

SACRED SPACE

PHILOSOPHICAL PREFACE TO SACRED SPACE AND SACRED TIME

There is the objective world out there and there is the subjective world within, and there is the bridge or relation between the two. Only the relation is graspable. The 'out there' and the 'in here' are given existence through the relation. An out there does not exist except in relation to a knower. But who is the knower? The knower is a set of experiences or relations with the out there and a set of self-referential experiences within. Subject and Object are the two ends of the relation. At the subjective end are attitudes and at the objective end are things. The mapping is not one to one. For one thing there can be many attitudes and there can be one attitude for many things. And there are some items which cannot definitely be assigned to either out there or in here. Is time out there or is it but a way we order things? Is space out there or is it but a way we organize things? Or do time and space themselves exist in both realms, being bridges and relations between knower and known?

If we consider time and space to be out there, then we can agree with the physicist that every instant of time and every point of space are the same. But if time and space are subjective, then experience says the quality of time and quality of space can vary. In the objective view quality of time and space is meaningless. In the subjective view we may experience quality as attributes of time and space. Thus any specialness of time or space is determined by the subjective, by the frame of mind, by attitude. Yet experience is that certain forms and certain sequences invoke certain feelings in us. Certain forms give (subjective) quality to space and certain sequences give quality to time. The forms are out there and the sequences involve the out there. What then are the connections between forms and space and between sequences and time? Should forms be equated to space and sequences to time? Some philosophers (e.g. Leibniz) have maintained space is but the gestalt property of forms. In this case space is purely out there and its qualities are transmitted to us through forms. The issue is then centered on the subjective qualities of forms and we may forget about space. Similarly with time. We need only be concerned with the subjective properties of sequences and forget about time and what it is. On the other hand, others have viewed space as having absolute independent existence. In this case we have the above questions concerning the relations between space and form to answer.

With this background, we leave the philosophical level and explore the feelings and attitudes invoked in us by our experience of forms and sequences.

ON SACRED SPACE

What is it that sets off certain places from all others? When we enter a great cathedral, a venerated memorial, or an ancient temple or tomb, what signals us that we have entered a special sort of space? How is it that our thoughts, our focus and our behavior are changed while in such a space and we are lifted out of our ordinary state of consciousness to a state of receptivity and responsibility not normally experienced?

Many years ago, before the various species of politically inspired violence descended on Southeast Asia--before the days of the Viet Cong, the Green Berets, the Khmer Rouge--I was fortunate in being able to explore some of the ancient temples hidden in the depths of the Cambodian jungle. Entering the jungle I was consumed with a sense of awe and wariness, not so much from a fear of the present, a chance encounter with a snake or large predator, but from some forgotten past that had clung to the jungle over centuries and even millenia. A past that had faded and been forgotten but which was still searching for realization and completion, seeking somehow another incarnation to restore and consummate what had been lost ages ago.

What was but vaguely sensed in the jungle, trenchantly penetrated me as we suddenly came upon the ancient stones of Ankor Thom. We had entered into a sacred space, a space that demanded full focus of our attention and paradoxically welcomed us into its essence while instilling in us a sense that we were trespassers. It was as though in coming here we were simultaneously interfering with and being incorporated into some mysterious process of reincarnation that was taking place in the crumbling stones. I found myself strongly desiring both to depart from the temple as quickly as possible and to remain in its presence forever. It is paradoxes such as this that are the vestibules of ^{spiritual} transformation and emergence. The power of the temple to inject an inescapable paradox into the depths of our psyches, was manifestation that it was truly a sacred space.

cognitive

While somewhat dramatic, this is what a sacred space is about. It is a place that tells you in no uncertain terms that it is not like any other place, and while you are in it you are not like you are at other times. As Mircea Eliade says in his "Cosmic Territorial Imperative":

"The fact that living in the world has a religious value is a result of a specific experience of what can be called "sacred space." Indeed, for religious man, space is not homogeneous. Some parts of it are qualitatively different from others. There exists a sacred space, and hence a strong, significant space. And there are others that are *not* sacred and so without structure, form, or meaning. Nor is this all: for religious man, this spatial non-homogeneity finds expression in the experience of an opposition between space that is sacred and all other spaces, the formless expanses surrounding it."

