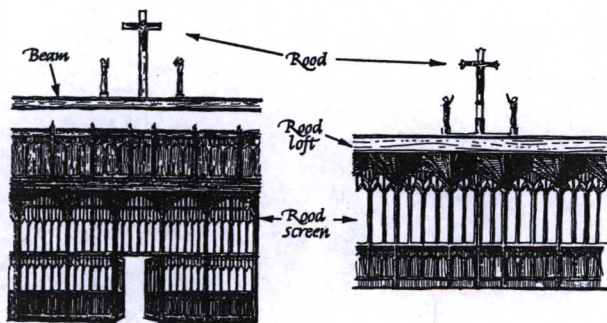
Winter 1993

This issue of *EAP* begins our fourth year of publication. We thank all readers who have renewed their subscription. Please, if you have not, do so as soon as possible. Renewal information is on the back page.

The theme of this issue is "environment, sacredness, and well-being." We feature a conference report by architect J. Bruce May, a poem by landscape architect Gwendolyn Scott, and essays by cultural historian Theodore Roszak and philosophers David Appelbaum, Robert Mugerauer, and Jeffrey Wattles. We are particularly pleased to announce a new monograph series, "Environmental and Architectural Phenomenology," to be published by the State University of New York Press under the editorship of *EAP* editor David Seamon. This announcement appears on p. 15.

As always, we ask for your contributions, whether letters, reviews, commentaries, essays, poems, drawings, or something else. The professional, scholarly, and geographical diversity of readers is perhaps *EAP*'s greatest strength. Please, don't hesitate to let us know about your particular interests, background, and point of view.

Below: Two examples of rood screens taken from Herbert Whone's Church, Monastery, Cathedral (see p. 6). Most of the illustrations in this EAP are from Whone's book.



ITEMS OF INTEREST

The 5th annual *Spirit of Place Symposium* will be held in Washington, D.C., sometime in the spring of 1993. The major theme is "Spirit of Sustainability." Topics include: (1) how the spirit of place affects people who live there or visit; (2) the key land-use issues associated with sacred places, particularly their sustainability. Contact: Institute for the Study of Natural Systems, P. O. Box 94942, Mill Valley, CA 94942 (415-383-5064).

The *Somatics Community Newsletter* presents information on the body's role in human life, self-awareness, and self development. The somatic dimensions of environmental and architectural experience are central to a phenomenology of place and to a complete understanding of environmental design (since, first of all, the built environment must incorporate our material, bodily being, both as form and process). This newsletter is published irregularly and costs \$5/year. It is one useful vehicle for keeping informed on work in somatic education. Write: Deborah Miller, *Somatics Community Newsletter*, Box 751, Mill Valley, CA 94942.

The *Coalition for Education in the Outdoors* is a "network of organizations, businesses, institutions, centers, agencies, and associations" that seeks to foster learning "in, for and about the outdoors." The Coalition publishes *Taproot*, a 28-page newsletter that includes commentaries, book reviews, news shorts, and resource listing. Write Bruce Matthew, CEO, Department of Recreation & Leisure Studies, SUNY Cortland, Cortland, NY 12045.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

J. Bruce May is an architect and urban designer. He has designed schools for handicapped children and public housing and town planning for Great Britain's New and Expanded Towns. He seeks to create a language that can describe "the unique qualities of landscapes that are frequently under threat from development in this country." He writes: "The work on which I am now engaged is focused on ways in which the built environment can influence human feelings, and consequently our psychic and physical health. With the results from this research, I am hoping to be able to emphasize the importance of architectural psychology in the design of future buildings."

"My interest in this question goes back to 1960 when we were designing innovative schools for children with epilepsy and cerebral palsy, and we were all beginning to recognize the importance of psychology in architecture. Our chief concern at that time was still with anthropomorphic fit, but we were also experimenting with spaces, colors and materials as influences on the child's sense of security, alertness or relaxation...."

"During the last three years I have been working with a group of architects and artists to develop a method of observation of buildings which is based on Goethe's studies of plant morphology and the way that we describe sculptural form language. I have adapted this method for use in the study of buildings and sense of place so that the results can be understood and used by non professionals."

"This work led up to last year's [1991] Architects Conference at Emerson College [Sussex, England] where I was running a workshop on Peoples' Perception and Response to Place in Nature and Architecture."

With his letter, May enclosed a report from that workshop, which we publish on p. 3 (the table, right, is part of that report). In regard to his approach, May explains that, "although these methods relate to quality rather than quantity, I am encouraging the use of rigorous scientific survey techniques when they are appropriate, and it is this marriage of science and the imagination that gives me great optimism for the future of this kind of work." Address: Podlinge Farm, Elmsted, Kent TN25 5JF, England.

OBSERVATIONAL THEMES FOR WORKSHOP ON PLACE EXPERIENCE

"What is here?" (physical/earth)

- Define boundary of area.
- Identify perceived boundary if different.
- Note all physical facts: sight, sound, smell, etc.
- Note size as related to human scale.
- Connections *in* and *out*--routes, paths & views.
- Levels, topography, and landmarks.
- Distinctive parts of area.
- Is the form vertical or horizontal? Concave or convex? Geometric or organic? Dark or light? Hot or cold?
- What other physical features are significant?

"What is happening here?" (etheric/water)

- Spatial movement *in* and *out* of the area.
- Spatial movement within the area.
- Paths that are used & barriers to movement.
- Sound, weather, quality of light & shadow.
- Orientation.
- Areas of shelter and exposure.
- Qualities of different horizons.
- Social uses--concentration, confusion, success, or failure.
- Hierarchy of space--external and internal.
- Where does the space expand or contract?
- What rhythms are there in the space or form?

