

CHRISTIAN  
NORBERG-SCHULZ

# GENIUS LOCI

TOWARDS A  
PHENOMENOLOGY OF  
ARCHITECTURE

*RIZZOLI*  
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## PREFACE

"Logic is doubtless unshakable,  
but it cannot withstand  
a man who wants to live."

Franz Kafka: *The Trial*

The present book forms a sequel to my theoretical works *Intentions in Architecture* (1963) and *Existence, Space and Architecture* (1971). It is also related to my historical study *Meaning in Western Architecture* (1975). Common to all of them is the view that architecture represents a means to give man an "existential foothold". My primary aim is therefore to investigate the *psychic* implications of architecture rather than its practical side, although I certainly admit that there exists an interrelationship between the two aspects. In *Intentions in Architecture* the practical, "functional", dimension was in fact discussed as part of a comprehensive system. At the same time, however, the book stressed that the "environment influences human beings, and this implies that the purpose of architecture transcends the definition given by early functionalism". A thorough discussion of perception and symbolization was therefore included, and it was emphasized that man cannot gain a foothold through scientific understanding alone. He needs *symbols*, that is, works of art which "represent life-situations". The conception of the work of art as a "concretization" of a life-situation is maintained in the present book. It is one of the basic needs of man to experience his life-situations as meaningful, and the purpose of the work of art is to "keep" and transmit meanings. The concept of "meaning" was also introduced in *Intentions in Architecture*. In general, the early book aimed at understanding architecture in *concrete* "architectural" terms, an aim which I still consider particularly important. Too much confusion is created today by those who talk about everything else when they discuss architecture! My writings therefore reflect a *belief* in architecture; I do not accept that architecture, vernacular or monumental, is a luxury or perhaps

something which is made "to impress the populace" (Rapoport). There are not different "kinds" of architecture, but only different situations which require different solutions in order to satisfy man's physical and psychic needs.

My general aim and approach has therefore been the same in all the writings mentioned above. As time has passed, however, a certain change in method has become manifest. In *Intentions in Architecture* art and architecture were analyzed "scientifically", that is, by means of methods taken over from natural science. I do not think that this approach is wrong, but today I find other methods more illuminating.<sup>1</sup> When we treat architecture analytically, we miss the concrete environmental character, that is, the very quality which is the object of man's identification, and which may give him a sense of existential foothold. To overcome this lack, I introduced in *Existence, Space and Architecture* the concept of "existential space". "Existential space" is not a logico-mathematical term, but comprises the basic relationships between man and his environment. The present book continues the search for a concrete understanding of the environment. The concept of existential space is here divided in the complementary terms "space" and "character", in accordance with the basic psychic functions "orientation" and "identification". Space and character are not treated in a purely philosophical way (as has been done by O. F. Bollnow), but are directly related to architecture, following the definition of architecture as a "concretization of existential space". "Concretization" is furthermore explained by means of the concepts of "gathering" and "thing". The word "thing" originally meant a gathering, and the meaning of anything consists in what it gathers. Thus Heidegger said: "A thing gathers world".

The philosophy of Heidegger has been the catalyst which has made the present book possible and determined its approach. The wish for understanding architecture as a concrete phenomenon, already expressed in *Intentions in Architecture*, could be satisfied in the present book, thanks to Heidegger's essays on language and aesthetics, which have been collected and admirably translated into English by A. Hofstadter (*Poetry, Language, Thought*, New York 1971). First of all I owe to Heidegger the concept of *dwelling*. "Existential foothold" and "dwelling" are synonyms, and "dwelling", in an existential sense, is the purpose of architecture. Man dwells when he can orientate himself within and identify himself with an environment, or, in short, when he experiences the environment as meaningful. Dwelling therefore implies something more than "shelter". It implies that the spaces where life occurs are *places*, in the true sense of the word. A place is a space which has a distinct character. Since ancient times the *genius loci*, or "spirit of place", has been recognized as the concrete reality man has to face and come to terms with in his daily life. Architecture means to visualize the *genius loci*, and the task of the architect is to create meaningful places, whereby he helps man to dwell.

I am well aware of the shortcomings of the present book. Many problems could only be treated in a very sketchy way, and need further elaboration. The book represents, however, a first step towards a "phenomenology of architecture", that is, a theory which understands architecture in concrete, existential terms. The conquest of the existential dimension is in fact the main purpose of the present book. After decades of abstract, "scientific" theory, it is urgent that we return to a qualitative, phenomenological understanding of architecture. It

does not help much to solve practical problems as long as this understanding is lacking. The book therefore does not treat economical and social problems. The existential dimension is not "determined" by the socio-economical conditions, although they may facilitate or impede the (self-) realization of certain existential structures. The socio-economical conditions are like a picture-frame; they offer a certain "space" for life to take place, but do not determine its existential meanings. The existential meanings have deeper roots. They are determined by the structures of our *being-in-the-world*, which have been analyzed by Heidegger in his classical work "Being and Time" (*Sein und Zeit*, 1926). In his essay "Building Dwelling Thinking" (1951), Heidegger moreover related basic existential structures to the functions of building and dwelling, and in "The Thing" (1950) he demonstrated the fundamental importance of the concept of "gathering". Modern architects have in general excluded the existential dimension, although some of them spontaneously recognized its significance. Thus Le Corbusier wrote: "The purpose of architecture is to *move us*. Architectural emotion exists when the work rings within us in tune with a universe whose laws we obey, recognize and respect". (*Vers une architecture*, 1923). Only with Louis Kahn, however, the existential dimension has regained its true importance, and in his question: "What does the building want to be?", the problem is posed in its essential form.

The existential dimension ("truth") becomes manifest in history, but its meanings transcend the historical situation. History, on the other hand, only becomes meaningful if it represents new concretizations of the existential dimension. In general the concretization of the existential dimension depends on *how*

things are made, that is, it depends on form and technology ("inspired technology", Louis Kahn said). This also includes the "how" of the Natural environment. In the present book we have therefore chosen to approach the existential dimension in terms of place. The place represents architecture's share in truth. The place is the concrete manifestation of man's dwelling, and his identity depends on his belonging to places.

I want to thank all those colleagues and students who have given me inspiration and help. In particular thanks go to my wife Anna Maria De Dominicis for her criticism and untiring help.

Because of the composite nature of the book I have not included any bibliography. All references are found in the foot-notes.

### 1. *The Phenomenon of Place*

Our everyday life-world consists of concrete "phenomena". It consists of people, of animals, of flowers, trees and forests, of stone, earth, wood and water, of towns, streets and houses, doors, windows and furniture. And it consists of sun, moon and stars, of drifting clouds, of night and day and changing seasons. But it also comprises more intangible phenomena such as feelings. This is what is "given", this is the "content" of our existence. Thus Rilke asks: "Are we perhaps *here* to say: house, bridge, fountain, gate, jug, fruit tree, window, - at best: column, tower...". Everything else, such as atoms and molecules, numbers and all kinds of "data", are abstractions or tools which are constructed to serve other purposes than those of everyday life. Today it is common to give more importance to the tools than our life-world.

The concrete things which constitute our given world are interrelated in complex and perhaps contradictory ways. Some of the phenomena may for instance comprise others. The forest consists of trees, and the town is made up of houses. "Landscape" is such a comprehensive phenomenon. In general we may say that some phenomena form an "environment" to others.

A concrete term for environment is place. It is common usage to say that acts and occurrences take place. In fact it is meaningless to imagine any happening without reference to a locality. Place is evidently an integral part of existence!

What, then, do we mean with the word "place"? Obviously we mean something more than abstract location. We mean a totality made up of concrete things having material substance, shape, texture and colour. Together these things determine an "environmental character",

Oslo, June 1976



which is the essence of place. In general a place is given as such a character or "atmosphere". A place is therefore a qualitative, "total" phenomenon, which we cannot reduce to any of its properties, such as spatial relationships, without losing its concrete nature out of sight.

Everyday experience moreover tells us that different actions need different environments to take place in a satisfactory way. As a consequence towns and houses consist of a multitude of particular places. This fact is of course taken into consideration by current theory of planning and architecture, but so far the problem has been treated in a too abstract way. "Taking place" is usually understood in a quantitative, "functional" sense, with implications such as spatial distribution and dimensioning. But are not "functions" inter-human and similar everywhere? Evidently not. "Similar" functions, even the most basic ones such as sleeping and eating, take place in very different ways, and demand places with different properties, in accordance with different cultural traditions and different environmental conditions. The functional approach therefore left out the place as a concrete "here" having its particular identity.

Being qualitative totalities of a complex nature, places cannot be described by means of analytic, "scientific" concepts. As a matter of principle science "abstracts" from the given to arrive at neutral, "objective" knowledge.

What is lost, however, is the everyday life-world, which ought to be the real concern of man in general and planners and architects in particular<sup>2</sup>. Fortunately a way out of the impasse exists, that is, the method known as *phenomenology*.

Phenomenology was conceived as a "return to things", as opposed to ab-

stractions and mental constructions. So far phenomenologists have been mainly concerned with ontology, psychology, ethics and to some extent aesthetics, and have given relatively little attention to the phenomenology of the daily environment. A few pioneer works however exist, but they hardly contain any direct reference to architecture<sup>3</sup>. A phenomenology of architecture is therefore urgently needed.

Some of the philosophers who have approached the problem of our life-world, have used language and literature as sources of "information". Poetry in fact is able to concretize those totalities which elude science, and may therefore suggest how we might proceed to obtain the needed understanding. One of the poems used by Heidegger to explain the nature of language, is the splendid *A Winter Evening* by Georg Trakl<sup>4</sup>. The words of Trakl also serve our purpose very well, as they make present a total life-situation where the aspect of place is strongly felt.

#### A WINTER EVENING

Window with falling snow is arrayed,  
Long tolls the vesper bell,  
The house is provided well,  
The table is for many laid.

Wandering ones, more than a few,  
Come to the door on darksome courses.  
Golden blooms the tree of graces  
Drawing up the earth's cool dew.

Wanderer quietly steps within;  
Pain has turned the threshold to stone.  
There lie, in limpid brightness shown,  
Upon the table bread and wine<sup>5</sup>.

We shall not repeat Heidegger's profound analysis of the poem, but rather point out a few properties which illuminate our problem. In general, Trakl uses *concrete* images which we all know from our everyday world. He talks

about "snow", "window", "house", "table", "door", "tree", "threshold", "bread and wine", "darkness" and "light", and he characterizes man as a "wanderer". These images, however, also imply more general structures. First of all the poem distinguishes between an *outside* and an *inside*. The *outside* is presented in the first two verses of the first stanza, and comprises *natural* as well as *man-made* elements. Natural place is present in the falling snow, which implies winter, and by the evening. The very title of the poem "places" everything in this natural context. A winter evening, however, is something more than a point in the calendar. As a concrete presence, it is experienced as a set of particular qualities, or in general as a *Stimmung* or "character" which forms a background to acts and occurrences. In the poem this character is given by the snow falling on the window, cool, soft and soundless, hiding the contours of those objects which are still recognized in the approaching darkness. The word "falling" moreover creates a sense of *space*, or rather: an implied presence of earth and sky. With a minimum of words Trakl thus brings a total natural environment to life. But the outside also has man-made properties. This is indicated by the vesper bell, which is heard everywhere, and makes the "private" inside become part of a comprehensive, "public" totality. The vesper bell, however, is something more than a practical man-made artifact. It is a symbol, which reminds us of the common values which are at the basis of that totality. In Heidegger's words: "The tolling of the evening bell brings men, as mortals, before the divine"<sup>6</sup>.

The *inside* is presented in the next two verses. It is described as a house, which offers man shelter and security by being enclosed and "well provided". It has however a window, an opening which

2. *Outside-inside, on the ground under the sky.*  
Hildebrandt: Göllersdorf, Chapel.
3. *Outside-inside. Giglio Castello.*
4. *Stimmung. Nordic forest near Oslo.*

makes us experience the inside as a complement to the outside. As a final focus within the house we find the table, which "is for many laid". At the table men come together, it is the *centre* which more than anything else constitutes the inside. The character of the inside is hardly told, but anyhow present. It is luminous and warm, in contrast to the cold darkness outside, and its silence is pregnant with potential sound. In general the inside is a comprehensible world of *things*, where the life of "many" may take place.

In the next two stanzas the perspective is deepened. Here the *meaning* of places and things comes forth, and man is presented as a wanderer on "darksome courses". Rather than being placed safely within the house he has created for himself, he comes from the outside, from the "path of life", which also represents man's attempt at "orientating" himself in the given unknown environment.

But nature also has another side: it offers the grace of growth and blossom. In the image of the "golden" tree, earth and sky are unified and become a *world*. Through man's labour this world is brought inside as bread and wine, whereby the inside is "illuminated", that is, becomes meaningful.

Without the "sacred" fruits of sky and earth, the inside would remain "empty". The house and the table receive and gather, and bring the world "close". *To dwell in a house therefore means to inhabit the world*. But this dwelling is not easy; it has to be reached on dark paths, and a threshold separates the outside from the inside. Representing the "rift" between "otherness" and manifest meaning, it embodies suffering and is "turned to stone". In the threshold, thus, the *problem* of dwelling comes to the fore.

Trakl's poem illuminates some essential



phenomena of our life-world, and in particular the basic properties of place. First of all it tells us that every situation is local as well as general. The winter evening described is obviously a local, nordic phenomenon, but the implied notions of outside and inside are general, as are the meanings connected with this distinction. The poem hence concretizes basic properties of existence. "Concretize" here means to make the general "visible" as a concrete, local situation. In doing this, the poem moves in the opposite direction of scientific thought. Whereas science departs from the "given", poetry brings us back to the concrete things, uncovering the meanings inherent in the life-world<sup>8</sup>.

Furthermore Trakl's poem distinguishes between natural and man-made elements, whereby it suggests a point of departure for an "environmental phenomenology".

Natural elements are evidently the primary components of the given, and places are in fact usually defined in geographical terms. We must repeat however, that "place" means something more than location.