"The religious experience of the non-homogeneity of space is a primordial experience. When the sacred manifests itself there occurs not only a break in the homogeneity of space but also a revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the artificial non-reality that resides in non-sacred space."

Several attributes of sacred space have been described:

Joseph Campbell says, "A sacred space is where time and eternity are in dialogue."

Lama Govinda says, A sacred space is one which symbolically models the cosmos.

Huston Smith says, "All sacred things must have their place. That being in their place is what makes them sacred, for if they were taken out of their place, the entire order of the universe would be destroyed. Sacred objects therefore contribute to the maintenance of the order of the universe by occupying the proper places allocated to them."

Indeed it has been said by American Indians, that when the white man has destroyed the last sacred place, the world will end.

*A sacred space is one that jars you out of automatic,
presents you with a paradox
Gives you an irreversible event
You can never go back again.*

Sacred spaces build faith, as Eliade points out. But faith also builds sacred spaces. The great temples, cathedrals, shrines of the world derive directly from sacred space or indirectly from the faith created by sacred space.

Some Scandinavian residents of Wisconsin wanted to build a small chapel in the style of the Old Stave Kirke of Norway. Over several years they learned carpentry, wood carving, stained glass, and the basic symbolism of early Christian art. Finally when they had completed their kirke, they looked on their handiwork with the joy of a job well done. But then they realized that not only had their faith built a chapel, but that the chapel had built them. They had had to become worthy of the work to which they dedicated themselves. And there is a message in this for us at the Church of the Incarnation, as we begin to rebuild our church. Let us commit so that as we rebuild a sacred space, it will rebuild us.

March 16, 1994

It is known that Hindus go to their temples, not to worship or praise God. They go to the temple for darsan, which is to get a glimpse of god. In fact, the purpose of life is to collect darsan. They believe one's real worth and wealth is to be measured in how much of God one has collected or experienced. Their temples are designed and built to give glimpses of God.

Indeed, the form of a temple, church, or mosque reflects the theology of the religion that builds it. We see in the basilica form the theology of the western church, God transcendent enshrined in the high altar at the end of the apse. The protestant format, with no altar, the pulpit with its bible being central; the orthodox format emphasizing the vertical dimension, with the material altar hidden behind the iconostasis, forcing the focus upward to the Almighty directly above the nave. Each form provides a different experience.

FORMS AND PLACES OF MYSTERY

Certain forms invite projections onto themselves. And some such forms can accept many projections. For example, the Great Pyramid of Cheops has invited and accepted countless projections on its form, scale, and structure. People have projected onto it history and prophecy, mathematical relations, esoteric and practical applications. Similarly, the great cathedrals have invited and accepted projections some of which may have been actually built in by the designers, but others have come into existence only later through the interaction of the cathedral with the mind and feelings of the beholder.

What is it in certain forms that invite and allow projections to be accepted? What is it that makes certain forms and places psychologically powerful and mysterious?

Is it

- Their history? Have past events stored their energies in the place or form. For example, does a library in some sense contain the presence of all who have written and been written about in the books on its shelves, or is some spirit present in the words themselves? Or on a battlefield is an essence of all who have sacrificed themselves there somehow forever present?
- Time? Does time by itself encrust a form or place with spiritual essences. Does just being ancient make a form or place assume magic and mystery?
- Place itself? Are some locations per se energy centers? Are there special places on the earth having properties that are found nowhere else? Sacred mountains, rocks, groves, rivers...
- Complexity? Are some forms intriguing because they are puzzles, their complexity inviting exploration in the hope of finding a hidden key, a secret treasure?
- that they Liberate us? Do some forms and places have the power to free us from the prison of the mundane? After we have been there we somehow know that our lives will forever be different.
- Ambiguity? The form can take on many aspects, and it cannot be reduced to one meaning, one interpretation. Its nature forbids an unequivocal categorization. This intrigues and challenges us.