"What do I feel here?" (astral/air)

- Am I happy, unhappy, bored or exhilarated?
- Does this place make me feel lonely or sociable?
- Does it welcome me, or do I feel like an intruder?
- Am I sheltered and safe or exposed and insecure?
- Does this place evoke associations with memories, dreams, ideals, or prejudices?
- Can you relate this place to rhythm or breathing?
- What does the image of this place invoke?

"What is the personality of this place?" (ego/fire)

- What is the gesture of this place?
- Is the image strong or weak?
- Is the space and form simple or complex?
- What qualities exist here?
- What is the function of this place?
- Does it function well or badly? Why?
- Does it tell the truth about itself?
- Can you describe its essence--its *genius loci*?

CONFERENCE REPORT

EXPERIENCING PLACE IN NATURE AND IN ARCHITECTURE

This report is a set of transcribed notes from a workshop held at a conference on architecture at Emerson College, Sussex, England, in 1991. The aims of this workshop were: (1) To develop a more conscious awareness of our responses and feeling to our physical surroundings; (2) to encourage a better understanding of the Goethean method of observation in relation to the study of buildings; and (3) to compare and contrast individual observations in a group context.

The workshop's focus related to the conference theme of "People, Nature and Architecture." A sequence of spaces at the college was chosen for group study. This sequence began with an approach from a garden and then proceeded over a wooden bridge into a meeting hall out onto a balcony with stairs leading down into a courtyard between two of Emerson's main buildings. This sequence of spaces provided a wide variety of experiences. Most of the participants had not experienced this spatial sequence before. The only users of the buildings at the time of the workshop were the conference attenders.

The method used to encounter this sequence of spaces is similar to the style of observation used by botanists to study the morphology of plants or by sculptors in articulating a form language. This method of seeing, however, has been adapted to suit the study and understanding of buildings. There are four stages marked by the kinds of topics and questions indicated in the table on the preceding page:

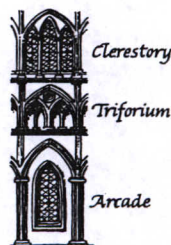
1. We begin by observing only the physical facts. Materials, structure, colors, dimensions, and so forth, are described in as clear and objective a manner as possible.
2. We next notice the changes from one space to another--expansion and contraction, movement of space and time, varying social uses, degree of light and shade, bird songs and all other events that bring life into the particular space.
3. Only in the third stage do we take note of our own responses and feelings in relation to the spaces--that is, our likes and dislikes, our preferences and personal judgements.
4. Finally, we try to stand back from our experiences and listen to what may speak through. In this way, we may feel a particular wholeness and sense of place.

This method of observation was introduced to a group of twenty workshop participants of which four-fifths were architects (other participants were a painter, therapist, teacher, and computer programmer). The workshop took place over a period of two days with four sessions of one-and-a-half hours each.

The way of working emphasized in the conference required participants to find a way to bring all their senses and sensibilities into as much balance as possible. Intriguingly, the effort was often the most difficult for the participants who had been trained to perceive the world largely in visual terms. These participants--most of them architects--were often limited by their eyes and by their desire to make swift judgements in terms of what they could see. In this sense, they experienced their surroundings mostly as *outside observers*.

This difficulty was partly ameliorated by the group process, which sought to maintain an effort to alternate continually between the individual's own experience and descriptions shared by others in the group. In the day of final discussion, it became clear that this corroborative stage was much more significant than most of the participants had first expected. There had been a shift from immediate sensory experience to a world of meaning in which the participants had become a self-conscious and integral part of a more fully understood environment.

J. Bruce May



NOTEWORTHY READINGS

Belden C. Lane, 1988. *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality*. New York: Paulist Press. Soft cover, \$9.95. ISBN 0-8091-2988-4.

Written by a theologian, this book explores the relationship between place and spirituality. "Places," writes Lane, "can be formative of our very being as humans, rooting us at the deepest levels of mystery and meaning" (p. 19).

In the prologue, Lane explains that most traditional studies of spirituality have typically separated religious experience from its place of happening, thus excluding "the palpable context of one's lived experience of the holy" (p. 6). Instead, Lane seeks ways whereby the study of spirituality "will be drawn instinctively to the manner in which one's lived experience of faith is rooted in time, space and culture" (ibid). In other words, what does it mean "to experience the holy within the context of a spatially-fixed reality?" (ibid). Lane writes:

Henry Miller may be right, after all, when he said that "our destination is never a place, but rather a new way of looking at things." To be able to recognize the place of our encounter with God and know it as if for the first time is to be twice blessed—to "be there" in all the gathered immediacy that human dwelling in the divine presence makes fully possible.

St. Francis found himself returning all of his life to the Portiuncula, that tiny abandoned church down the hill from Assisi. The rolling Apennines, the red poppies in the fields, the extraordinary light of Umbria itself—all these were part of what drew him to the place. But it was ultimately a new way of seeing more than the place seen which marked the spirituality of this thirteenth-century troubadour. He regularly discerned wonder in what others viewed with scorn. His insight would turn us back to all the places we might once have found plain and abandoned in our own experience. Indeed, such is the goal, finally, of any geography of the spirit (p. 8).