Various attempts at a description of natural places are offered by current literature on "landscape", but again we find that the usual approach is too abstract, being based on "functional" or perhaps "visual" considerations<sup>9</sup>. Again we must turn to philosophy for help. As a first, fundamental distinction Heidegger introduces the concepts of "earth" and "sky", and says: "Earth is the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal...". "The sky is the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the glitter of the stars, the year's seasons, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, the drifting clouds and

blue depth of the ether..."<sup>10</sup>. Like many fundamental insights, the distinction between earth and sky might seem trivial. Its importance however comes out when we add Heidegger's definition of "dwelling": "The way in which you are and I am, the way in which we humans are on the earth, is dwelling...". But "on the earth" already means "under the sky"<sup>11</sup>. He also calls what is between earth and sky *the world*, and says that "the world is the house where the mortals dwell"<sup>12</sup>. In other words, when man is capable of dwelling the world becomes an "inside". In general, nature forms an extended comprehensive totality, a "place", which according to local circumstances has a particular identity. This identity, or "spirit", may be described by means of the kind of concrete, "qualitative" terms Heidegger uses to characterize earth and sky, and has to take this fundamental distinction as its point of departure. In this way we might arrive at an existentially relevant understanding of *landscape*, which ought to be preserved as the main designation of natural places. Within the landscape, however, there are subordinate places, as well as natural "things" such as Trakl's "tree". In these things the meaning of the natural environment is "condensed". The man-made parts of the environment are first of all "settlements" of different scale, from houses and farms to villages and towns, and secondly "paths" which connect these settlements, as well as various elements which transform nature into a "cultural landscape". If the settlements are organically related to their environment, it implies that they serve as *foci* where the environmental character is condensed and "explained". Thus Heidegger says: "The single houses, the villages, the towns are works of building which within and around themselves gather the multifarious in-between. The buildings bring

the earth as the inhabited landscape close to man, and at the same time place the closeness of neighbourly dwelling under the expanse of the sky"<sup>13</sup>. The basic property of man-made places is therefore concentration and enclosure. They are "insides" in a full sense, which means that they "gather" what is known. To fulfill this function they have openings which relate to the outside. (Only an *inside* can in fact have openings). Buildings are furthermore related to their environment by resting on the ground and rising towards the sky. Finally the man-made environments comprise artifacts or "things", which may serve as internal foci, and emphasize the gathering function of the settlement. In Heidegger's words: "The thing things world", where "thinging" is used in the original sense of "gathering", and further: "Only what conjoins itself out of world becomes a thing"<sup>14</sup>.

Our introductory remarks give several indications about the *structure* of places. Some of these have already been worked out by phenomenologist philosophers, and offer a good point of departure for a more complete phenomenology.

A first step is taken with the distinction of natural and man-made phenomena, or in concrete terms between "landscape" and "settlement". A second step is represented by the categories of earth-sky (horizontal-vertical) and outside-inside.

These categories have spatial implications, and "space" is hence re-introduced, not primarily as a mathematical concept, but as an existential dimension<sup>15</sup>. A final and particularly important step is taken with the concept of "character". Character is determined by *how* things are, and gives our investigation a basis in the concrete phenomena of our everyday life-world. Only in this way we may fully grasp the *genius loci*; the "spirit of place" which

5. *Stimmung. Desert village outside Khartoum.*  
6. *Inside. Old Norwegian cottage, Telemark.*

the ancients recognized as that "opposite" man has to come to terms with, to be able to dwell<sup>16</sup>.

## 2. *The Structure of Place*

Our preliminary discussion of the phenomena of place led to the conclusion that the structure of place ought to be described in terms of "landscape" and "settlement", and analyzed by means of the categories "space" and "character". Whereas "space" denotes the three-dimensional organization of the elements which make up a place, "character" denotes the general "atmosphere" which is the most comprehensive property of any place. Instead of making a distinction between space and character, it is of course possible to employ one comprehensive concept, such as "lived space"<sup>17</sup>. For our purpose, however, it is practical to distinguish between space and character. Similar spatial organizations may possess very different characters according to the concrete treatment of the space-defining elements (the *boundary*). In history the basic spatial forms have been given ever new characterizing interpretations<sup>18</sup>. On the other hand it has to be pointed out that the spatial organization puts certain limits to characterization, and that the two concepts are interdependent.

"Space" is certainly no new term in architectural theory. But space can mean many things. In current literature we may distinguish between two uses: space as three-dimensional geometry, and space as perceptual field<sup>19</sup>. None of these however are satisfactory, being abstractions from the intuitive three-dimensional totality of everyday experience, which we may call "concrete space". Concrete human actions in fact do not take place in an homogeneous isotropic space, but in a space distinguished by qualitative differences, such as "up" and "down". In architec-





7. The path of the wanderer. Sacro Speco, Subiaco.



tural theory several attempts have been made to define space in concrete, qualitative terms. Giedion, thus uses the distinction between "outside" and "inside" as the basis for a grand view of architectural history<sup>20</sup>. Kevin Lynch penetrates deeper into the structure of concrete space, introducing the concepts of "node" ("landmark"), "path", "edge" and "district", to denote those elements which form the basis for men's orientation in space<sup>21</sup>. Paolo Portoghesi finally defines space as a "system of places", implying that the concept of space has its roots in concrete situations, although spaces may be described by means of mathematics<sup>22</sup>. The latter view corresponds to Heidegger's statement that "spaces receive their being from locations and not from "space"<sup>23</sup>. The outside-inside relation which is a primary aspect of concrete space, implies that spaces possess a varying degree of *extension* and *enclosure*. Whereas landscapes are distinguished by a varied, but basically continuous extension, settlements are enclosed entities. Settlement and landscape therefore have a *figure-ground* relationship. In general any enclosure becomes manifest as a "figure" in relation to the extended ground of the landscape. A settlement loses its identity if this relationship is corrupted, just as much as the landscape loses its identity as comprehensive extension. In a wider context any enclosure becomes a *centre*, which may function as a "focus" for its surroundings. From the centre space extends with a varying degree of continuity (rhythm) in different directions. Evidently the main directions are horizontal and vertical, that is, the directions of earth and sky. *Centralization*, *direction* and *rhythm* are therefore other important properties of concrete space. Finally it has to be mentioned that natural ele-

8. Settlement in the landscape. Capracotta, Isernia.

9. Urban inside. Il Campo, Siena.

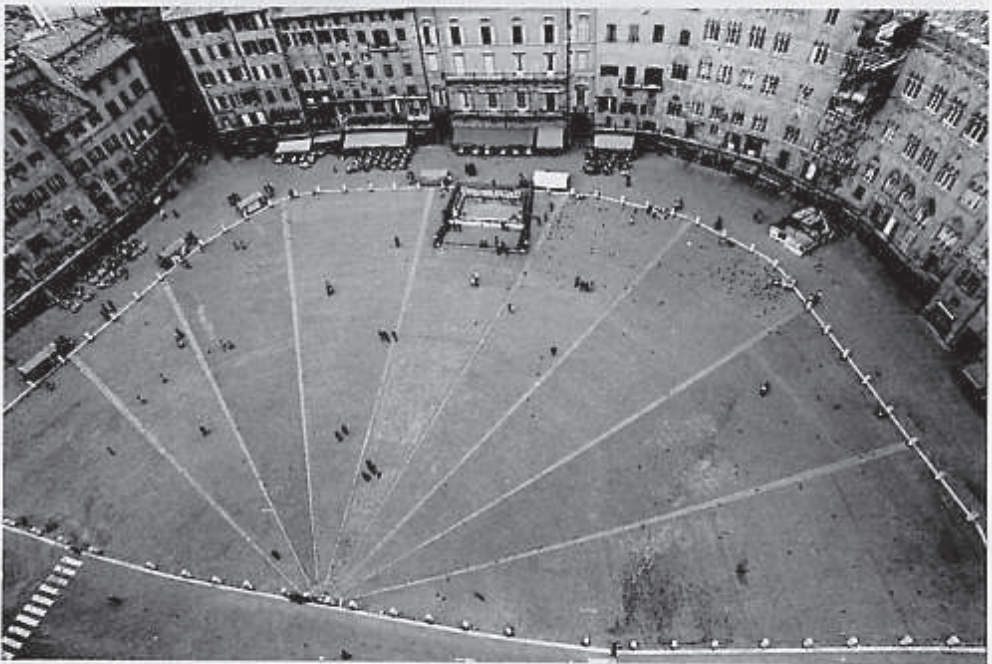
ments (such as hills) and settlements may be clustered or grouped with a varying degree of *proximity*.

All the spatial properties mentioned are of a "topological" kind, and correspond to the well-known "principles of organization" of Gestalt theory. The primary existential importance of these principles is confirmed by the researches of Piaget on the child's conception of space<sup>24</sup>.

Geometrical modes of organization only develop later in life to serve particular purposes, and may in general be understood as a more "precise" definition of the basic topological structures. The topological enclosure thus becomes a circle, the "free" curve a straight line, and the cluster a grid. In architecture geometry is used to make a general comprehensive system manifest, such as an inferred "cosmic order".

Any enclosure is defined by a boundary. Heidegger says: "A boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that, from which something begins its presencing"<sup>25</sup>. The boundaries of a built space are known as *floor*, *wall* and *ceiling*. The boundaries of a landscape are structurally similar, and consist of ground, horizon, and sky. This simple structural similarity is of basic importance for the relationship between natural and man-made places. The enclosing properties of a boundary are determined by its *openings*, as was poetically intuited by Trakl when using the images of window, door and threshold. In general the boundary, and in particular the wall, makes the spatial structure visible as continuous or discontinuous extension, direction and rhythm.

"Character" is at the same time a more general and a more concrete concept than "space". On the one hand it denotes a general comprehensive at-



10. Wall. S. Gimignano, Toscana.



mosphere, and on the other the concrete form and substance of the space-defining elements. Any real *presence* is intimately linked with a character<sup>26</sup>. A phenomenology of character has to comprise a survey of manifest characters as well as an investigation of their concrete determinants. We have pointed out that different actions demand places with a different character. A dwelling has to be "protective", an office "practical", a ball-room "festive" and a church "solemn". When we visit a foreign city, we are usually struck by its particular character, which becomes an important part of the experience. Landscapes also possess character, some of which are of a particular "natural" kind. Thus we talk about "barren" and "fertile", "smiling" and "threatening" landscapes. In general we have to emphasize that *all places have character*, and that character is the basic mode in which the world is "given". To some extent the character of a place is a function of time; it changes with the seasons, the course of the day and the weather, factors which above all determine different conditions of *light*.

The character is determined by the material and formal constitution of the place. We must therefore ask: *how* is the ground on which we walk, *how* is the sky above our heads, or in general; *how* are the boundaries which define the place. How a boundary is depends upon its formal articulation, which is again related to the way it is "built". Looking at a building from this point of view, we have to consider how it rests on the ground and how it rises towards the sky.

Particular attention has to be given to its lateral boundaries, or walls, which also contribute decisively to determine the character of the *urban* environment.

We are indebted to Robert Venturi for having recognized this fact, after it had been considered for many years "im-

11. Floor. Street in Sermoneta, Lazio.  
 12. Making. St. Mary's Woolnoth, London by Hawksmoor.

moral" talk about "façades"<sup>27</sup>. Usually the character of a "family" of buildings which constitute a place, is "condensed" in characteristic *motifs*, such as particular types of windows, doors and roofs. Such motifs may become "conventional elements", which serve to transpose a character from one place to another. In the boundary, thus, character and space come together, and we may agree with Venturi when he defines architecture as "the wall between the inside and the outside"<sup>28</sup>.

Except for the intuitions of Venturi, the problem of character has hardly been considered in current architectural theory. As a result, theory has to a high extent lost contact with the concrete life-world. This is particularly the case with technology, which is today considered a mere means to satisfy practical demands. Character however, depends upon *how things are made*, and is therefore determined by the technical realization ("building"). Heidegger points out that the Greek word *techné* meant a creative "re-vealing" (*Entbergen*) of truth, and belonged to *poiesis*, that is, "making"<sup>29</sup>. A phenomenology of place therefore has to comprise the basic modes of construction and their relationship to formal articulation. Only in this way architectural theory gets a truly concrete basis.

The structure of place becomes manifest as environmental totalities which comprise the aspects of character and space. Such places are known as "countries", "regions", "landscapes", "settlements" and "buildings". Here we return to the concrete "things" of our everyday life-world, which was our point of departure, and remember Rilke's words: "Are we perhaps *here* to say..." When places are classified we should therefore use terms such as "island", "promontory", "bay", "forest", "grove", or "square", "street", "courtyard", and "floor",



“wall”, “roof”, “ceiling”, “window” and “door”.

Places are hence designated by *nouns*. This implies that they are considered real “things that exist”, which is the original meaning of the word “substantive”. Space, instead, as a system of relations, is denoted by *prepositions*. In our daily life we hardly talk about “space”, but about things that are “over” or “under”, “before” or “behind” each other, or we use prepositions such as “at”, “in”, “within”, “on”, “upon”, “to”, “from”, “along”, “next”. All these prepositions denote topological relations of the kind mentioned before. Character, finally, is denoted by *adjectives*, as was indicated above. A character is a complex totality, and a single adjective evidently cannot cover more than one aspect of this totality. Often, however, a character is so distinct that one word seems sufficient to grasp its essence. We see, thus, that the very structure of everyday language confirms our analysis of place.

Countries, regions, landscapes, settlements, buildings (and their sub-places) form a series with a gradually diminishing scale. The steps in this series may be called “environmental levels”<sup>30</sup>. At the “top” of the series we find the more comprehensive natural places which “contain” the man-made places on the “lower” levels. The latter have the “gathering” and “focusing” function mentioned above. In other words, man “receives” the environment and makes it focus in buildings and things. The things thereby “explain” the environment and make its character manifest. Thereby the things themselves become meaningful. That is the basic function of *detail* in our surroundings<sup>31</sup>. This does not imply, however, that the different levels must have the same structure. Architectural history in fact shows that this is rarely the case. Vernacular settlements usually



13. Place. Neresheim with monastery by Neomann.

14. Environmental levels.

15. Visualization. Calcata, Lazio.

16. Visualization and symbolization. Castle in Alto Adige.

17. Symbolization. Petra in Jordan.

have a topological organization, although the single houses may be strictly geometrical. In larger cities we often find topologically organized neighbourhoods within a general geometrical structure, etc. We shall return to the particular problems of structural correspondence later, but have to say some words about the main "step" in the scale of environmental levels: the relation between natural and man-made places.