Which, if any or all, explain the power of these forms to entertain our projections? Perhaps such forms are mirrors, they reflect some part of ourselves back to us. We **recognize** something in the form that we already know because it is in us. Or perhaps such forms have "frequencies" with which we **resonate**. Both recognition and resonance are aspects of projection. Lastly, we may say that a mystery permits no orthodoxy, and consequently there can be no heresies.

FORMYST. WPW



Our usual view of a sacred space is one in which we feel elation, inspiration, peace or awe. But without the presence of the obverse side of the coin feelings of doubt, frustration, confusion and rejection, no paradox is generated. The true sacred space demands we attend it. We may disdain it or we may be enraptured by it, but we cannot be indifferent to it. We may shut it off but it does not shut us off. It is insisting we open to it. We have many ways of avoiding its call--departure, disdain, intellectual denegration, or criticism, --allowing us to discount it.

A sacred space cannot be recognized except that there be spaces that are not sacred. In going from one to the other we must perceive a change. It is this change that invokes awareness of a new dimension of reality. Sacred spaces reveal to us the presence of the great ocean of spirit in which we are imbedded, just as a change in temperature or the coming of a breeze reveals to us the presence of the great ocean of air in which we are imbedded but ^{of} which we ordinarily are not aware, ~~of~~.

Sacred spaces are of three types:

- 1) Chakras--power points of the earth
- 2) Locations in which the Feng Shui of nature has trapped energy.
- 3) Places in which intentional Feng Shui has altered the conditions so as to trap energy.

Manifestations of Sacred Spaces

- 1) Injection of ambivalence and paradox.
- 2) High energy
- 3) Symbolic isomorphy to the cosmos

Sacred spaces may be created

- 1) by ritual activity
- 2) isomorphic symbolism to the cosmos
- 3) Feng Shui

"Trying to explain the sacred character of certain places and certain times with new myths is fruitless."

"All sacred things must have their place. That being in their place is what makes them sacred for if they were taken out of their place, even in thought, the entire Order of the Universe would be destroyed. Sacred objects, therefore, contribute to the maintenance of the Order of the Universe by occupying the places allocated to them."

From Forgotten Truth by Huston Smith p117 (Levi Strauss)

{[i.e. sacred objects in the right place create sacred space. This can also be said about sacred time. This in fact is what is meant by kairos.

A sacred place is where time and eternity are in dialogue.

Joseph Campbell

The reason that some of the greatest works of art are linked to places, I think, like Florence, Venice, Jerusalem, the Four Corners, is that the making of place includes dance, theater, ritual, costumes, and architecture beautifully suited, all of which links to nature.

Lawrence Halprin, landscape architect

But this is not the entire picture. Having eaten of the fruit of the tree, we participated in more than process. Animals live by process alone, but we have assumed further responsibilities. This means that process per se is not deterministic, but that branch points occur and choices are to be made--choices that alter the course of evolution. Hence knowledge of good and evil. 10/04/88

In the subjective realm there are attitudes. In the objective realm there are things, Their mappings are not one to one.. For one thing that can be many attitudes and there can be one attitude for many things. All specialness to time or place belongs to attitude.

SEPTEMBER 21 1990

What is a sacred space? It is a place in which the gods dwell. When we create a sacred space, we build a place to which we hope to attract the gods so as to keep them always in our midst. And one knows at once on entering such a space whether or not some god has chosen to abide there.

Yesterday I went into the chapel of a small college in a town in Texas. Upon entering the space I knew at once that a god had taken up residence there. The efforts of those who built it had been rewarded; rewarded in the greatest and most lasting way that any human effort can be rewarded: Bringing a god to dwell in our midst.

TEMENOS

Our earthly lives are restricted as though to a narrow shore between a great ocean and a broad expanse of land. Indeed this shore upon which we live lies narrowly confined within three zones, each zone bounded by barriers which we probe only with great difficulty.

First: we live in a narrow zone at the boundary between earth and sky which we call the zoosphere, a zone that maintains for us air, moisture and warmth, while below is impenetrable solidity and above invisible vacuity.

Second: we live in a narrow zone at the boundary between past and future which we call the present, a zone that permits us to exchange energy and information with the world, while behind is only remembrance and ahead only speculation.