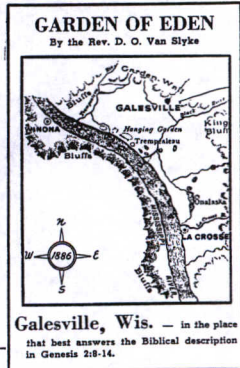
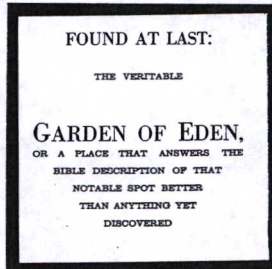
To explore this spiritual geography, Lane draws on personal experiences, secondhand narratives, and historical case studies that he interprets phenomenologically and hermeneutically. In his first chapter, he offers ways to understand the phenomenon of sacred place, "grasping the meaning of religious experience as 'placed experience'." (p. 7). In the next chapters, he explores place in regard to several traditions in American spirituality—Native-American, Spanish and

French Catholic, Puritan, Shaker, and the vision of Dorothy Day and her socialist newspaper, *The Catholic Worker*. In between these interpretive-historical chapters are more personal sections dealing with what Lane calls "mythical landscapes"—e.g., the holy meaning of mountains, the desert landscape of Edward Abbey, and the locale around Galesville, Wisconsin—considered by one itinerant preacher, the Rev. D.O. Van Slyke, as the Garden of Eden.

Particularly useful for EAP readers are four axioms that Lane believes will help one "to understand the character of sacred space" (p. 15): first, sacred space is not chosen, it chooses; second, sacred place is ordinary place, ritually made extraordinary; third, sacred place can be tread upon without being entered; and, fourth, the impulse of sacred place is both centripetal and centrifugal, local and universal (p. 15). Throughout his book, Lane uses these four axioms as a broad conceptual framework that indicates the richness of their interpretive possibilities.

Lane's book is powerfully written and conceptually coherent and strong. Though unfortunately not yet well known, this book is a major contribution to the phenomenology of place and sacredness. On the next page, we offer one sampling of Lane's lucid writing.

Below, title caption and map from a pamphlet by the Rev. D.O. Van Slyke, a 19th-century Methodist preacher who claimed that the banks of the Mississippi River in Trempealeau County, Wisconsin, were the site of the original Garden of Eden.



Lane is often masterful at eliciting interpretive pattern from his own firsthand experiences of place. One example is his childhood encounter with Southern evangelicalism, which he says "was imaginatively provocative for me, as a youth, so long as it remained aniconic, liminal, marginal to the world" (p. 152). He begins with one recollection and then points to underlying experiential pattern:

I was ten years old the afternoon men came to the vacant lot across the street and began driving huge steel stakes into the ground. There on the dead grass where I'd chased kites and fielded grounders all my life, they had erected by evening a three-poled tent of milk-gray canvas. In the warm August weather, its side awnings were left rolled up, revealing neat rows of folding chairs and large wood shavings strewn over the ground. The sudden emergence of this massive, if makeshift place--precisely where there had been no place the day before--enthralled us neighborhood children.

Later that night we crossed the road to see the revival, my parents and I. And to a ten-year-old child without money, its excitement was as grand as a circus--perhaps even grander, with its laced edge of obscure mystery. I watched bare light bulbs hanging precariously from wires in the top of the tent as a woman played a small, portable organ and the evangelist traced with violin bow the high, wavering notes of "The Old Rugged Cross" on the flat edge of a hand-saw held between his knees. Brother and Sister Thomas, they were called, if I remember well....

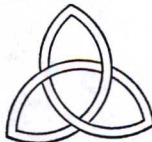
On that night, in that liminal place, I knew myself to have stood for a moment on the edge of some universal reality. It was my first, but not last, encounter with the spirituality of the evangelical revival.

For years now I've been asking myself how to retrieve that experience of growing up on the margins of Southern evangelicalism. How do I discover the second naivete of which [hermeneutical philosopher] Paul Ricoeur speaks--the hard-won ability to reclaim the vitalities of myth on the far shore of critical suspicion? How can I be there again, without also denying all that I have since become?

In asking these questions, I'm intrigued that the process of memory seems so often linked to a sense of place. Recalling the physical environment, the concrete details of a given placed experience, can be the most vivid way of reviving forgotten and intensely powerful images. St. Ignatius Loyola, in his *Spiritual Exercises*, for this reason emphasized the reconstruction of place and application of the five senses in one's reading of the Gospel stories. In such a way, as he well knew, the reading would become a remembering--the rich remembering of *anamnesis*, a remembering that creates, that invites simultaneity and the deepest participation.

As I remember, then, the places that form the context of my earliest encounters with God--places distinctive to the experience of the evangelical revival--I remember then as places charged with liminality. They were places that were, at the same time, *not* places--places caught in transition, existing only on the margins of a structured world. A tent used as a revival hall, a furnace room housing a Sunday School class, a storefront serving as church, a barracks as evangelistic center, a dance hall as place of worship--these were the sites that filled my childhood imagination with the power of a God upsetting all structure and questioning all places once thought secure.

These were places bristling with ambiguity, each used for a purpose utterly different from their original design...their multivalent sense of place left the air that much more charged with possibilities for imagining alternative selves, for rethinking the structure of one's own being (pp. 152-53).



In our postmodern age, there are needed practical ways whereby we, as outsiders in history, might learn ways to return to past symbolic traditions and to re-enter them as empathetic insiders who wish to learn some of the lived-meanings these symbols must have originally had. This understanding might allow us to revitalize these past symbols for our own unsettled situation or to set a foundation of awareness whereby new symbolisms might arise.

As its title suggests, Whone's book is a guide to Christian symbols as they are expressed in medieval churches, monasteries, and cathedrals, particularly those of England. In the introduction, Whone explains that he wrote the book because popular guide books typically assume terms--transept, nave, rood, chancel, and so forth--that many visitors do not know or know only in terms of external, architectural expression: "The result is that though there is plenty to see, there is little conscious looking" (p. v). Whone arranges his book as a glossary that attempts to take the reader beyond the material form toward a sense of the form's experienced symbolic meaning.