Man-made places are related to nature in three basic ways. Firstly, man wants to make the natural structure more precise. That is, he wants to *visualize* his "understanding" of nature, "expressing" the existential foothold he has gained. To achieve this, he *builds* what he has seen. Where nature suggests a delimited space he builds an enclosure; where nature appears "centralized", he erects a *Mal*<sup>32</sup>; where nature indicates a direction, he makes a path. Secondly, man has to *complement* the given situation, by adding what it is "lacking". Finally, he has to *symbolize* his understanding of nature (including himself). Symbolization implies that an experienced meaning is "translated" into another medium. A natural character is for instance translated into a building whose properties somehow make the character manifest<sup>33</sup>. The purpose of symbolization is to free the meaning from the immediate situation, whereby it becomes a "cultural object", which may form part of a more complex situation, or be moved to another place. All the three relationships imply that man *gather* the experienced meanings to create for himself an *imago mundi* or *microcosmos* which concretizes his world. Gathering evidently depends on symbolization, and implies a transposition of meanings to another place, which thereby becomes an existential "centre".

Visualization, complementation and symbolization are aspects of the general



processes of settling; and dwelling, in the existential sense of the word, depends on these functions. Heidegger illustrates the problem by means of the *bridge*; a "building" which visualizes, symbolizes and gathers, and makes the environment become a unified whole. Thus he says: "The bridge swings over the stream with ease and power. It does not just connect banks that are already there, the banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge designedly causes them to lie across from each other. One side is set off against the other by the bridge. Nor do the banks stretch along the stream as indifferent border strips of the dry land. With the banks, the bridge brings to the stream the one and the other expanse of the landscape lying behind them. It brings stream and bank and land into each other's neighborhood. The bridge gathers the earth as landscape around the stream"<sup>34</sup>. Heidegger also describes *what* the bridge gathers and thereby uncovers its value as a symbol. We cannot here enter into these details, but want to emphasize that the landscape as such gets its value *through* the bridge. Before, the meaning of the landscape was "hidden", and the building of the bridge brings it out into the open. "The bridge gathers Being into a certain "location" that we may call a "place". This "place", however, did not exist as an entity before the bridge (although there were always many "sites" along the river-bank where it could arise), but comes-to-presence with and as the bridge"<sup>35</sup>. The existential purpose of building (architecture) is therefore to make a site become a place, that is, to uncover the meanings potentially present in the given environment.

The structure of a place is not a fixed, eternal state. As a rule places change, sometimes rapidly. This does not mean, however, that the *genius loci* necessarily

changes or gets lost. Later we shall show that *taking place* presupposes that the places conserve their identity during a certain stretch of time. *Stabilitas loci* is a necessary condition for human life. How then is this stability compatible with the dynamics of change? First of all we may point out that any place ought to have the "capacity" of receiving *different* "contents", naturally within certain limits<sup>36</sup>. A place which is only fitted for one particular purpose would soon become useless. Secondly it is evident that a place may be "interpreted" in different ways. To protect and conserve the *genius loci* in fact means to concretize its essence in ever new historical contexts. We might also say that the history of a place ought to be its "self-realization". What was there as possibilities at the outset, is uncovered through human action, illuminated and "kept" in works of architecture which are simultaneously "old and new"<sup>37</sup>. A place therefore comprises properties having a varying degree of invariance.

In general we may conclude that *place* is the point of departure as well as the goal of our structural investigation; at the outset place is presented as a given, spontaneously experienced totality, at the end it appears as a structured world, illuminated by the analysis of the aspects of space and character.

### 3. *The Spirit of Place*

*Genius loci* is a Roman concept. According to ancient Roman belief every "independent" being has its *genius*, its guardian spirit. This spirit gives life to people and places, accompanies them from birth to death, and determines their character or essence. Even the gods had their *genius*, a fact which illustrates the fundamental nature of the concept<sup>38</sup>. The *genius* thus denotes what a thing *is*, or what it "wants to be", to use a word

of Louis Kahn. It is not necessary in our context to go into the history of the concept of *genius* and its relationship to the *daimon* of the Greeks. It suffices to point out that ancient man experienced his environment as consisting of definite characters. In particular he recognized that it is of great existential importance to come to terms with the *genius* of the locality where his life takes place. In the past survival depended on a "good" relationship to the place in a physical as well as a psychic sense. In ancient Egypt, for instance, the country was not only cultivated in accordance with the Nile floods, but the very structure of the landscape served as a model for the lay-out of the "public" buildings which should give man a sense of security by symbolizing an eternal environmental order<sup>39</sup>.

During the course of history the *genius loci* has remained a living reality, although it may not have been expressively named as such. Artists and writers have found inspiration in local character and have "explained" the phenomena of everyday life as well as art, referring to landscapes and urban milieus. Thus Goethe says: "It is evident, that the eye is educated by the things it sees from childhood on, and therefore Venetian painters must see everything clearer and with more joy than other people"<sup>40</sup>.

Still in 1960 Lawrence Durrell wrote: "As you get to know Europe slowly, tasting the wines, cheeses and characters of the different countries you begin to realize that the important determinant of any culture is after all the spirit of place"<sup>41</sup>.

Modern tourism proves that the experience of different places is a major human interest, although also this value today tends to get lost. In fact modern man for a long time believed that science and technology had freed him from a direct dependence on places<sup>42</sup>.



This belief has proved an illusion; pollution and environmental chaos have suddenly appeared as a frightening *nemesis*, and as a result the problem of place has regained its true importance.

We have used the word "dwelling" to indicate the total man-place relationship. To understand more fully what this word implies, it is useful to return to the distinction between "space" and "character". When man dwells, he is simultaneously located in space and exposed to a certain environmental character. The two psychological functions involved, may be called "orientation" and "identification"<sup>43</sup>. To gain an existential foothold man has to be able to *orientate* himself; he has to know *where* he is. But he also has to *identify* himself with the environment, that is, he has to know *how* he is a certain place.

The problem of orientation has been given a considerable attention in recent theoretical literature on planning and architecture. Again we may refer to the work of Kevin Lynch, whose concepts of "node", "path" and "district" denote the basic spatial structures which are the object of man's orientation. The perceived interrelationship of these elements constitute an "environmental image", and Lynch asserts: "A good environmental image gives its possessor an important sense of emotional security"<sup>44</sup>. Accordingly all cultures have developed "systems of orientation", that is, "spatial structures which facilitate the development of a good environmental image". "The world may be organized around a set of focal points, or be broken into named regions, or be linked by remembered routes"<sup>45</sup>. Often these systems of orientation are based on or derived from a given natural structure. Where the system is weak, the image-making becomes difficult, and man feels "lost". "The terror of being lost comes from the necessity that a mobile or-



20. Identification. Nordic winter.

21. Identification. Khartoum, Sudan.



ganism be oriented in its surroundings<sup>46</sup>. To be lost is evidently the opposite of the feeling of security which distinguishes dwelling. The environmental quality which protects man against getting lost, Lynch calls "imageability", which means "that shape, color or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment"<sup>47</sup>. Here Lynch implies that the elements which constitute the spatial structure are concrete "things" with "character" and "meaning". He limits himself, however, to discuss the spatial function of these elements, and thus leaves us with a fragmentary understanding of dwelling. Nevertheless, the work of Lynch constitutes an essential contribution to the theory of place. Its importance also consists in the fact that his empirical studies of concrete urban structure confirm the general "principles of organization" defined by Gestalt psychology and by the researches into child psychology of Piaget<sup>48</sup>.

Without reducing the importance of orientation, we have to stress that dwelling above all presupposes *identification* with the environment. Although orientation and identification are aspects of one total relationship, they have a certain independence within the totality. It is evidently possible to orientate oneself without true identification; one gets along without feeling "at home". And it is possible to feel at home without being well acquainted with the spatial structure of the place, that is, the place is only experienced as a gratifying general character. True belonging however presupposes that both psychological functions are fully developed. In primitive societies we find that even the smallest environmental details are known and meaningful, and that they make up complex spatial

structures<sup>49</sup>. In modern society, however, attention has almost exclusively been concentrated on the "practical" function of orientation, whereas identification has been left to chance. As a result true dwelling, in a psychological sense, has been substituted by alienation. It is therefore urgently needed to arrive at a fuller understanding of the concepts of "identification" and "character".

In our context "identification" means to become "friends" with a particular environment. Nordic man has to be friend with fog, ice and cold winds; he has to enjoy the creaking sound of snow under the feet when he walks around, he has to experience the poetical value of being immersed in fog, as Hermann Hesse did when he wrote the lines: "Strange to walk in fog! Lonely is every bush and stone, no tree sees the other, everything is alone..."<sup>50</sup>. The Arab, instead, has to be a friend of the infinitely extended, sandy desert and the burning sun. This does not mean that his settlements should not protect him against the natural "forces"; a desert settlement in fact primarily aims at the exclusion of sand and sun and therefore complements the natural situation. But it implies that the environment is experienced as *meaningful*. Bollnow says appropriately: "*Jede Stimmung ist Übereinstimmung*", that is, every character consists in a correspondence between outer and inner world, and between body and psyche"<sup>51</sup>.

For modern urban man the friendship with a natural environment is reduced to fragmentary relations. Instead he has to identify with man-made things, such as streets and houses. The German-born American architect Gerhard Kallmann once told a story which illustrates what this means. Visiting at the end of the Second World War his native Berlin after many years of absence, he wanted to see the house where he had grown

up. As must be expected in Berlin, the house had disappeared, and Mr. Kallmann felt somewhat lost. Then he suddenly recognized the typical pavement of the sidewalk: the floor on which he had played as a child. And he experienced a strong feeling of having returned home.

The story teaches us that the objects of identification are concrete environmental properties and that man's relationship to these is usually developed during childhood. The child grows up in green, brown or white spaces; it walks or plays on sand, earth, stone or moss, under a cloudy or serene sky; it grasps and lifts hard and soft things; it hears noises, such as the sound of the wind moving the leaves of a particular kind of tree; and it experiences heat and cold. Thus the child gets acquainted with the environment, and develops perceptual *schemata* which determine all future experiences<sup>52</sup>. The schemata comprise universal structures which are inter-human, as well as locally determined and culturally conditioned structures. Evidently every human being has to possess schemata of orientation as well as identification.

The *identity* of a person is defined in terms of the schemata developed, because they determine the "world" which is accessible. This fact is confirmed by common linguistic usage. When a person wants to tell who he is, it is in fact usual to say: "I am a New Yorker", or "I am a Roman". This means something much more concrete than to say: "I am an architect", or perhaps: "I am an optimist". We understand that human identity is to a high extent a function of places and things. Thus Heidegger says: "*Wir sind die Be-Dingten*"<sup>53</sup>. It is therefore not only important that our environment has a spatial structure which facilitates orientation, but that it consists of concrete objects of identification.

22. Identification. S. Gregorio, Cosenza.

23. Identification. Naples.



24. Sidewalk. Berlin.

25. Enclosure. Monteriggioni, Toscana.



*Human identity presupposes the identity of place.*

Identification and orientation are primary aspects of man's being-in-the-world. Whereas identification is the basis for man's sense of *belonging*, orientation is the function which enables him to be that *homo viator*, which is part of his nature. It is characteristic for modern man that for a long time he gave the role as a wanderer pride of place. He wanted to be "free" and conquer the world. Today we start to realize that true freedom presupposes belonging, and that "dwelling" means belonging to a concrete place.

The word to "dwell" has several connotations which confirm and illuminate our thesis. Firstly it ought to be mentioned that "dwell" is derived from the Old Norse *dvelja*, which meant to linger or remain. Analogously Heidegger related the German "wohnen" to "bleiben" and "sich aufhalten"<sup>54</sup>. Furthermore he points out that the Gothic *wunian* meant to "be at peace", "to remain in peace". The German word for Peace, *Friede*, means to be free, that is, protected from harm and danger. This protection is achieved by means of an *Umfriedung* or enclosure. "Friede" is also related to *zufrieden* (content), *Freund* (friend) and the Gothic *frijōn* (love). Heidegger uses these linguistic relationships to show that *dwelling means to be at peace in a protected place*. We should also mention that the German word for dwelling, *Wohnung*, derives from *das Gewohnte*, which means what is known or habitual. "Habit" and "habitat" show an analogous relationship. In other words, man knows what has become accessible to him through dwelling. We here return to the *Übereinstimmung* or correspondence between man and his environment, and arrive at the very root of the problem of "gathering". To gather

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means that the everyday life-world has become "gewohnt" or "habitual". But gathering is a concrete phenomenon, and thus leads us to the final connotation of "dwelling". Again it is Heidegger who has uncovered a fundamental relationship. Thus he points out that the Old English and High German word for "building", *buan*, meant to dwell, and that it is intimately related to the verb *to be*. "What then does *ich bin* mean? The old word *bauen*, to which the *bin* belongs, answers: *ich bin, du bist*, mean: I dwell, you dwell. The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans are on earth, is *buan*, dwelling"<sup>55</sup>. We may conclude that dwelling means to gather the world as a concrete building or "thing", and that the archetypal act of building is the *Umfriedung* or enclosure. Trakl's poetic intuition of the inside-outside relationship thus gets its confirmation, and we understand that our concept of *concretization* denotes the essence of dwelling<sup>56</sup>.

Man dwells when he is able to concretize the world in buildings and things. As we have mentioned above, "concretization" is the function of the work of art, as opposed to the "abstraction" of science<sup>57</sup>. Works of art concretize what remains "between" the pure objects of science. Our everyday life-world consists of such "intermediary" objects, and we understand that the fundamental function of art is to gather the contradictions and complexities of the life-world. Being an *imago mundi*, the work of art helps man to dwell. Hölderlin was right when he said: "Full of merit, yet poetically, man dwells on this earth".