Third: we live in a narrow zone at the boundary between the inanimate and the immortal which we call the sentient, a zone that finds love and hope, while before lies decision and after lies death.

Each narrow region contains what we call the known, while without lies the great unknown. Both the impenetrable solidity of the earth and the invisible transparency of the air conceal from us although in different ways. Both our volatile recollections of the past and our misty glimpses of the future delimit what we know by their respective curtains. Both the well spring of life and the high wall of death differently hide our origins and our destinies. It is only that part of us within the confines of the cell defined by these six barriers that we know. Beyond the barriers we know not how far we may extend, how long we may endure, nor how significant we may be.

What is required of those who must walk along this shore whose path is obscured? If our destination is hidden, if only the immediate path may be discerned, how do we proceed? We can only focus on how we walk and where we step, taking each pace with care. There are those who refuse to proceed without knowing their destination. There are those who abandon the path and set off in various directions. But no matter what direction we take, to all the way ahead is obscured. This being so, the wisest no longer dispute the direction to take, but search for how most safely to walk.

But there is further wisdom to be found. Careful observation will permit us to discern greater portions of the path than that which lies immediately within our ken. We notice that certain features repeat after so many steps, and counting we see the same patterns repeating at different scales and the path begins to emerge as a fugue of interlaced familiar melodies. Then despite our limited perception, when we take our steps in time with these melodies, we find the path may be followed not only with safety but with confidence. Then as our skill increases, we find we may also safely step to variations of the familiar themes, and finally we learn confidently to step with joy to melodies new and more beautiful than any we have known.

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TEMENOST, P51

The Architectures of Theology

Historically, the architecture of religious worship has assumed two geometric forms:

First, the linear, in which people face in one direction (usually East) toward a symbolic or iconic presence of a deity: a high altar, a statue, a sacred book. Examples include the basilicas and cathedrals of Europe, synagogues, and many of the temples of India.

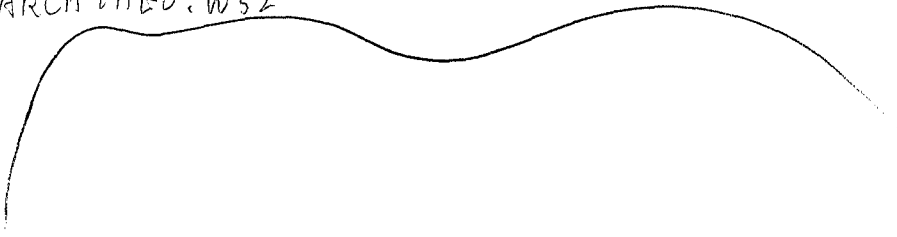
Second, the circular, in which people are gathered around a fixed central focus, such as a fire, a sacrificial altar, or just an empty space. Examples include the kiva of native Americans, the peristyle temples of ancient Greece, and quaker meeting houses.

Until quite recently the Christian tradition has favored the basilica form in one of its several modifications. This form symbolizes the theology of spiritual growth. The interior of the church is divided into a succession of spaces which mark a path to the high altar, the Holy of Hollies, the abode of the deity.. There is a narthex, a transition space from the exterior secular space to the interior sacred space. In many churches one encounters a baptismal font near the entrance which symbolizes both the entrance to the nave and the beginning of an individual's spiritual path. The nave itself is usually a single large space, but segmented by a series of pillars or bays symbolically marking stations along life's way.

The first major transition, within the church is between the nave and the chancel, frequently marked by steps and a rood screen, the gate of death to the world. The successive elevations of nave, chancel, and sanctuary symbolize climbing a holy mountain, a universal symbol of the spiritual path that leads to the deity who dwells on the summit. Passing through the rood screen, climbing the first stairs, entering the chancel one is aware of entering a different and more sacred space. In Anglican churches, the customary choir arrangement in the chancel is antiphonal. This has traditional significance, symbolizing the dialogue between the congregation and God.

Next, elevated another step and separated from the chancel by a rail, is the sanctuary. This has traditionally been a reserve for those celebrating the Eucharist. Within this space is the high altar, the symbolic location of God Transcendent.