Frequently, Whone emphasizes the crucial point that, especially in regard to sacred architecture, the outer is almost always an expression of the inner. To "read" a church thoroughly, therefore, is to find a way to use architectural expression as a kind of window through which one sees less obvious, more existential, significances. He explains in regard to one of the most central Christian symbols--the cross:

...in the symbol of the cross we have a simple crossing of two lines, an archetypal image of all duality--of conflict. Man's cross is his dual nature. The prison of the body is at variance with the freedom of the spirit: on the psychological level, these opposing pulls give rise to great suffering and conflict (a cross state). On the highest conceivable level there is the fundamental duality which Absolute power has made within itself, for once the act of creation has been initiated, it has divided itself into *creator* and *created*. Is there any wonder that the church building came to embody the cross, for it operates on all levels--it is the root of life (p. vi).

We reprint Whone's entry on "east end," which nicely illustrates the layering of meaning among geographical, architectural, and spiritual themes.

EAST END

'East' is from a Germanic root *austr*, 'east', which is connected with Latin *Aurora* and Greek *eos*, both meaning 'dawn.'

The orientation of the church with the altar at the east end derives from ancient pagan traditions.

Monuments, such as Stonehenge, the Parthenon, and the temple at Luxor, have entrances facing the rising sun, which was...regarded as a divine life-giving power. When the form of the basilica was adopted by the early Christians, there was some arbitrariness, but by the time of the monasteries and cathedrals, the ancient orientation had permanently been reaffirmed.

The sun was symbolically seen as the Son, that is as Christ the Son of God, since it was seen to resurrect daily and annually out of darkness, as Christ rose from the darkness of the tomb into eternal life. The power of resurrection in all its forms, whether it is seen in the cosmos at Christmas and Easter, or psychologically in the re-righting of man's falling energies, is a function of male will, of the spirit's affirmation of power over matter, life over death. East is connected with Easter, the festival of the resurrection of light celebrated at the vernal equinox. Thus the male lancet window symbolically belongs to the east end of a church (and where its three divisions are under one arch, the unity of the Trinity), whilst the rose window, as female, belongs to the west end. The entry into a church at the west end symbolizes man's entry into the material world, and through baptism a return towards the rebirth of the spirit. This is also reflected in the two towers on either side of the west door (the duality of the world), and the single central tower above the crossing (the light-filled unity of the spirit). (See 'pillar' and 'lantern'.)

The East as the source of wisdom and truth is found...in fairy story and myth: there is the same quest for the divine intelligence and life power that derives from the light of the sun (pp. 73-75).

Theodore Roszak

This essay includes excerpts from the cultural historian Theodore Roszak's latest book, The Voice of the Earth (NY: Summit Books), published this past summer. Many EAP readers will know Roszak because of his two influential books, The Making of a Counter Culture (1969) and Where the Wasteland Ends (1973).

In Sending EAP this excerpt, he wrote: "Keep your fine magazine coming.... There was a discussion in the Fall 1991 EAP by Anthony Weston that dealt with 'placeless places', a topic that overlaps with a topic in my new book—the environmental impact of design. I deal with the whole of urban culture as a 'design' problem: namely, the context of a certain kind of 'collusive madness'."

Modern psychology has always been plagued by the problem of evidence. Wishing to be more than purely speculative, it has had to find an empirical method for exploring the inaccessible interior of the psyche. By its very nature, the mind is a mystery; it cannot be laid on the table for dissection or x-rayed like the limbs and organs of the body. Wanting to know more about the meaning of human behavior than he could learn from studying muscular reflexes and physiological traces, Freud arrived at the concept of "projection." The hidden contents of the psyche must in some way be projected into the world for analysis.

Thanks to Freud and to Jung after him, psychiatry rapidly developed from a would-be science that had nearly nothing to work with to a philosophical inquiry that had everything to work with, all the myth, lore, art, literature, and religion of the human race.... As bold as psychiatry has become in using cultural contents to probe the unconscious, however, it has been less willing to use political and social institutions for that purpose. This may be because governments, corporations, political parties, armies present themselves as products of deliberation and reason, rather than free fantasy. They seem more "real" than the inventions of art and religion. It has been left to artists like Kafka and De Chirico to capture the nightmarish quality that haunts the streets, the bureaucracies, the law courts of everyday life.

And what of the city, which has grown to become the biggest of all human institutions? Nothing has absorbed more human energy; nothing projects more of our aspirations. Yet modern psychiatry has never undertaken a symbolic reading of the city. Doubtless this is because psychiatrists work from within the city on which they are totally dependent for sustenance,

for the recognition of their peers, for the making of money and the building of careers.

Therapists, tied to the city by their careers and their bank accounts, cannot be expected to treat their clients anywhere but in the city. We have no psychiatry that requires doctor and patient to abscond to a place apart from human works and urban rhythms, not even for as long as a single therapeutic session. Therapy makes no demand for clean air, the songs of birds, the presence of trees or sea, mountain or stream. The troubled soul locked in a tortured ego will never be coaxed to look out and around at something greater, more lordly, more ennobling; a state of nature that invites the mind to contemplate eternal things. Yet common experience tells us that a solitary walk by the river or ocean, a few calm hours in the woods restore the spirit and may produce more insight into our motives and goals than the best labors of the professional analyst. The quiet contemplation of the night sky before one turns to sleep and dreams might do more to touch the mind with a healing grandeur than weeks, months, years of obsessive autobiographical excavation.