This means: man's merits do not count much if he is unable to dwell *poetically*, that is, to dwell in the true sense of the word. Thus Heidegger says: "Poetry

does not fly above and surmount the earth in order to escape it and hover over it. Poetry is what first brings man into the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling"<sup>58</sup>. Only poetry in all its forms (also as the "art of living") makes human existence meaningful, and *meaning* is the fundamental human need.

Architecture belongs to poetry, and its purpose is to help man to dwell. But architecture is a difficult art. To make practical towns and buildings is not enough. Architecture comes into being when a "total environment is made visible", to quote the definition of Susanne Langer<sup>59</sup>. In general, this means to concretize the *genius loci*. We have seen that this is done by means of buildings which gather the properties of the place and bring them close to man. The basic act of architecture is therefore to understand the "vocation" of the place. In this way we protect the earth and become ourselves part of a comprehensive totality. What is here advocated is not some kind of "environmental determinism". We only recognize the fact that man is an integral part of the environment, and that it can only lead to human alienation and environmental disruption if he forgets that. To belong to a place means to have an existential foothold, in a concrete everyday sense. When God said to Adam: "You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the Earth"<sup>60</sup>; he put man in front of his most basic problem: to cross the threshold and regain the lost place.

### 1. *The Phenomena of Natural Place*

To be able to dwell between heaven and earth, man has to "understand" these two elements, as well as their interaction. The word "understand" here does not mean scientific knowledge; it is rather an existential concept which denotes the experience of *meanings*. When the environment is meaningful man feels "at home". The places where we have grown up are such "homes"; we know exactly how it feels to walk on that particular ground, to be under that particular sky, or between those particular trees; we know the warm all-embracing sunshine of the South or the mysterious summer nights of the North. In general we know "realities" which carry our existence. But "understanding" goes beyond such immediate sensations. From the beginning of time man has recognized that nature consists of inter-related elements which express fundamental aspects of being. The landscape where he lives is not a mere flux of phenomena, it has structure and embodies meanings. These structures and meanings have given rise to mythologies (cosmogonies and cosmologies) which have formed the basis of dwelling<sup>1</sup>. A phenomenology of natural place ought to take these mythologies as its point of departure. In doing this, we do not have to re-tell the tales, rather we should ask which concrete categories of understanding they represent.

In general any understanding of the natural environment grows out of a primeval experience of nature as a multitude of living "forces". The world is experienced as a "Thou" rather than an "it"<sup>2</sup>. Man was thus imbedded in nature and dependent upon the natural forces. The growth of man's mental faculties proceeds from the grasping of such diffuse qualities, into more articulate experiences where the parts and the interrelationships within the totality

26. Monte Bianco.

27. Vesuvio.

28. Rocks at Petra, Jordan.

are understood. This process may happen in different ways according to the local environment, and it does not mean that the world loses its concrete, live character. Such a loss implies pure *quantification*, and is thus linked with the modern scientific attitude<sup>3</sup>. We may distinguish between five basic modes of mythical understanding, which have different weight in different cultures.

The first mode of natural understanding takes the forces as its point of departure and relates them to concrete natural elements or "*things*"<sup>4</sup>. Most ancient cosmogonies concentrate on this aspect and explain how "everything" has come into being. Usually creation is understood as a "marriage" of *heaven* and *earth*. Thus Hesiod says: "Earth (Gaia) first of all gave birth to a being equal to herself, who could overspread her completely, the starry heaven (Ouranos)..."<sup>5</sup>. This primeval couple generated the gods and the other mythical creatures, that is, all those "forces" which make up the "multifarious in-between". A similar image is found in Egypt where the world was represented as a "space" between heaven (Nut) and earth (Geb); the only difference being that the sexes of the two elements are here exchanged. The earth is the "serving bearer" from which life emerges, the very foundation of existence (*tellus mater*). The sky, instead, is something "high" and inaccessible. Its shape is described by "the vaulting path of the sun", and its properties in general are experienced as transcendence, order and creative power (rain). The sky primarily has "cosmic" implications, whereas the earth may satisfy man's need for protection and intimacy. At the same time, however, the earth constitutes the extended ground on which his actions take place.

The marriage between heaven and earth forms the point of departure for the





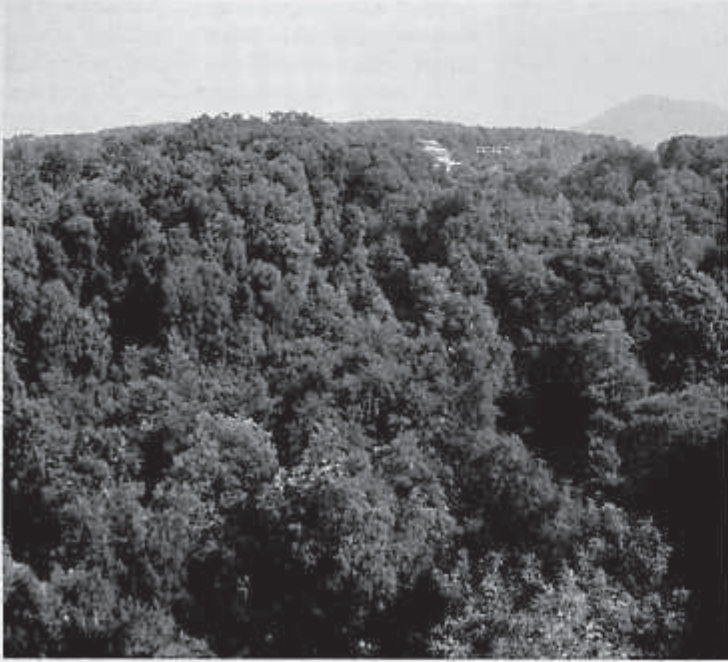
29. *The Roman campagna.*

30. *Place in the shadow under a tree. Petra, Jordan.*



further differentiation of "things". The *mountain*, thus, belongs to the earth, but it rises towards the sky. It is "high", it is close to heaven, it is a meeting place where the two basic elements come together. Mountains were therefore considered "centres" through which the *axis mundi* goes, ...a spot where one can pass from one cosmic zone to another<sup>6</sup>. In other words, mountains are *places* within the comprehensive landscape, places which make the structure of Being manifest. As such they "gather" various properties. To the general ones already mentioned, we must add the hardness and permanence of *stone* as a material. Rocks and stones have been given primary importance by many cultures because of their imperishableness. In general, however, mountains remain "distant" and somewhat frightening, and do not constitute "insides" where man can dwell. In Medieval painting, thus, rocks and mountains were symbols of "wilderness"; a meaning which was still alive in the landscape painting of Romanticism<sup>7</sup>. But there are other kinds of natural "things" which reveal meanings. In the *tree* heaven and earth are also united, not only in a spatial sense because the tree rises up from the ground, but because it grows and is "alive". Every year the tree re-enacts the very process of creation, and "to a primitive religious mind, the tree *is* the universe, and it is so because it reproduces it and sums it up..."<sup>8</sup>. In general *vegetation* is the manifestation of living reality. But vegetation has also forms which are less friendly or even frightening. The *forest*, thus, is primarily a "wilderness" full of strange and menacing forces. Bachelard writes: "We do not have to be long in the woods to experience the rather anxious impression of "going deeper and deeper" into a limitless world. Soon, if we do not know where we are going,

31. Wood at Ariccia, Alban hills.  
32. Norwegian Forest.



33. Grove at Khartoum, Sudan.  
34. Olive grove. S. Gregorio, Catanzaro.



we no longer know where we are"<sup>9</sup>. Only when the wood is of limited extension and becomes a *grove*, it remains intelligible and positively meaningful. The Paradise has in fact been imagined as a delimited or enclosed grove or garden.

In the images of Paradise we encounter another basic element of ancient cosmogonies: *water*. The very particular nature of water has always been recognized. In the *Genesis*, God separates the dry land from the water after the creation of heaven and earth, light and darkness, and in other cosmogonies water is *the* primeval substance from which all forms come<sup>10</sup>. The presence of water, thus, gives identity to the land, and the legend of the Deluge presents the "loss of place" as a great flood. Although it is the opposite of place, water belongs intimately to living reality. As a fertilizer it even became a symbol of life, and in the images of Paradise four rivers flow from a spring in the very centre. The history of landscape painting illustrates the importance of water as a life-spending element. The "ideal" landscapes of the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries usually contain a centrally placed river or lake along which man's settlements are located, and from which the cultivated land extends. Later, water is justly understood and depicted as a local element of primary characterizing importance, and in Romantic landscapes, it reappears as a dynamic chthonic force.

Being the primary natural "things", rocks, vegetation and water make a place meaningful or "sacred", to use the term of Mircea Eliade. He writes: "The most primitive of the "sacred places" we know of constituted a microcosm: a landscape of stones, water and trees"<sup>11</sup>. Moreover he points out that "such places are never *chosen* by man, they





are merely discovered by him; in other words the sacred place in some way or another reveals itself to him"<sup>12</sup>. In the environment the sacred places function as "centres"; they serve as objects of man's orientation and identification, and constitute a spatial structure. In man's understanding of nature we thus recognize the origin of the concept of space as a system of places. Only a system of meaningful places makes a truly human life possible.

The second mode of natural understanding consists in abstracting a systematic *cosmic order* from the flux of occurrences. Such an order is usually based on the course of the sun, as the most invariant and grandiose natural phenomenon, and the cardinal points. In some places it may also be related to the local geographical structure, as in Egypt, where the south-north direction of the Nile constitutes a primary element of man's orientation<sup>13</sup>. An order of this kind implies that the world is understood as a structured "space", where the main directions represent different "qualities" or meanings. In ancient Egypt, thus, the east, the direction of the sun's rising, was the domain of birth and life, whereas the west was the domain of death. "When thou settest on the western horizon, the land is in darkness in the manner of death... (but) when the day breaks, as thou rises on the horizon... they awake and stand upon their feet... they live because thou has arisen for them"<sup>14</sup>. The belief in a cosmic order is usually connected with a concrete image of some kind. In Egypt the world was imagined as "a flat platter with a corrugated rim. The inside bottom of this platter was the flat alluvial plain of Egypt, and the corrugated rim was the rim of mountain countries... This platter floated in water... Above the earth was the inverted pan of the sky, setting the outer

limit to the universe". Heaven was imagined to rest on four posts at the corners<sup>15</sup>. In the Nordic countries where the sun loses much of its importance, an abstract "heavenly axis" running north-south was imagined, around which the world turns. This axis ends in the Polar Star, where it is carried by a column, an *Irmisul*<sup>16</sup>. A similar *axis mundi* was imagined by the Romans, whose heavenly *cardo* runs south from the Polar Star, crossing at a right angle the *decumanus*, which represents the course of the sun from the east to the west<sup>17</sup>. In Rome, thus, primary elements of Southern and Nordic cosmologies were unified.

The third mode of natural understanding consists in the definition of the *character* of natural places, relating them to basic human traits.

The abstraction of characters was the achievement of the Greeks, and was evidently made possible by the very structure of the Greek landscape. Topographically Greece consists of numerous distinct but varied sites. Each landscape is a clearly delimited, easily imageable "personality"<sup>18</sup>. Intense sunlight and clear air give the forms an unusual presence. "Because of the ordered variety, clarity and scale in the landscape, the human being is neither engulfed nor adrift in Greece. He can come close to the earth to experience either its comfort or its threat"<sup>19</sup>. The basic property of the Greek environment, therefore, is the individual and intelligible character of places. In some places the surroundings appear to offer protection, in others they menace, and in others again we feel at the centre of a well-defined *cosmos*. In some places there are natural elements of a very particular shape or function, such as horned rocks, caves or wells. In "understanding" these characteristics, the Greeks *personified* them as anthropomorphic gods, and every place with pronounced properties became a









37. Delphi, tholos of Athena.

38. Delphi, theatre and temple of Apollo.

39. Trees and light. Sacro Speco, Subiaco.

manifestation of a particular god. Places where the fertile earth feels close were dedicated to the old chthonic deities Demeter and Hera, and places where man's intellect and discipline complement and oppose the chthonic forces were dedicated to Apollo. There are places where the environment is experienced as an ordered whole, such as mountains with an all-round view, dedicated to Zeus, and groves close to water or swampy land dedicated to Artemis. Before any temple was built, open-air altars were erected "in the ideal position from which the whole sacred landscape could be grasped"<sup>20</sup>. We understand thus how Greek architecture took the meaningful place as its points of departure. By relating natural and human characters, the Greeks achieved a "reconciliation" of man and nature which is particularly well concretized at Delphi. Here the old symbols of the earth, the *omphalos* or "navel of the world" and *bothros* or offering cave of the Great Goddess of the earth, were enclosed within Apollo's temple. Thus they were taken over by the "new" god and made part of a total vision of nature and man.

But nature also comprises a fourth category of phenomena which are less palpable. *Light* has of course always been experienced as a basic part of reality, but ancient man concentrated his attention on the sun as a "thing", rather than the more general concept of "light". In Greek civilization, however, light was understood as a symbol of knowledge, artistic as well as intellectual, and was connected with Apollo, who absorbed the old sun-god Helios. In Christianity light became an "element" of prime importance, a symbol of conjunction and unity which was connected with the concept of *love*. God was considered *pater luminis*, and "Divine Light" a manifestation of the

spirit. In Byzantine painting Divine Light was concretized as a golden ground which "surrounds the main figures as with a halo of sanctity"<sup>21</sup>, stressing the iconographic foci. A sacred place, thus, was distinguished by the presence of light, and accordingly Dante wrote: "The Divine Light penetrates the universe according to its dignity"<sup>22</sup>. The Renaissance, instead, understood the world as a *microtheos* which God is manifest in every thing. As a result, the landscape painters depicted the environment as a totality of "facts", where everything down to the smallest detail seems fully understood and loved. "Facts become art through love, which unifies them and lifts them to a higher plane of reality; and, in landscape, this all embracing love is expressed by light"<sup>23</sup>.