ARCHTHEO.W52



In recent years, the circular church form has become more common. This form emphasizes, less the idea of individual spiritual path and more the importance of Christian community. In the center is the Eucharistic table, around which in all quarters are the seats for the congregation. There is no preferred direction and no differences in the interior space. There is the table and the congregation, no barriers between, minimizing the role of the priesthood and supporting the doctrine that all are equal before God. This is not God Transcendent above and beyond, but is God Immanent, Immanuel, God with and within us. There are some, e.g. Joseph Campbell, who feel that this form inculcates a feeling of self sufficiency and leads to the eventual exclusion of God altogether. There is no question but that the two forms reflect, if not two distinct theologies, at least a very significant difference of emphasis.

With the placing of a Eucharistic table at the crossing in churches with transepts, a blend of the two modes was effected. The table at the crossing simulated a quasi-circular format and a high altar at the terminus of the apse preserved the linear format. Perhaps the church of the future, in order to meet both the needs of forging community, and enhancing spiritual development, should incorporate both the circular and linear formats. The design should have flexibility, like a stage, allowing one or the other mode to be used as befits the occasion: small numbers gathered around the eucharistic table, sanctifying the host and partaking of God Immanent; or the entire congregation focused on the Presence beyond the Holy of Hollies worshipping God Transcendent.

These forms are not only symbolic, but affect the attitudes and self image of those in the church. In the circular form, there is a feeling of equality and community, and also feelings of maturity and self sufficiency. We have come of age, accountability is upon our shoulders. We are active participants in God's plan. In the linear form, on the other hand, there remains a feeling of dependence and need, we are not self sufficient, we are still sheep in need of the good shepherd. But the linear form possesses a dynamic, a sense of movement to a higher potential, to spiritual growth. It is made for processions with their power of movement from space to space to space. This in contrast to the static mood inherent in the circular form. But without the High Altar, the Holy of Hollies, there is no place for God.

On Architectural Forms of Worship

Historically, communal worship has assumed two geometric forms:

First, the circular, in which people, considered as equals, are gathered around a central focus, an *arche*, such as a fire, sacrificial altar, eucharistic table, or empty space. Historical examples include the kiva, peristyle temples, quaker meeting houses.



Good modern examples are churches such as All Souls, Schenectady, NY (Edward Durell Stone), St James, the Fisherman, Wellfleet, MA (Olav Hammarstrom). This form is increasingly favored by monastic orders.

Second, the linear, in which people face in one direction (usually East) toward the *Holy of Hollies*, a symbolic or iconic presence of a deity: a high altar, a statue, a painting, a sacred book. In this form there are usually divisions in the building in the form of steps, rails, screens, doors, indicating a sequence of increasing sanctity as the *Holy of Hollies* is approached-- the garden, the narthex, the nave, the chancel, the sanctuary. Examples of this hierarchical form are found from the temples and shrines of Japan and India to the basilicas and cathedrals of Europe. Modern examples, employing a "post Gothic" format, in which the beam structure of the roof reinforces the symbolic steps, include The Wayfarers Chapel, Palos Verdes, CA (Lloyd Wright), Thorncrown Chapel, Eureka Springs, AR (E. Fay Jones).

With the introduction of transepts, the Gothic cathedral effected a blend of the two modes. A eucharistic table at the crossing simulated a quasi-circular format (celtic cross) and a high altar at the terminus of the apse preserved the linear format. A second approach to having both the eucharistic table and the high altar is in the semi-circular form. An excellent example is St. Matthew's, Pacific Palisades, CA (Charles Moore).

Perhaps to meet the needs both of forging community and enhancing spiritual development, a church should incorporate both the circular and linear formats. A possible future approach to this need would be a design based on a temporal pattern. That is, the design should have flexibility, like a stage, allowing one or the other mode to be used as befits the occasion: small numbers gathered around the eucharistic table, sanctifying the host and partaking of God Immanent; or the entire congregation focused on the Presence beyond the Holy of Hollies, praising and worshiping God Transcendent.