My guess would be that by the time most clients have fought their way home on the freeway, whatever good was achieved during their \$100-per-fifty-minute-psychiatric-hour has been undone. They are sunk once more in the collusive madness that they never left behind.

LADDERS

David Appelbaum

David Appelbaum is a philosopher and the author of Voice (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1990), a consideration of the subjugation of voice by thought. He has recently completed Everyday Spirits, which will also be published shortly by SUNY. This essay incorporates sections from a chapter in that book. Address: Philosophy Department, College at New Paltz, New Paltz, NY 12561.

The trail abruptly ends in front of a sheer wall of rock. It had wound easily through the scrub pine, following the escarpment from cleft to cleft. We had walked in each other's footsteps, a silent study of the mountain. Now we stare point blank ahead at gray slate that reaches up nearly to the sky's zenith. No handholds, too soft for protection, no way around. Spirits sink. How could we go on? Must we go back? Just then, from within a hidden chimney, comes the guide's cry, "A ladder!"

The magic power of ladders lies in their swift resolution of an impasse. An unknown blocks the path while on either edge yawns a precipitous drop. To be thwarted, to retreat, or to forge ahead: the first two represent the traditional horns of the dilemma and the last, the way between. The solution appears upon lifting the eyes up. The ladder that begins with feet on the ground points to heaven. Thus Abraham stopped in mid-career in sacrificing his son Isaac and looked up. High in the cedar tree was a ram, provided for reason of the burnt offering. Like a boy, Abraham used its branches as a ladder. Climbing it, he became one with all his ages and lived beyond them. The ladder brought the gift of heaven down to earth.

Ladders come to us themselves like ancient conundrums. The first involves the matter of time. Is the way between heaven and earth--wherein the everyday spirits ply--crossed in a single leap? Or are there steps that one after the other lead to the far side? Is knowledge gained suddenly or by a gradual raising of the veil? Rung by rung, ladders provide access to heights otherwise unbridgeable. They reveal persistent effort that lifts the climber skyward. They prove the value of an incremental approach to elevation.

There is a second conundrum. It involves the matter of direction. Do ladders go up or down? On earth, gravity is the predominant force. Terrestrial life is subject to its downward pull, its desire to level things, and its denial of differences in scale. Because of gravity, water seeks the lowest horizon, boulders plummet from the mountain top, and sand and dust are attracted to the depths. The pull of gravity to the center has the effect of flattening one thing on top of another. Only that which resists gravity survives. The cost to daily life is compression of time and distortion of care. Time foreshortens and charm lapses from what we care for. Gravity dispirits us. It makes for drabness, dullness, and murkiness, and leaves the posture stooped. It is amnesia of height.

When not informed by this subtle spirit, we are lost to ourselves. We are then prone to an organic forgetfulness of the upright position--that position wherein vertebrae make a ladder from the tailbone to base of the skull. A human body is a sack of flesh slung around a ladder, with structural supports and a locomotive option added on. That we, the ladder, are made to stand upright irreversibly distinguishes us from the rest of the animal kingdom. No longer do we see with eyes on the same horizontal as the spine, but from a horizontal on the top--a perpendicular. Not only vision but the passage of energies also are transformed by tilting the skeletal ladder upright. With the uppermost rung nearer to celestial influences, the human alignment acquires startling new possibilities. With aid of this spirit, a man or woman can resonate with the nearness of an inner divinity....

There is a third conundrum. It involves the matter of origin. Where do ladders come from? Do they begin on earth reaching up or in heaven dropping down? The question is one of some subtlety. Though

ladders are raised against gravity, the impulse to regain height descends from above. The very same moment that care-worn tension melts, the ascending vision appears. Memory of the skyward direction is preserved in heaven, safe from the distractions of earth-bound existence. Ladders originate in the immortal realm so that we--forgetfulness withal--may be able to reach that which waits undying within us.

The riddle tells that, for humans, ladders are for climbing. Even going down a ladder is a climb that needs no less muscular exertion than going up. We must always climb because the ladder's origin lies on a level higher than our own, born of the earth's gravity, and all ladders sustain that origin. Only a being not subject to the laws of earth can truly descend.

The duality of direction is summarized in Jacob's dream in which a ladder extends from heaven to earth. In "The Jacob's Ladder," Levartov explains that men and women--even whole nations--climb while angels spring down "from one step to the next, giving a little lift of the wings." The way up is arduous, the way down, of ease. Knowledge of reality descends to us in a moment of harmony. A choiceless freedom permeates the depths. By contrast, determination marks the upward direction. It is a striving--to spark of memory of balance--that lights the ascent.

The genius of ladders lies in design. They push off from earth with their feet and gain height only through repeated lateral support. Sidepieces must be related through crosspieces or else the ladder remains a pole. Ladders thus rely on a secret principle--the vertical can be attained only by strict attention to the horizontal. The same principle operates in the cross, which is a ladder with a missing sidepiece. The principle is rarely understood. The ladder (or cross) provides a way of ascent through care for that which cannot ascend, which always remains on the same level. Height becomes a matter of greater inclusiveness rather than sheer verticality. Fear (or its inverse, rapture) of heights forgets the indirectness of the climb. It moves ahead of itself, obsessed by the notion of utter perpendicularity. The pathology dreams of an angelic existence. It rejects the human way with ladders, the striving to retain balance on each rung.

Most ladders we find already in place, man-made and heaven-laid. Occasionally, however, genius discovers an unknown ladder so that we may stand on our fathers' shoulders and see anew. These explorers, both recorded and unrecorded, leave behind a question. What does compassion do with the ladder after ascent? By the mountaineer's logic, ladders once gone up have no use. All means are relative and absolutely to be abolished when the climb is done, "for there is one," Pound writes in his poem *The Eyes*, "Whose smile more availeth/Than all the age-old knowledge of thy books."