Light is not only the most general natural phenomenon, but also the less constant. Light conditions change from morning to evening, and during the night darkness fills the world, as light does during the day. Light, thus, is intimately connected with the *temporal rhythms* of nature which form a fifth dimension of understanding. The phenomena which distinguish a natural place cannot be separated from these rhythms<sup>24</sup>. The seasons, thus, change the appearance of places; in some regions more, in others less. In the northern countries green summers and white winters alternate, and both seasons are characterized by very different conditions of light. The temporal rhythms obviously do not change the basic elements which constitute a natural place, but in many cases they contribute decisively to its character and are therefore often reflected in local myths and fairytales. In landscape painting, the local importance of temporal rhythms and light conditions were studied from the eighteenth century on, a development which culminated with

impressionism<sup>25</sup>.

In mythopoeic thought time is just as qualitative and concrete as other natural phenomena, and is experienced in the periodicity and rhythm of man's own life as well as in the life of nature. Man's participation in the natural totality is concretized in *rituals*, in which "cosmic events", such as creation, death and resurrection are re-enacted. As such, rituals do not however belong to the natural environment, and will be discussed in the next chapter, together with the general problem of representing time.

Thing, order, character, light and time are the basic categories of concrete natural understanding. Whereas thing and order, are spatial (in a concrete qualitative sense), character and light refer to the general atmosphere of a place<sup>26</sup>. We may also point out that "thing" and "character" (in the sense here used) are dimensions of the earth, whereas "order" and "light" are determined by the sky. Time, finally, is the dimension of constancy and change, and makes space and character parts of a living reality, which at any moment is given as a particular place, as a *genius loci*. In general the categories designate the *meanings* man has abstracted from the flux of phenomena ("forces"). In his classical work on the relationship between nature and the "human soul", Willy Hellpach calls such meanings "existential contents", and says: "Existential contents have their source in the landscape"<sup>27</sup>.

## 2. The Structure of Natural place

The term "natural place" denotes a series of environmental levels, from continents and countries down to the shaded area under an individual tree. All these "places" are determined by the concrete properties of earth and sky. The ground is obviously the most stable

40. Norwegian forest in winter.

41. Extended land. Valle del Marecchia, Forlì.

element, although some of its properties change with the seasons, but the more variable and less concrete sky also plays a "characterizing" role of decisive importance. It is natural to take the more stable properties as the point of departure for our discussion, in relation to the environmental level which serves as the comprehensive stage for everyday life, that is: *landscape*.

The distinctive quality of any landscape is *extension*, and its particular character and spatial properties are determined by *how* it extends. Extension, thus, may be more or less continuous, sub-places within the all-embracing landscape may be formed and its capacity of receiving man-made elements varies accordingly. The "how" of extension primarily depends on the nature of the ground, that is, on the topographical conditions. "Topography" simply means "place-description", but it is generally used to denote the physical configuration of a place. In our context "topography" primarily means what geographers call the *surface relief*. On a flat plain, extension is general and infinite, but usually variations in the surface relief create directions and defined spaces.

It is important to distinguish between the structure and the scale of the relief. The structure may be described in terms of nodes, paths and domains, that is, elements which "centralize" space such as isolated hills and mountains or circumscribed basins, elements which direct space such as valleys, rivers and *wadis*, and elements which define an extended spatial pattern, such as a relatively uniform cluster of fields or hills. Evidently the effect of such elements is very different according to their dimensions. For our purpose it is practical to distinguish between three levels: micro, medium and macro. The micro elements define spaces which are too small to serve human purposes, while



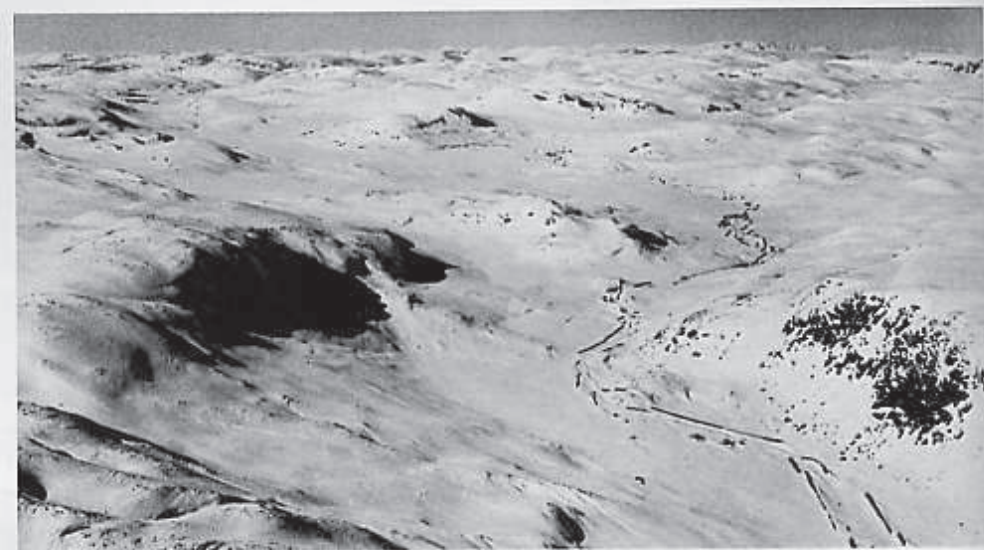
42. *Extended land. Valle d'Idria, Puglia.*

43. *Extended land. Romagna.*

44. *Extended land. Norway from the air in winter.*

the macro elements are analogously too large. Spaces which are directly suited for or dimensionally related to human dwelling have a medium or "human" scale. As examples of different environmental scales we may mention the Norwegian forest, the plains of Northern France (the *campagne*), and the rolling countryside of Denmark. In the Norwegian forest the ground is covered by minuscule hillocks and tufts. The ground is never open and free, but cut through by tiny "valleys" between minuscule "hills". A kind of micro-landscape is formed, which seems to have been made for gnomes or dwarfs. In Northern France, instead, the surface relief consists of extended but low, undulating mounds, whose super-human scale creates a feeling of infinite, "cosmic", extension. In Denmark the landscape is somewhat similar, but the scale is smaller, and an intimate "human" environment results. If we maintain the "Danish" scale horizontally, but accentuate the vertical dimensions of the relief, a "human hill landscape" is formed. As examples we may mention the central parts of Tuscany and the Monferrato in Italy. Where the depressions reach a certain depth, however, the hills become separated and the ground loses its continuity. As a result the landscape appears forbidding and "wild". This is the case in Liguria, where the land is cut through by a network of narrow ravines<sup>28</sup>. A relatively small change thus suffices to transform the inviting and ordered hill landscape of the neighbour regions into a kind of confused maze.

Our examples have indicated how variations in the surface relief determine the spatial properties of the landscape, and to some extent its character. Characters such as "wild" and "friendly" are thus functions of the relief, although they may be accentuated or contradicted by





45. Norwegian forest.

46. Campagna in Central Italy.

47. Rolling countryside in Denmark.



*texture, colour and vegetation.* The words "texture" and "colour" refer to the material substance of the ground, that is, whether it consists of sand, earth, stone, grass or water, whereas "vegetation" denotes elements which are added to end transform the surface relief. The character of the landscape is evidently to a high extent determined by these "secondary" elements. Similar reliefs may appear as a "barren" desert of "fertile" plain, according to the absence or presence of vegetation. At the same time, however, similar reliefs preserve fundamental common properties, such as "infinite" extension. The undulating plains of Northern France, for instance, possess the "cosmic" quality which is usually found in the desert, but simultaneously the land is fertile. A fascinating synthesis is thus experienced<sup>29</sup>. When vegetation becomes a primary feature, the landscape in general gets its name from this property, as in the various types of forest landscapes. In the forest landscape the surface relief is less prominent than the spatial effect of the vegetation. Often relief and vegetation combine to form very particular landscapes. In Finland, for instance, the continuous forest is "interpenetrated" by a complex system of interconnected lakes. As a result an eminently Nordic character is created, where the microstructure of the forest is emphasized by the mobile and "live" element of the water<sup>30</sup>. In general the presence of *water* adds a certain micro-scale to landscapes whose relief lacks this dimension, or it adds to the mystery of landscapes which already possess the micro level. When water is present as a swift river or cascade, nature itself becomes mobile and dynamic. The reflecting surface of lakes and ponds also has a dematerializing effect which counteracts the stable topographical structure. In a swamp landscape, finally, the ground



48. Hills in the Monferrato.

49. Finnish landscape.

50. Ravine. Vitorchiano, Lazio.



51. Coastline in Basilicata, Maratea.





52. Valley in Norway.



53. Norwegian islands.



54. Norwegian fjord.

gets a maximum of indeterminacy. The banks of rivers and lakes, on the contrary, form precise edges which usually function as primary structural elements in the landscape. Such edges have the double function of giving definition to the water itself as well as the adjoining land. Evidently this definition may happen on all environmental levels, and on the most comprehensive it is the ocean which forms the "final" ground on which the continents appear as distinct "figures"<sup>31</sup>.

Through the interaction of surface, relief, vegetation and water, characteristic totalities or *places* are formed which constitute the basic elements of landscapes. A phenomenology of natural place obviously ought to contain a systematic survey of such concrete totalities<sup>32</sup>. Variations in the surface relief generate a series of places, for which our language has well-known names: plain, valley, basin, ravine, plateau, hill, mountain. All these places possess distinctive phenomenological characteristics. The plain, thus, makes extension as such manifest, whereas the valley is a delimited and directed space. A basin is a centralized valley, where space becomes enclosed and static. Whereas valleys and basins have a macro or medium scale, a ravine (cleft, gorge) is distinguished by a "forbidding" narrowness. It has the quality of an "under-world" which gives access to the "inside" of the earth. In a ravine we feel caught or trapped, and the etymology of the word in fact leads us back to *rapere*, that is to "seize". Hills and mountains are spatial complements to valleys and basins, and function as primary space-defining "things" in the environment. The general structural properties of hills and mountains are denoted by words such as "slope", "crest", "ridge" and "peak". We have already suggested that the presence of water may emphasize the





55. Clouds. Lüneburger Heide.  
 56. Valley and silhouette. Subiaco.  
 57. From the Syrian desert.  
 58. Countryside in Denmark.



place-structure of the surface relief. A valley is literally "underlined" by a river, and the image of a basin is strengthened by a lake. But water also generates particular kinds of spatial configurations: island, point, promontory, peninsula, bay and fjord, all of which must be counted among the most distinctive natural places. The island thus, is a place *par excellence*, appearing as an "isolated", clearly defined figure. Existentially the island brings us back to the origins; it rises out of the element from which everything was originally born. The word "peninsula" means "almost an island", and thus language expresses an important spatial structure. A gulf or bay is also a strong archetypal place, which may be characterized as an "inverted peninsula". The typical places generated by vegetation, such as forest, grove, and field, have already been mentioned; we only have to remind of their importance as parts of "living" reality<sup>33</sup>.

Being on the earth implies to be under the sky. Although the sky is distant and intangible, it has concrete "properties", and a very important characterizing function. In daily life we take the sky for granted; we notice that it changes with the weather, but hardly recognize its importance for the general "atmosphere". It is only when we visit places very different from our home that we suddenly experience the sky as "low" or "high", or otherwise different from what we are used to. The effect of the sky is basically due to two factors. Firstly the constitution of the sky itself, that is, the quality of light and colour, and the presence of characteristic clouds<sup>34</sup>. Secondly its relationship to the ground, that is, how it appears, from below. Seen from an extended open plain, the sky becomes a complete hemisphere, and when the weather is "good", its appearance is all-embracing and truly

grandiose. In places with a pronounced surface relief or rich vegetation, however, only a sector of the sky is seen at the time. Space contracts, and the landscape becomes intimate or even constricted. That this is not a modern experience, is confirmed by the report of an ancient Egyptian scribe: "Thou hast not trodden the road to Meger (in Syria), in which the sky is dark by day, which is overgrown with cypresses, oaks and cedars that reach the heavens... Shuddering seizes thee, (the hair of) thy head stands on end and the soul lies in thy hand... The ravine is on one side of thee, while the mountain rises on the other"<sup>35</sup>. A frightening experience indeed for an Egyptian who was used to see the sun in all its course. In general we may say that *the sky is as large as the space from which it is seen*. Remembering that a space begins its "presencing" from the boundary, we understand how the *silhouette* of the surrounding "walls" becomes important when the space is narrow. Instead of being a comprehensive hemisphere within a linear *horizon*, the sky is reduced to a background for the contours of the surface relief. The landscape character thus becomes manifest as a silhouette against the sky, sometimes gently undulating, sometimes serrate and wild<sup>36</sup>.

The climatically determined appearance of the sky acts as a counterpoint to its general spatial properties. In the desert areas of North Africa and the Near East, the cloudless blue sky gives emphasis to the infinite extension of the land, and we experience the landscape as embodying an eternal order, centered on ourselves. On the plains of Northern Europe, instead, the sky is usually "low" and "flat". Even on cloudless days its colour is relatively pale, and the feeling of being under an embracing dome is usually absent. The horizontal direction is therefore experienced as mere ex-

tension. Many variations are however possible according to the local surface relief and the quality of the light. In areas which are not too distant from the coast, the atmospheric conditions are continuously changing and light becomes a live and strongly poetic element. In a country like Holland, where the ground is flat and subdivided in small spaces, light remains a local and intimate value. In Northern France, instead, the landscape opens up and the extended sky becomes a comprehensive "stage" for the continuously changing quality of light. A "light-world" is experienced, which evidently inspired the luminous walls of the Gothic cathedrals and the impressionistic paintings of Monet<sup>37</sup>. In Southern Europe these poetic qualities of light are mostly absent; the strong and warm sun "fills the space" and brings out the plastic qualities of natural forms and "things". As a consequence, Italian landscape painting has always concentrated its attention on the sculptural object, and depicts an environment consisting of evenly illuminated discrete objects<sup>38</sup>.

In general the earth is the "stage" where man's daily life takes place. To some extent it may be controlled and shaped, and a friendly relationship results. Natural landscape thus becomes *cultural landscape*, that is, an environment where man has found his meaningful place within the totality. The sky, instead, remains distant and is distinguished by its "otherness". In structural terms these basic facts are expressed by the *horizontal* and the *vertical*. The simplest model of man's existential space is therefore a horizontal plane pierced by a vertical axis<sup>39</sup>. On the plane man chooses and creates centres, paths and domains which make up the concrete space of his everyday world.