But architectural forms are not only symbolic, they affect the attitudes of the participants. In the circular form, there is a feeling of equality and community, but also a feeling of maturity with its derivative feeling of self sufficiency, "we are coming of age, we are no longer sheep". In the linear form, there remains a feeling of dependence and need, "we shall never be completely self sufficient, we are still the children of a loving parent". But the linear form possesses a dynamic, especially when enhanced with procession, that vividly symbolizes the processes of spiritual growth. This in contrast to the more static mood of the circular form.

But whatever the form, without the High Altar, the Holy of Hollies, God is ultimately displaced from the church.

Some thoughts on a visit to the Armstrong Redwood Grove 10/30/87

Upon entering the grove, one is very aware of entering a different space. The vibes suddenly change. It is difficult to articulate the message one receives. First, one gets the feeling that one is an intruder, not exactly welcome but of necessity tolerated. Then there is the feeling of being regarded somewhat contemptuously, of being judged, or rather prejudged. The mood is most solemn and there seems to be a soporific spell cast on everything. The primary message of the grove is DO NOT DISTURB, a message also passed on by the forestry people who undoubtedly have come under the spell of the grove and serve unconsciously as agents of the giants, independent of any of our national conservation values. My reaction is to try to avoid coming under the spell and maintain "scientific objectivity" which is to say to keep inviolate my own subjective prejudices. Certainly I could not rock their boat if I wanted to.

These giants have created an environment in which they can indefinitely survive. Ring counts reveal many to be over 1300 years old. But the number of species in their ecological complex is surprisingly limited. They are almost a self sufficient species depending only on each other for the preservation of the environment which sustains them. Some mosses and ferns together with their own droppings seem sufficient to maintain the moisture and soil conditions necessary for equilibrium. What prevents a proliferation of other species who would thrive in this type of "rain forest" environment is the absence of light. In fact the giants have removed practically all competition by appropriating all the sunlight and monopolizing the source of energy. But they have also cut off light from their own offspring. Only here and there a very limited number of young redwoods survive. And what is most significant, there is no "middle class". There are only the giants and very young, only those centuries old and those a decade or two or less. Evidently aspirations of the young to become part of the grove are illusory. Upon reaching a certain size their energy requirements can no longer be met and they fail to survive. I am sure that the remains of smaller trees have been removed by man. Only here and there on the forest floor are the remains of giants, who have succumbed to fire, wind or the vandalism of man.

How did such a configuration come about? More typical ecological complexes are dynamic. There is birth, ageing, death and recycling. Young trees sprout, grow up, and eventually, if all goes well, reach a maximum size, then in time succumb. The key that differentiates a dynamic ecology from that of the redwood grove, seems to be the limit to maximum size.

Variety is also an important parameter in every complex. The grove ecology appears to function with very restricted variety, but also there are only a limited number of giants. More dynamic ecologies have both a greater variety of species and greater numbers of members within each species. There seems to be some sort of "equipartition" relation between numbers and variety. The number allowed within each species depends on the breadth of the variety of species. The greater the variety, the larger the permitted population of each species.

From one afternoon's observation, I have generalized to the extent of surmising that number within a species, $n(s_1)$, $n(s_2)$, .. the variety of species i.e. the number of different species, $v(s)$, the maximum sizes (masses, heights, ...), $m(s_1)$, $m(s_2)$, ... and the dynamism or maximum ages $a(s_1)$, $a(s_2)$, ... are all parameters of basic ecological significance. Some functional guesswork:

I. The equipartition relation:
 $n(s_1) = n(s_2) = n(s_3) = \dots = v(s)$
 Which is to say the greater the variety,
 the greater the numbers within each species.

II. The maximum size-maximum age relation:
 $m(s)$ varies directly with $a(s)$
 What is revealed here is that there are two

basic types of organism. 1) Those that follow sigmoidal growth curves, reaching maxima, and 2) those whose size appears unbounded. The above relation is for genre 2)

- III. The maximum size-variety relation:
v(s) varies inversely with m(s)
It follows from the first relation that
n(s) also varies inversely with m(s)
- IV. We finally suspect some bound on the entire mass of the complex.