To leave no trace, one "must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it"--thus says Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus*. From the standpoint of rigor, compassion dictates strangely. It is not a matter of making things easy but of allowing the other to find a way to ease. In its career, value lies in the obstacle, the hard ascent, the riddled path. To find a ladder where otherwise is only impasse thus deflates the value--the search. It presumes us gods who seek no thing, a presumption most heavy to bear.

But ladders embrace a duality, as do we who occupy the rungs. As everyday spirits, ladders contact both the relative and the absolute and allow commerce between the two. Compassion, even when sagely, is not always absolute. The unknown mountaineer who spends a week carving a ladder from scrub pine leaves behind a legacy. Others' climbs are possible because of this work. Some achieve a height not otherwise open to them. To the one who devised the ladder, a great debt of gratitude is owed. He or she risked compassion that might have subtracted from personal attainment. The risk always is to interfere in the name of help. The risk is also to withhold in the name of rigor. Between the two sides, the sage walks the edge--which is the ladder narrowed as to become rungliss.



**MIRCEA ELIADE:
RESTORING THE POSSIBILITIES OF PLACE**

Robert Mugerauer

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For Michael Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and other postmodernist thinkers, the belief that we can penetrate to any reality or truth is a delusion imposed for the sake of dominance by one historical regime following another. These thinkers claim that we must courageously confront our present situation with a relentless honesty, which means violently stripping away our comforting illusions and forcefully undoing past interpretations by inserting our own.

At the same time, these postmodernist writers argue that we must not allow any illusory validity to adhere to our arbitrary, though necessary, dislocations and substituted constructions. Instead, we must become open to the only remaining possibility--the free play of language and other sign systems. Interpretation becomes a strategy of liberation from the oppression and bodily bondage of our culturally built world. At the end of the history of human habitation as dislocation, *only violent, liberating displacements would be within our power.*

In striking contrast, other powerful thinkers acknowledge the current crisis in meaning but contend that the skeptical position of Foucault and Derrida is neither necessary nor the most appropriate response. One such thinker is the Rumanian-American scholar of religions *Mircea Eliade*, who works to show how our historical situation and relativistic theories occupy a peculiar place in the history of the world and of the West in particular.

Eliade contends that we still can contact primal sources of meaning and value that have *not* been eliminated, but only ignored, in Western rationalistic views. What is called for, he argues, is a turning away from our metaphysical prison and the seductive image of ourselves as technological and literary creators of meaning. Instead, we must seek new ways to open up to realms beyond ourselves, which still

come to us existentially, manifesting the dimensions of reality in which we can dwell.

PARTICIPATING IN THE SACRED

Eliade uses phenomenological and hermeneutic methods to discern, describe, and interpret the essential features of such phenomena as myths and rituals, religious images and symbols, sacred and profane time and space.¹

As a phenomenologist, Eliade's approach is rigorously empirical, describing but not judging what appears to become manifest in various religious experiences and traditions. As a hermeneuticist, Eliade believes that we can retrieve the substantive meaning of religious phenomena, even from cultures to which we never did, or no longer, belong. Eventually, we may understand reality more fully and find a deeper meaning of the cosmos.

Eliade differs from Derrida and Foucault, not only in his analysis of our contemporary problem, but also in his assessment of the actual situation and possibilities. Eliade recognizes our anxiety in historicism's wake. As a correlate of believing that there is nothing transcendent to history, modern culture generally believes it is trapped inside linear time and unable to escape.

Hence, our current existence in time is understood via historicism where the flow of time changes and determines everything. The result is fear in the face of our impending death and the apocalyptic end of our civilization. We are lonely and estranged from the world.

According to Eliade, historicism and its anxiety have resulted from the displacement of religion as a mode of access to the sacred and the subsequent desecralization of the modern world. He also holds that we unnecessarily "put up with a nihilistic and pessi-

mistic vision of the world" because we have rejected the access to reality which is still possible.² We have imprudently discarded the wisdom and comforts available through contact with other and earlier cultures and with a transcendent reality.

But Eliade also contends that we have a viable option to seeing human habitation as only historically delimited and thus, today, inaccessible. Rather, he believes that sacred reality is still available, either as a means to understand other cultures or in itself.

HIEROPHANY AND MYTH

Throughout his work, Eliade explicates the primal difference between the *sacred* and *profane*. All things in their ordinary, merely natural or made character are profane. They are used and understood in an unexceptional way. But, according to Eliade, the sacred manifests itself in this world by showing itself in or through things: natural things, built forms, language, symbols, and so on. The sacred breaks through the homogenous into the world and establishes the world, making it what it is--an act of sacred manifestation that Eliade calls *hierophany*.³ Since some things participate in the sacred, they become differentiated from the rest: they become saturated with Being and significance.

Further, our built world participates in the sacred cosmos by homology. The built world is able to repeat the sacred patterns, a possibility which means that some things are able to help establish and hold on to the sacred. Things and the built can participate, and thereby have meaning in, the homology between the human condition and the structure of reality.

Built and natural things, however, have this meaning only insofar as they orient toward the cosmic and display the sacred. Eliade claims this orientation and display crucially depend on *myth*--a narration of sacred events that occurred in the beginning, *in illo tempore*.⁴ Myth is crucial because it holds the paradigmatic sacred events themselves.