Our brief excursion into the structure of natural place has implied that it pos-

sesses on several "levels". A whole country may be the object of concrete identification, in accordance with its particular structure. Italy is thus distinguished by its being a peninsula with a chain of mountains in the middle. On both sides of the central ridge, landscapes of various kinds are formed: plains, valleys, basins and bays, which, because of the topography of the country, maintain a certain independence. Within the landscapes, sub-places offer man the possibility of intimate dwelling. Among the sub-places we also find the archetypal *retreat* where man may still experience the presence of the original forces of the earth. The "Carceri" of St. Francis outside Assisi or the Sacro Speco of St. Benedict near Subiaco are characteristic examples. In these places the saints of the Middle Ages experienced the mystery of nature, which to them meant the presence of God<sup>40</sup>. Being a peninsula divided by a range of mountains, Scandinavia is structurally similar to Italy. But the dimensions are larger, and the spatial properties of the regions more varied. As a result, the peninsula comprises *two* countries with distinct characteristics, whereas it would not make sense to split Italy longitudinally in "halves". In southern Norway we find a primary "hand-shaped" system of valleys with the centre in Oslo, which therefore acts as a natural focus. Western Norway is subdivided by a series of parallel fjords between tall mountains, and therefore consists of more separate, albeit "similar" landscapes. Northern Sweden possesses an analogous system of long, parallel valleys, whereas the southern part of the country rather may be called a cluster of domains defined by lakes and hills. The coast of both countries is accompanied by a belt of islands and skerries, which introduces a "microstructure" entirely lacking in Italy.

59. Scandinavia, map.

60. Assisi, Eremo delle Carceri.



61. Italy, map.



Structurally orientation and identification thus means the experience of natural place within natural place. The different "insides" are "known" in accordance with their structural properties. In all countries in fact we find that the naming of regions and landscapes reflect the existence of natural places which have a structurally determined identity<sup>41</sup>. The individual *genius loci* is therefore part of a hierarchical system, and must be seen in this context to be fully understood.

### 3. *The spirit of Natural Place*

Our discussion of the phenomena of natural place has uncovered several basic types of natural factors, which in general are related to the earth or the sky, or express an interaction of the two basic "elements". Our discussion has furthermore implied that in some regions the sky may appear the dominant factor, whereas in others the earth contributes the primary presence. Although some kind of interaction between the two elements exists everywhere, there are places where sky and earth seem to have realized a particularly happy "marriage". In these places the environment becomes manifest as a harmonious whole of medium scale which allows for relatively easy and complete identification. Among the landscapes where the sky dominates we may distinguish between those where the "cosmic order" is of primary importance and those where the changing atmospheric conditions contribute decisively to the environmental character. Where the earth is dominant, a classification must be based on the presence of archetypal "things" as well as variations in scale (micro-macro).

#### *Romantic Landscape*

It is natural to start a discussion of archetypal natural places with the kind

of landscape where the original forces are still most strongly felt: the Nordic forest, as it is known in certain parts of Central Europe and particularly in Scandinavia. The Nordic forest is distinguished by an interminable multitude of different phenomena:

The ground is rarely continuous, but it is subdivided and has a varied relief; rocks and depressions, groves and glades, bushes and tufts create a rich "microstructure".

The sky is hardly experienced as a total hemisphere, but is narrowed in between the contours of trees and rocks, and is moreover continuously modified by clouds.

The sun is relatively low and creates a varied play of spots of light and shadow, with clouds and vegetation acting as enriching "filters". Water is ever present as a dynamic element, both as running streams and quiet, reflecting ponds.

The quality of the air is constantly changing, from moist fog to refreshing ozone.

As a whole, the environment seems to make a mutable and rather incomprehensible world manifest, where surprises belong to the order of the day. The general instability is emphasized by the contrast between the seasons and by frequent changes of weather. In general we may say that the Nordic landscape is characterized by an *indefinite multitude of different places*. Behind every hillock and rock there is a new place, and only exceptionally the landscape is unified to form a simple, univocal space. In the Nordic landscape therefore, men encounters a host of natural "forces", whereas a general unifying order is lacking. This becomes clearly manifest in the literature, art and music of the Nordic countries, where natural impressions and moods play a primary role. In legends and fairy-tales we

encounter the mythical inhabitants of this world: gnomes, dwarfs and trolls<sup>42</sup>. Still today Nordic man carries these beings within his psyche, and when he wants to "live", he leaves the city to experience the mysteries of the Nordic landscape. In doing this he looks for the *genius loci*, which he has to understand to gain an existential foothold. In general we may characterize the Nordic world as a *romantic* world, in the sense that it brings man back to a distant "past", which is experienced emotionally rather than understood as allegory or history.

What kind of dwelling is possible in the Nordic landscape? We have already suggested that Nordic man has to approach nature with *empathy*, he has to live *with* nature in an intimate sense. Direct participation is thus more important than abstraction of elements and order. This participation, however, is not social. Rather it implies that the individual finds his own "hiding-place" in nature. "My home is my castle", is in fact a Nordic saying. The process of empathy and participation obviously takes place in different ways in different regions. In Denmark, where the scale is human and idyllic, dwelling means to settle between the low mounds, under the large trees, embraced by the changing sky. In Norway, instead, it means to find a place in "wild" nature, between rocks and dark, gloomy conifers, preferably next to a swift stream of water<sup>43</sup>. In both cases however, the "forces" of nature are present and make dwelling become an *interaction* between man and his environment. The essential property which makes these forces manifest, is microstructure. The Nordic landscape is therefore dominated by the *earth*. It is a chthonic landscape, which does not with ease rise up to approach the sky, and its character is determined by an

62. *Living between and under the trees, Denmark.*

63. *Romantic landscape, Norwegian forest.*

64. *Microstructure, Norwegian forest.*







65. Cosmic landscape. Desert with camels, Jordan.

66. Oasis at Luxor.

interacting multitude of unintelligible detail.

#### Cosmic Landscape

In the *desert* the complexities of our concrete life-world are reduced to a few, simple phenomena<sup>44</sup>:

The infinite extension of the monotonous barren ground; the immense, embracing vault of the cloudless sky (which is rarely experienced as a sector between rocks and trees); the burning sun which gives an almost shadowless light; the dry, warm air, which tells us how important breathing is for the experience of place.

As a whole, the environment seems to make an absolute and eternal order manifest, a world which is distinguished by permanence and structure. Even the dimension of time does not introduce any ambiguities. The course of the sun thus describes an almost exact meridian, and divides space into "orient", "occident", "midnight", and "midday", that is, *qualitative* domains which in the South are commonly used as denotations for the cardinal points<sup>45</sup>. Sunset and sunrise connect day and night without transitional effects of light, and create a simple temporal rhythm. Even the animals of the desert participate in the infinite, monotonous environmental rhythms, as it becomes manifest in the movements of the camel, "the ship of the desert".

The only surprise one might encounter in the desert is the sand-storm, the *haboob* of the Arabs. But the sandstorm is also monotonous. It does not represent a different kind of order; it hides the world, but does not change it.

In the desert, thus, the *earth* does not offer man a sufficient existential foothold. *It does not contain individual places*, but forms a continuous neutral ground. The *sky*, instead, is structured by the sun (and also by the moon and

the stars) and its simple order is not obscured by atmospheric changes. In the desert, therefore, man does not encounter the multifarious "forces" of nature, but experiences its most absolute cosmic properties. This is the existential situation behind the Arabic proverb: "The further you go into the desert, the closer you come to God". The belief that there is only one God, monotheism, has in fact come into being in the desert countries of the Near East. Both Judaism and Christianity stem from the desert, although their doctrines have become "humanized" by the more friendly landscape of Palestine. In Islam, however, the desert has found its supreme expression. For the Muslim the conception of the one God is the only dogma, and five times a day he turns towards Mecca to say: "*la ilaha illallah*", there is no God but Allah<sup>46</sup>. By thus proclaiming the unity of God, the Muslim confirms the unity of his world, a world which has the *genius loci* of the desert as its natural model. For the desert-dweller the *genius loci* is a manifestation of the Absolute<sup>47</sup>. Existentially, the desert is in a very particular way, and its being has to be known as such to make dwelling possible. Islam therefore confirms that the Arab has become a friend of the desert. It is no longer understood as "death", as it was by the ancient Egyptians, but has become a basis for life. This does not mean however, that the Arab settles in the desert. For settling he needs the *oasis*, that is, he needs an intimate place within the cosmic macroworld<sup>48</sup>. In the oasis the slender trunks of the palms which rise from the flat expanse of the ground seem to make the order of horizontals and verticals which constitute Arabic space manifest. Within this abstract order no truly plastic objects are possible, the "play of light and shadow" is extinguished, and every-

thing is reduced to surface and line. In the oasis dwelling gets its full range, comprising the totality as well as the individual locality.

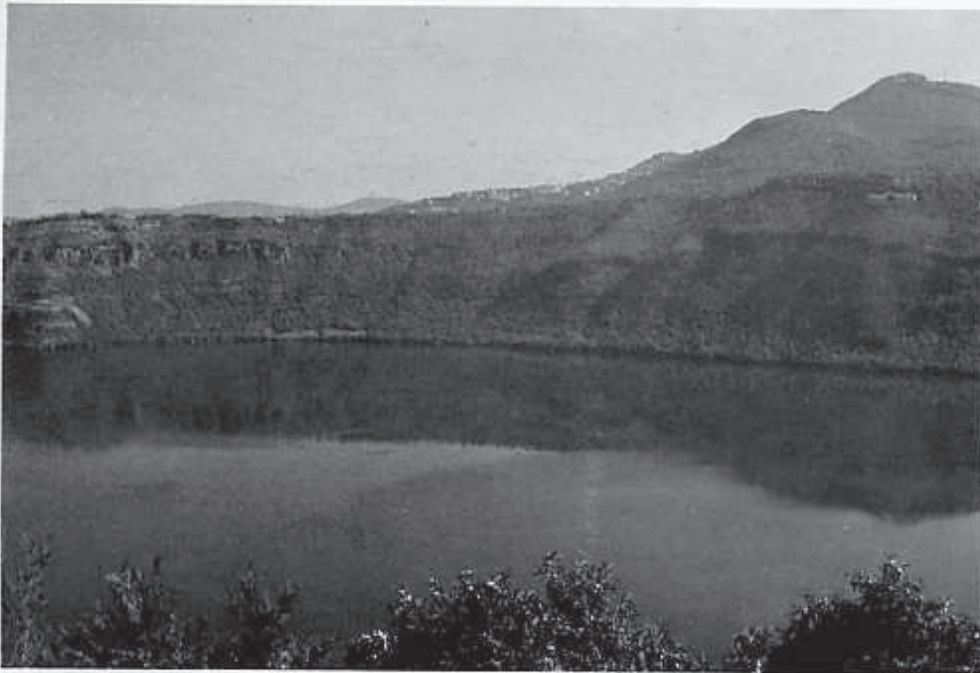
#### Classical Landscape

Between the South and the North we find the classical landscape. It was "discovered" in Greece, and later it became one of the primary components of the Roman environment. The classical landscape is neither characterized by monotony nor by multifariousness. Rather we find an intelligible *composition* of distinct elements: clearly defined hills and mountains which are rarely covered by the shaggy woods of the North, clearly delimited, imageable natural spaces such as valleys and basins, which appear as individual "worlds"; a strong and evenly distributed light and a transparent air which give the forms a maximum of sculptural presence. The ground is simultaneously continuous and varied, and the sky is high and embracing without however possessing the absolute quality encountered in the desert. A true microstructure is lacking, all dimensions are "human" and constitute a total, harmonious equilibrium. The environment thus consists of palpable "things" which stand out (*ek-sist*) in light. The classic landscape "receives" light without losing its concrete presence<sup>49</sup>.

In general the classical landscape may be described as a *meaningful order of distinct, individual places*. Thus Ludwig Curtius writes: "The single Greek landscape is naturally given as a dearly delimited unit, which to the eye appears as an integrated totality (*geschlossenes Gebilde*). The Greek sense for plastic form and boundary, for the whole and the parts, is founded on the landscape..."<sup>50</sup>. We have already pointed out that the Greeks personified the various characters experienced in the landscape

67. Classical landscape. Lago di Albano with Monte Cavo.

68. Wine terraces in Calabria.



as anthropomorphic *gods*, interrelating thus natural and human properties. In nature Greek man found himself, rather than the absolute God of the desert or the trolls of the Nordic forest. That means that by knowing himself he knew the world, and became freed from the total abstraction as well as the empathy discussed in connection with the cosmic and the romantic landscapes. The classical landscape therefore makes a human fellowship possible, where every part conserves its identity within the totality. Here the individual neither is absorbed by an abstract system, nor has to find his private hiding-place. A true "gathering" thus becomes possible, which fulfills the most basic aspects of dwelling.

How then does "classical man" dwell in the landscape? Basically we may say that he places himself in front of nature as an equal "partner". He is where he is, and looks at nature as a friendly complement to his own being. This simple and stable relationship helps to release human *vitality*, whereas the mutable Nordic world makes man search security in introvert heaviness. When man places himself "in front of" nature, he reduces landscape to a *veduta*, and the classical landscape is in fact hardly "used" in the Nordic sense of "going into nature"<sup>31</sup>. The union of man and nature is rather expressed through the practical use of agriculture, which accentuates the landscape structure as an "addition" of relatively independent, individual places. The *genius loci* of the classical landscape is therefore first of all manifest where clearly defined natural places are emphasized by the loving care of man. As a well known example we may mention the Valdarno in Italy, where the cultural landscape indeed expresses the classical "reconciliation". In general the reconciliation is manifest as a harmonious equilibrium of earth

69. Settlement in the landscape. Soriano ai Cimino.

70. French "campagne" near Amiens.

and sky. Plastically present, the earth rises up without drama, and blossoms in trees which have their individual plastic value. The golden light of the sky answers gently, and promises man "bread and wine".

#### *Complex Landscapes*

The romantic, cosmic and classical landscapes are archetypes of natural place. Being generated by the basic relationships between earth and sky, they are relevant categories which may help us to "understand" the genius loci of any concrete situation. As types, however, they hardly appear in "pure" form, but participate in various kinds of syntheses. We have already mentioned the "fertile desert" of the French *campagne*, where cosmic, romantic and classical properties unify to form a particularly meaningful totality, a landscape which made Gothic architecture possible, and hence a particularly complete interpretation of the Christian message. We might also mention a place like Naples, where classical spaces and characters meet the romantic atmosphere of the sea and the chthonic forces of the volcano, or Venice where cosmic extension comes together with the everchanging, glittering surface of the lagoon. In Brandenburg, instead, extension is squeezed in between a sandy moor and a low, grey sky, creating a landscape which seems saturated by the monotonous, cheerless rhythm of marching soldiers. In the Alps, on the contrary, we find a "wild-romantic" character, which is primarily determined by the contrast between serrate silhouettes and impenetrable ravines. The possibilities are legion and determine a corresponding multitude of "existential meanings". The notion that the landscape determines fundamental existential meanings or contents, is confirmed by the fact



- 71. Naples, panorama.
- 72. The crater of the Vesuvio.
- 73. Venice across the lagoon.
- 74. Norwegian landscape.
- 75. Alpine landscape.

that most people feel "lost" when they are moved to a "foreign" landscape. It is well known that people of the great plains easily suffer from claustrophobia when they have to live in a hilly country, and that those who are used to be surrounded by intimate spaces easily become victims of agoraphobia. In any case, however, landscape functions as an extended *ground* to the man-made places. It contains these places, and as a "preparation" for them, it also contains natural "insides". We have described these as "meaningful places" which are "known" because they possess particular structural properties. Dwelling in nature is therefore not a simple question of "refuge". Rather it means to understand the given environment as a set of "insides", from the macro down to the micro level. In the romantic landscape dwelling means to rise up from the micro to the macro level; here the immediately given are the forces of the earth, whereas God is hidden. In the cosmic landscape the process has the opposite direction, and the enclosed garden or "paradise" becomes the ultimate goal. In the classical landscape, finally, man finds himself in the harmonious "middle" and may reach "out" as well as "in". Rilke told us what it is all about: "Earth, is not this what you want: invisibly to arise in us?"<sup>52</sup>.





III  
MAN-MADE PLACE

76. Urnes Stave church, Norway.  
77. Megalithic structure, Segni, Lazio.

1. *The Phenomena of Man-made Place*

To dwell between heaven and earth means to "settle" in the "multifarious in-between", that is, to concretize the general situation as a man-made place. The word "settle" here does not mean a mere economical relationship; it is rather an existential concept which denotes the ability to symbolize meanings. When the man-made environment is meaningful, man is "at home". The places where we have grown up are such "homes"; we know exactly how it feels to walk on that particular pavement, to be between those particular walls, or under that particular ceiling; we know the cool enclosure of the Southern house, and the comforting warmth of the Nordic dwelling. In general, we know "realities" which carry our existence. But "settling" goes beyond such immediate gratifications. From the beginning of time man has recognized that to create a place means to express the essence of being. The man-made environment where he lives is not a mere practical tool or the result of arbitrary happenings, it has structure and embodies meanings. These meanings and structures are reflections of man's understanding of the natural environment and his existential situation in general<sup>1</sup>. A study of man-made place therefore ought to have a *natural* basis: it should take the relationship to the natural environment as its point of departure.

Architectural history shows that man's primeval experience of everything as a "Thou", also determined his relationship to buildings and artifacts. Like natural elements, they were imbued with life, they had *mana*, or magical power. Demonic powers in fact are conquered by giving them a "dwelling". In this way they are fixed to a place and may be influenced by man<sup>2</sup>. The architecture of early civilizations may therefore be interpreted as a concretization of the under-



78. Step pyramid at Saqqāra.

79. Cave dwelling at Petra.

standing of nature, described above in terms of things, order, character, light and time. The processes involved in "translating" these meanings into man-made forms have already been defined as "visualization", "complementation", and "symbolization", whereas "gathering" serves the somewhat different purpose of making the man-made place become a *microcosmos*. In general we may say that man "builds" his world.

The first mode of building consists in concretizing the natural forces. In the early history of Western art and architecture we encounter two basic ways of doing this. Either the forces are "directly" expressed by means of lines and ornament, or they are concretized as man-made things, which represent the natural things mentioned above. Whereas the first way was employed by the "Nordic" peoples, the second was developed by the Mediterranean civilizations<sup>1</sup>. We shall here concentrate our attention on the "Mediterranean" mode. Early Mediterranean architecture is first of all distinguished by the use of large stones. It is a *megalithic* architecture where the material symbolizes the solidity and permanence found in mountains and rocks. Permanence was understood as a primary existential need, and was related to man's ability of procreation. The erect stone, *menhir*, was simultaneously a "built" rock and a phallic symbol, and the massive, cyclopic wall embodied the same forces<sup>2</sup>. Through a process of abstraction, the elementary forces were transformed into a system of verticals and horizontals ("active" and "passive" elements), a development which culminated in the orthogonal structures of Egyptian architecture. Other natural meanings were also related to this system. The Egyptian pyramids are "artificial mountains" which were built to make the properties of a real mountain manifest, such as an





80. Temple of Amenophis III, Luxor.  
81. Valley-temple of Chephren, El Gizeh.

inferred vertical axis which connects earth and sky and "receives" the sun. Thus the pyramid unifies the primordial mountain of Egyptian mythology with the radiant sun-god Ra, and represents the king as his son. At the same time the pyramids through their location between oasis and desert (life and death), visualize the spatial structure of the country; a longitudinal fertile valley between infinite expanses of barren land<sup>5</sup>. Here buildings are used to define a significant boundary ("edge"). Finally we may mention that Egyptians "built" the sky, decorating ceilings of tombs, temples and houses with stars on a blue ground. By means of visualization and symbolization the ancient Egyptians thus concretized their known world.

We have already mentioned the *cave* as another archetypal natural element. In megalithic architecture artificial caves, *dolmen*, were built to visualize this aspect of the earth. Being simultaneously interior spaces and feminine symbols, the artificial caves were understood as representations of the world as a whole<sup>6</sup>, an interpretation which was completed by the introduction of vertical "masculine" elements, such as a pillar, or an orthogonal system of vertical and horizontal members. The "marriage of heaven and earth" which was the point of departure for ancient cosmogonies was thus concretized in built form. Typical examples are furnished by the megalithic temples of Malta, where the apses contained a *menhir* and the boundaries are orthogonally articulated. In ancient architecture we also encounter other representations of natural elements. The Ionic temple with its numerous columns has thus been described as a "sacred grove", and the expression "forest of columns" is often used to designate the hypostyle halls of early civilizations. In the Egyptian temples the columns are in fact derived

from plant forms, such as palm, papyrus and lotus. The Egyptian forest of columns represented "the land and the sacred plants which rose out of the fertilized soil to bring protection, permanence and sustenance to the land and its people"<sup>7</sup>. In general man's understanding of the fertile soil is visualized through *agriculture*. In the cultural landscape the natural forces are "domesticated" and living reality is made manifest as an ordered process where man participates. The *garden* is hence a place where living nature is concretized as an organic totality. Man's image of Paradise was in fact always an enclosed garden. In the garden the known elements of nature are gathered: fruit trees, flowers and "tamed" water. In Mediaeval painting it is depicted as a *hortus conclusus* with the "Tree of Life" and a fountain in the middle, surrounded by a "wilderness" of mountains and forests<sup>8</sup>. Even water may thus be "built", that is, given precise definition as part of a cultural landscape, or visualized in a fountain. In the cultural landscape man "builds" the earth, and makes its potential structure manifest as a meaningful totality. A cultural landscape is based on "cultivation", and contains defined places, paths and domains which concretize man's understanding of the natural environment.

Orthogonal space, cave-like interior and cultural landscape suggest general comprehensive orders, which to some extent satisfy man's need for understanding nature as a structured whole, comprising all environmental levels from the artifact to the region. The quest for order, however, above all becomes manifest through the "building" of one of the *cosmic orders* mentioned in connection with natural place. We understand immediately that the orthogonal space of the Egyptians comprised this aspect, unifying the east-west course of the sun

and the south-north direction of the Nile. Moreover the Egyptians over and over again reproduced their general image of heaven and earth in the floors, walls and ceilings of their temples. We have also reason to believe that the imagined four posts on which the sky rests, are a derivation from an archetypal building with a flat ceiling and a column at each corner. The understanding of the natural environment therefore does not necessarily precede building. The very act of building may become a means to this understanding, and the house may act as a "model" for the cosmic image, at least if a structural similarity is present. We thus realize the fundamental importance of architecture as a means to give man an existential foothold. The Nordic image of the cosmos as a house where the heavenly axis forms the ridge-beam and the *Irmisul* the northern of the two posts on which it rests, is also a projection of the structure of a simple archetypal house into the cosmic sphere<sup>9</sup>. And the Mediterranean image of a "cosmic cave", in obviously derived from natural caves as well as artificial caves such as the Roman Pantheon<sup>10</sup>. In this case, we find a reciprocal relationship between the natural and the man-made place.

The Romans possessed both the cave-image and the house-image, representing again a meeting of Mediterranean and Nordic elements. In the Pantheon two crossing axes are integrated in the cave-like rotunda, expressing thus that the world is both oriented and "round"<sup>11</sup>. On the urban level the Romans visualized the cosmic order by means of two main streets crossing each other at a right angle; the *cardo* running north-south and the *decumanus* east-west. This scheme has been known by many civilizations and was still alive in the Middle Ages<sup>12</sup>. The word "quarter" in connection with cities stems from this

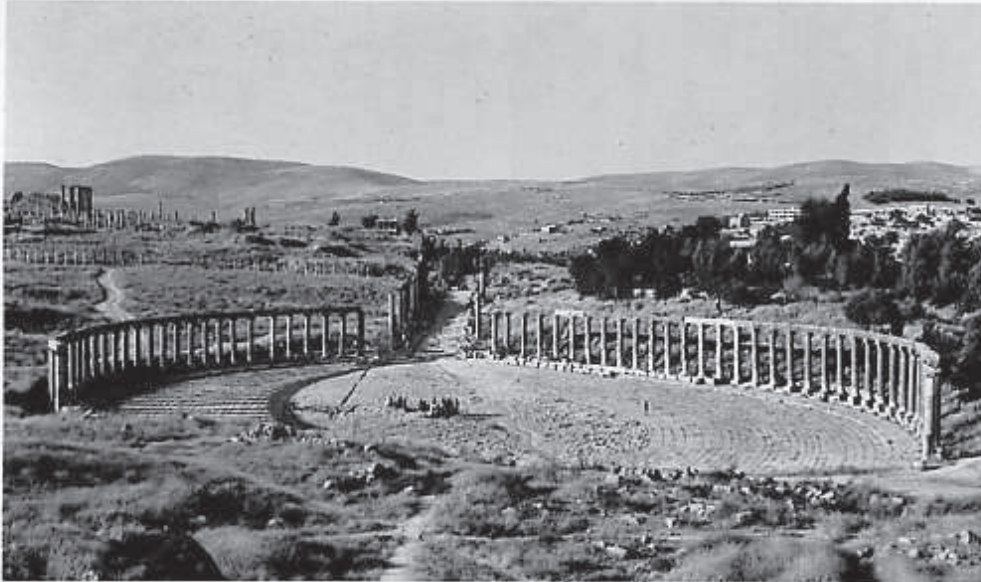


division in four parts by the crossing axes. In the Middle Ages whole countries like Ireland and Iceland were divided in four parts. A Medieval world map from the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century, shows four symmetrically disposed continents, separated by seas and surrounded by a "mare magnum"<sup>13</sup>. We may also remind in this connection that the Christian basilica with transept is organized around a "crossing".

Whereas a cosmic order is visualized by means of spatial *organization*, characters are symbolized through formal *articulation*. Characters are more intangible than natural "things" and spatial relationships, and demand particular attention from the builder. In fact their concretization presupposes a language of symbolic forms (style). Such a language consists of basic elements which may be varied and combined in different ways. In other words it depends on systematic formal articulation. The decisive step in the development of a coherent formal language was taken by the Greeks. We have already pointed out that the Greek achievement consisted in a precise definition of different kinds of natural places, which were related to basic human characters. This definition meant something more than the meaningful dedication of a particular place to a particular god, although this might have been the first step<sup>14</sup>. Primarily it consisted in the building of symbolic structures, temples, which gave the intended character presence. The single temple may be understood as an individual member of a "family", just as the gods formed a family which symbolized the various roles and interactions of man on earth. The individual differences within the family were first of all expressed by the so called classical *Orders*, but also by variations within the *Orders* as well as combinations of traits from two or more *Orders*. Our theoretical knowledge

82. Forum of Gerasa, Jordan, with *cardo* and *decumanus* in the background.

83. Second Hera temple, Paestum.



84. "Opera di natura" and "opera di mano".  
Raphael: Palazzo Vidoni, Rome.

of the Orders goes back to the Roman architect Vitruvius. Vitruvius maintains that temples ought to be built in a different style according to their dedication, and proceeds by explaining the Orders in terms of human characters. The Doric column "furnishes the proportion of a man's body, its strength and beauty". The Ionic is characterized by "feminine slenderness", whereas the Corinthian "imitates the slight figure of a maiden"<sup>15</sup>. The articulation of Greek architecture therefore, cannot be understood in merely visual or aesthetic terms. Articulation meant making precise a particular character, and this character, simple or complex, determined every part of the building. In Renaissance architecture articulation was based on the "Vitruvian" tradition. Serlio calls the orders *opera di mano*, and implies that they represent different modes of human existence, while rustication was *opera di natura*, that is, a symbol of the original forces of the earth. As late as the eighteenth century the classical Orders formed the basis for an exceptionally sensitive treatment of symbolic characterization<sup>16</sup>.

Architectural history, however, also knows other coherent symbolic languages. In Mediaeval European architecture, a systematic approach to architectural form served the purpose of symbolizing the ordered Christian cosmos<sup>17</sup>. As the Christian world is founded on the *spirit* as an existential reality, Mediaeval articulation aimed at "dematerialization", and negated the anthropomorphic classical Orders. Dematerialization was understood as a function of *light*, as a divine manifestation. We may therefore say that Mediaeval man "built" light, the most intangible of natural phenomena. Since then light has been a primary means of architectural characterization.