As opposed to the modern view, which takes myth to be an object of study and curiosity and its supposed source--sacred reality--to be a fiction, Eliade contends that myth is the basis of the lived experience of a culture, since myth makes models manifest, thereby giving meaning and value to life.⁵ The repetition of myths, according to Eliade, enables

culture to recover or repeat the sacred epiphany. In other words, living *mythos*, though primarily "sacred story," becomes linguistic and graphic symbols, and also actions and deeds--that is, rituals--which display the sacred story. And one crucial means of manifesting cosmic order and events is the built environment.

From Eliade's *Images and Symbols*:

The most commonplace existence swarms with images and symbols. Let us repeat...that symbols never disappear from the *reality* of the psyche. The aspect of them may change, but their function remains the same; one has only to look behind the latest masks....

The life of modern [people] is swarming with half-forgotten myths, decaying hierophanies and secularized symbols....They are no less interest for all that. These degraded images present us the only possible point of departure for the spiritual renewal of modern man.

It is of the greatest importance, we believe, to rediscover a whole mythology, if not a theology, still concealed in the most ordinary, everyday life of contemporary man; it will depend upon himself whether he can work his way back to the source and rediscover the profound meanings of all these faded images and damaged myths.

But let no one object that these relics are of no interest to modern man, that they belong to a "superstitious past" happily liquidated by the nineteenth century... or that it is all right for poets [and] children...to satiate themselves with nostalgias and images, but for goodness sake let serious people go on thinking and "making history."

Such a separation between the "serious things of life" and "dreams" does not correspond with reality. Modern man is free to dispense mythologies and theologies, but that will not prevent his continuing to feed upon decayed myths and degraded images....All that essential and indescribable part of man that is called *imagination* dwells in realms of symbolism and still lives upon archaic myths and theologies... hence the failure of man "without imagination;" he is cut off from the deeper reality of life and from his own soul (NY: Sheed & Ward, 1969, pp. 16-20).

IMPLICATIONS

Eliade's hermeneutical phenomenology aims to open to the epiphany and transformation of the sacred, to "the emergence of a reality and the disclosure of its fundamental structures."⁶ The task is to pass beyond ourselves, to the *other*, in a manner congruent with actual experience of access to the sacred (if not the access of an indigenous participant, at least that appropriate to someone on a genuine quest). Eliade moves into religious experience and existence through the "exercise of the phenomenological attitude in opening to this material on its own terms and allowing essences to appear."⁷

Eliade's approach specifically applies to the built environment and yet is broad in its scope of what can be described "from the inside." Most of the human habitation on earth, from earliest times until recently in the West and still in many parts of the world has been a participation by *homo religiosus* in sacred modes of being and building.

In such traditional life, built form and culture belong together, by way of myth, since they both participate in the sacred by being homologous with it. In a sacred cosmos, techniques of orientation are also techniques for the construction of sacred space, and built form is an *imago mundi*.⁸

Originally the work of the gods, such techniques and forms in human habitation have been reproduced and continued through human work. Accordingly, Eliade's hermeneutical phenomenology is of greatest practical importance to understand how specific peoples dwell in the cosmos, according to their particular, local version of the broader traditional homology of human body: house: cosmos.⁹

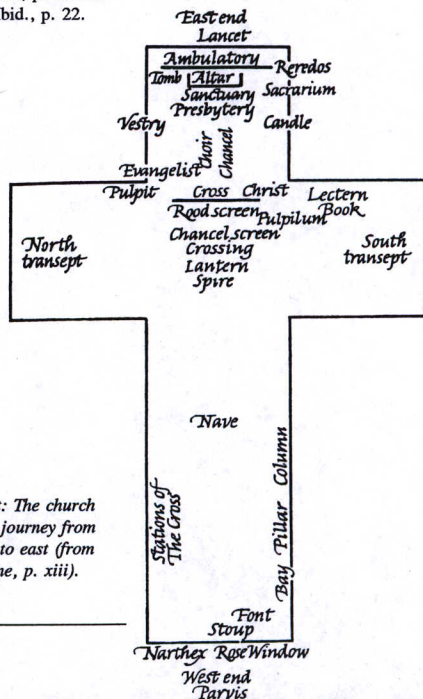
According to this traditional mode of dwelling, the sacred initially established, centered, and ordered the world so that it could become a place *to live*. Because of origin and foundation, a group's sacred dwelling place is opposite "the chaos of the homogeneity and relativity of profane space" and is not intelligible in the latter's terms.¹⁰

For people living immersed within a profane view or otherwise preoccupied with the profane and hence living outside the sacred cosmos (as our current culture is), it would be all but "useless" to look for the sacred. The latter always would be hidden, as unintelligible, since it is wholly other.

Thus, the advantage of Eliade's sympathetic method: allowing the essence of sacred phenomena to appear on their own terms provides access impossible to either merely objectivistic (purely empirical) or subjectivistic approaches, since the deep reality behind the order of the built environment is opposite to both the objective and subjective. Eliade's approach allows for an attempt to recover the underlying cosmological-ontological meaning and structure of primal and many contemporary ways of life.

NOTES

1. Central works by Eliade, all published by Harper & Row in New York, include: *The Sacred and the Profane* (1957); *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries* (1957); *Cosmos and History* (1959); *Myth and Reality* (1963); *The Two and the One* (1965); and *The Quest* (1969).
2. *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, p. 239.
3. See *Myth and Reality*, p. 6; *Sacred and Profane*, p. 11.
4. *Myth and Reality*, p. 1.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
6. *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, p. 15.
7. W. L. Brennenman & S. O. Yarin, *The Seeing Eye* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982).
8. *Sacred and Profane*, p. 29, p. 53.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 172 ff.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 22.



Jeffrey Wattles

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The experience of the starry sky on a clear, quiet night exemplifies the paradox of humankind. On the one hand, we are part of nature as embodied perceivers. On the other hand, we transcend nature as beings who can evaluate and project ourselves forward in imagination and think of what might be and what ought to be. In *Man is Not Alone* (NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1951), Abraham Joshua Heschel argues that we are distinguished from the animals by our capacity for awe in the face of the ineffable: "There are three aspects of nature which command man's attention: power, loveliness, grandeur. Power he exploits, loveliness he enjoys, grandeur fills him with awe....The stirring in our hearts when watching the star-studded sky is something no language can declare" (p. 3, p. 4). Mundane enjoyment of the beauties of nature is deaf to the sublime echo of universe beauty.

Despite the extensive spoiling of nature resulting from the immaturities of finite beings, there are moments when we glimpse a natural scene of breathtaking beauty. The veil of imperfection lifts, and we sense a divine perfection whose threads are woven throughout nature. Thus some romantic painters laid a white glaze underneath their forest greens, earthen browns, and atmospheric rosy pinks to bestow on the painted landscape a concealed luminosity, rarely if ever directly visible. A scene may center about some beautiful focus for attention, such as a mountain. But the experience of beauty involves more than focusing on some harmony of contrasts in an attractive object. Outdoors, more than in an art gallery, the perceiver and the chosen focus are encompassed by the surrounding environment. The beauties of nature provide a respite from the strains of sustained focus on other people or on theoretical and practical goals.

Phenomenology indicates a variety of experiences in which values are involved. Values are part of the *background* of a given object of perception, as a dimension that pervades or is somehow present along

with what we perceive. We may discover values by *appreciating the meanings implicit in facts*. We may *directly focus* on truth and beauty and goodness in sublime thinking. We may *ask for* values for self or others in prayer. A soul-satisfying experience of supreme values is a *foundation for* worship. We may discover a *spiritual source of value within* the mind itself. While engaged in considering or doing something, we may feel spiritual values *in the very quality of transformed awareness of action*.

Present-day philosophy presses us to make our affirmations in a more complex way. On the one hand, spiritual value is present; on the other hand, its presence is partial and retires before the theorizing gaze. Nor is spiritual value constant in nature's various moods, or is it accessible to every attitude. One could attempt a reductive psychological explanation of our rapture under the stars; but the stars are not merely a phenomenon of the variable atmosphere, and neither are values merely human constructs. The affirmation that values are real and are felt does not conflict with the fact that values are actualized in time through personal creativity.

Experiences of supreme value draw us toward our own spiritual nucleus. Ethics today is increasingly situating concepts of duty and value in an inquiry about who we are. Fragment 119 of Heraclitus, revived by Martin Heidegger, states that man's essential dwelling [*ethos*] is (in the nearness of) the spirit [*daimon*, the god]. Indeed, spiritual dwelling is mutual: God is in us, and we are in God. What a different "foundation" for ethics is here! The spirit indweller builds, with the mind's cooperation, a soul for further adventures. At least we can be haunted by such "myths" as we attune to the possibility of revelation.

Our visions of the night sky are not photographs conceivable in a vacuum of human time and space. They culminate journeys forth from our dwellings. They culminate the second moment of the epic cycle:

initially at home, then voyaging forth, and finally returning as did Homer's Odysseus. We climb a hill to look at the stars. The complementary model--for example, in the Neo-Platonic tradition--is taken from an imagined heavenly standpoint, whence the spirit sparks go forth to assist mortals on their journey to a common, universal home from which space extends in a friendly universe. The larger vision, implicit in photographs of our planet taken from space, discloses humankind as one family.

Becoming more alive to the earth as the *on which* of human dwelling, and to the heavens as the *under which* of human dwelling is one path to a grounding of environmental responsibility. Unless we tidy our *on which*, we will rarely sense our *under which*. Unless we look up, the daylight beauties of the local soil and blood and native language will usurp the starlight beauties of being one family, the family of God.

ON LEAVING A HOUSE

*From the front steps
I take the slope up
to the front door.*

*From the hallway
I take the cool
white length leading
to the pumpkin painted kitchen.
From the front room
I take the White Panthers
weighing and measuring out
foodstuffs, leaving lentils and
small dried peas in the cracks
between the floorboards.
From Harriette's room
I take standing in front
of her long mirror;
she argues the length of my skirt.
From the sewing room
I take the hours spent
putting in a zipper
or ironing a seven yard flounce.*

*From the living room
I take the change of paintings
and the no sound of a piano sold.
I take Malcolm's Tonka
trucks from the marble top,
the puzzles, and envelopes too.*

*From the kitchen
I take all the pies,
turkeys, souffles, jams,
bread, and dirty dishes
I have made.
I take the poster dream of
running through the night desert.*

*I take the dish cabinet,
Christopher's light machine, and
the pantry along with Harriette's
twenty quart Revere pan for tofu.
From the back room
I take Pieter's guitar case
which he made with a peachwood handle.
I take the writing
from the downstairs john.*

*From Christopher's room
I take knocking on his door
in shock, asking him to bathe
motorcycle wounds on my knees.
I take his crying in case I died.
From my old room
I take signalling to Lari's
room across the creek.
I also take my A's in Latin.
From the tub room
I take the orangeness
of the walls and towels.
I take stretching my legs
on the towel bar, plie, releve.*

*From the garden
I take the frozen flannel plant
That came back with small white flowers.
I take the long stretch
of the rope swing.*

*I stand in front of the house,
looking at the Bless You on the mailbox.
I take it with me.*

--Gwendolyn Scott

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in Landscape Architecture
at Kansas State University.*

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