In addition to "forces", order, character





85. Building light. Cappella Palatina, Palermo.  
86. Building light. Amiens Cathedral.



and light, the categories of natural understanding also comprise *time*, which is a basically different dimension. Time is not a phenomenon, but the order of phenomenal succession and change. Buildings and settlements, however, are static, apart from certain mobile elements of secondary importance. Nonetheless man has succeeded in "building" time, by translating basic temporal structures into spatial properties<sup>18</sup>. Primarily life is "movement", and as such it possesses "direction" and "rhythm". The *path* is therefore a fundamental existential symbol which concretizes the dimension of time. Sometimes the path leads to a meaningful goal, where the movement is arrested and time becomes permanence. Another basic symbol which concretizes the temporal dimension is therefore the *centre*. The archetypal buildings which visualize the concept of centre are the *Mal* and the enclosure, which often appear in combination. The *Mal* used by ancient civilizations was usually understood as an *axis mundi*. At the *acropolis*, *Mal* (hill) and enclosure (plateau) are unified. In ancient architecture we also usually find a *via sacra* which leads to the centre, and which is used for ritual re-enacting of "cosmic" events. In the Christian *basilica*, path (nave) and goal (altar) are united to symbolize the "Path of Salvation" of Christian doctrine. The basic phenomena of the urban environment, the *street* and the *square*, also belong to the categories of path and centre.

The man-made place visualizes, complements and symbolizes man's understanding of his environment. In addition it may also *gather* a number of meanings. Any true settlement is founded on gathering, and the basic forms are the farm, the agricultural village<sup>19</sup>, the urban dwelling, and the town or city. All these places are essentially man-made or

87. Path and goal. Belvedere, by Hildebrandt  
Vienna.

88. Village. Pitigliano, southern Toscana.

89. Path and goal. S. Sabina, Rome.



"artificial", but they fall into two distinct categories. The first two are directly related to the land, that is, they form part of a *particular* environment, and their structure is determined by this environment. In the urban dwelling and the town as a whole, instead, the direct relation to the natural environment is weakened or almost lost, and gathering becomes a bringing together of forms which have their roots in other localities. This is the *essential* property of the urban settlement. The main historical cities are therefore hardly found in places where a particular natural character is revealed (such as Delphi or Olympia), but somewhere *between* these places. Thereby they become comprehensive centres for a world which comprises a multitude of meanings. By moving the natural forces into the settlement, the forces were "domesticated", and the city became a fact "which helped to liberate man from the terror of the natural world with its dark powers and limiting laws"<sup>20</sup>. In a town such as Priene, the main gods are brought together and located, according to their particular nature, within the urban area, transforming thus the town into a meaningful *microcosmos*. But also the other buildings, public as well as private, are articulated by means of the classical Orders, and are thus related to the same system of meanings<sup>21</sup>. It goes without saying that the gathering function of the town determines a complex internal structure, an urban "inside". The same holds true for the house, which Alberti called a "small city".

Through building, man-made places are created which possess their individual *genius loci*. This genius is determined by what is visualized, complemented, symbolized or gathered. In vernacular architecture the man-made *genius loci* ought to correspond closely to that of the natural place, in urban architecture,

instead, it is more comprehensive. The *genius loci* of a town, thus, ought to comprise the spirit of the locality to get "roots", but it should also gather contents of *general* interest, contents which have their roots elsewhere, and which have been moved by means of symbolization. Some of these contents (meanings) are so general that they apply to all places.

## 2. The Structure of Man-made Place

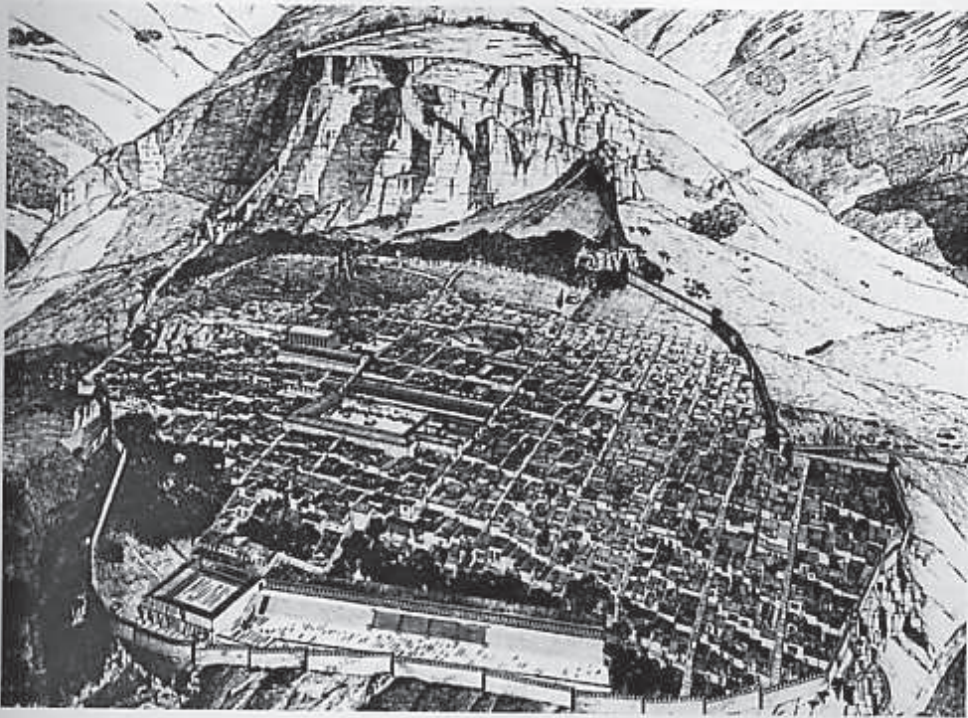
The term "man-made place" denotes a series of environmental levels, from villages and towns down to houses and their interiors. All these "places" begin their "presencing" (being) from the boundaries. We have already pointed out that the "presencing" thereby defined, in principle implies particular relationships to the ground and to the sky. A general introduction to the structure of man-made places therefore has to investigate these relationships with regard to the different environmental levels. *How* does a building stand and rise? (Evidently "standing" here comprises lateral extension and contact with the surroundings by means of openings). *How* is a settlement related to its environment, and *how* is its silhouette? Questions of this kind put the matter of structure in concrete terms, and give the phenomenology of architecture a realistic basis.

The distinctive quality of any man-made place is *enclosure*, and its character and spatial properties are determined by how it is enclosed. Enclosure, thus, may be more or less complete, openings and implied directions may be present, and the capacity of the place varies accordingly. Enclosure primarily means a distinct area which is separated from the surroundings by means of a built boundary. It may also be manifest in less strict form as a dense cluster of elements, where a continuous boundary is inferred

rather than positively present. An "enclosure" may even be created by a mere change in the texture of the ground.

The cultural importance of defining an area which is qualitatively different from the surroundings, cannot be overestimated. The *temenos* is the archetypal form of meaningful space, and constitutes the point of departure for human settlement. In Japan, as has been shown by Günter Nitschke, basic cultural phenomena of various kinds were derived from the process of land demarcation<sup>20</sup>. The landmarks themselves were bundles of grass or reeds which were bound together in the middle to form a fan-like artifact which visualizes a separation of earth and heaven (bottom and top). A three-dimensional "cosmos" was thus defined within the given chaos. Nitschke furthermore points out that the very word for (enclosed) land, *shima*, was derived from the name of the land occupation mark, *shime*, and reminds us of a parallel connection of words in the German *Marke* (mark, sign) and *Mark* (land, e.g. Denmark)<sup>21</sup>. We may add that several Nordic terms for an enclosed "inside", *town*, *tun* (norw.), *tyn* (czech) are derived from *Zaun*, that is, "fence", *vallis*, "valley", goes together with *vallum*, "wall", "palisade", and *vallus*, "pole"<sup>24</sup>. Indeed the enclosure began its presencing from the boundary.

The "how" of the enclosure depends upon the concrete properties of the boundaries. The boundaries determine the degree of enclosure ("openness") as well as the spatial direction, which are two aspects of the same phenomenon. When an opening is introduced in a centralized enclosure, an *axis* is created which implies longitudinal movement. We find such a combination of enclosure and longitudinality already at Stonehenge, where the "altar" is moved away from the geometrical centre in



62/70
 relation to the processional path which enters the area from the north-east<sup>25</sup>. The spatial structures developed during the history of architecture are always in one way or the other based on centralization and longitudinality and their combinations. The general significance of the concepts of centre and path is thus confirmed, but the particular ways of using these themes are to a high extent locally determined. Centralization and longitudinality are often emphasized by the upper boundary of the space, for instance by a hemispherical *dome* or a barrel *vault*. The ceiling may thus determine and visualize the internal spatial structure. In general the presence of a ceiling defines the particular kind of enclosures known as "interior space". When there is no ceiling, the sky acts as the upper boundary, and the space is, in spite of lateral boundaries, part of "exterior space". An enclosed space which is lit from above therefore offers a strange experience of being inside and outside at the same time.

62/70
 The main urban elements are centres and paths. A square obviously functions as a centre and a street as a path. As such they are enclosures; their spatial identity in fact depends upon the presence of relatively continuous lateral boundaries. In addition to centre and path, we have introduced the word *domain* to denote a basic type of enclosure. An urban district is such a domain, and again we find that the presence of a boundary is of decisive importance. A district, thus, is either defined by conspicuous edges of some kind, or at least by a change in urban texture which implies a boundary. In combination, centres, paths and domains may form complex totalities which serve man's need for orientation. Of particular interest are the cases when a centre generates a domain, or "field", to use the word of Paolo Portoghesi<sup>26</sup>. This happens for





92. Vault. S. Cataldo, Palermo.  
 93. Piazza. Il Campo, Siena.  
 94. Street. S. Gimignano, Toscana.  
 95. District. Pisticci, Basilicata.



instance when a circular *piazza* is surrounded by a concentric system of streets. The properties of a "field" are hence determined by the centre, or by a regular repetition of structural properties. When several fields interact, a complex spatial structure results, of varying density, tension and dynamism<sup>27</sup>.

Centre, path and domain are general and abstracts concepts, which translate the Gestalt principles into architectural terms. More concrete are certain archetypal configurations which are generated by these principles, or rather: which may be classified as centres, paths or domains. In architectural history, thus, we encounter centralized forms such as the *rotunda* and the regular polygons, which generate three-dimensional volumes. Le Corbusier still considered the sphere, the cube, the pyramid and the cylinder the elements of architectural form<sup>26</sup>. The basic longitudinal forms stem from an organization of space around a curved or straight line, and are equally important in buildings and towns. As built domains we may, finally, consider all kinds of clusters and groups of spaces or buildings. Whereas the cluster is based on simple proximity of the elements, and shows relatively indeterminate spatial relationships, the word "group" is mostly used to denote a regular, possibly geometrical, two- or three-dimensional spatial organization. The importance of the archetypal configurations is confirmed by the fact that towns and villages in any part of the world either belong to the centralized, the longitudinal or the clustered type. In German the types are known as *Rundling*, *Reihendorf* and *Haufendorf*<sup>29</sup>. Two spatial patterns of particular interest are the *grid* and the *labyrinth*. The grid is an "open", orthogonal infrastructure of paths, which may be filled in with

96. Round village. Palombara Sabina, Lazio.



97. Linear village. Caprarola, Lazio.

98. Cluster village with labyrinthine spaces. Ostuni, Puglia.

buildings in different ways<sup>10</sup>. The labyrinth instead, is characterized by a lack of straight and continuous paths, and a high density. It is the traditional Arabic settlement pattern<sup>31</sup>.

The character of a man-made place is to a high extent determined by its degree of "openness". The solidity or transparency of the boundaries make the space appear isolated or as part of a more comprehensive totality. We here return to the inside-outside relationship which constitutes the very essence of architecture. A place may thus be an isolated refuge, whose meaning is due to the presence of symbolic elements, it may communicate with an "understood" concrete environment, or be related to an ideal, imagined world. The last case is found in the "double-shell" spaces of late Baroque architecture, where the inside proper is embedded in a luminous zone which symbolizes the omnipresence of Divine Light<sup>32</sup>. Zones of transition may also be used to relate the internal structure of the place to the structure of the natural or man-made environment. We may in this context again remind of Robert Venturi, who says: "Architecture occurs at the meeting of interior and exterior forces of use and space"<sup>33</sup>. Evidently this meeting is expressed in the wall, and in particular in the openings which connect the two "domains".

A man-made place, however, is something more than a space with a varying degree of openness. As a building, it stands on the ground, and rises towards the sky. The character of the place is to a high extent determined by how this standing and rising is concretized. This also holds true for entire settlements, such as towns. When a town pleases us because of its distinct character, it is usually because a majority of its buildings are related to the earth and the sky in the same way; they seem to



99. Double-shell structure. In der Wies by Zimmermann.

100. On the ground under the sky. Temple of Heaven, Peking.

101. "Gerist". Open barn in western Norway.





express a common form of life, a common way of being on the earth. Thus they constitute a *genius loci* which allows for human identification.

The "how" of a building comprises a general and particular aspect. In general any building possesses a concrete structure (*Gerüst*) which may be described in formal-technical terms, and in particular an individual articulation of this structure. An archetypal building in this sense is a house whose primary structure consists of a ridge-beam carried by a (gabled) post at either end. Such a house possesses a clear, easily imageable order, which in ancient times helped man to gain a feeling of security. This fact is confirmed by the etymology and relationship of the terms which denote the various parts of the structure. The word "ridge", thus, in general means the crest of something, and in particular a chain of mountains. The corresponding Norwegian word *ås* means "hill" and "god" as well as the ridge of the house. The German *First* has many connotations, among which *Forst* is particularly interesting, as it denotes an enclosed area in general<sup>34</sup>. Of primary importance in the structure is the point where the horizontal and vertical members are connected, the "gable". In the Middle Ages the German word *Giebel* meant gable as well as the poles of the sky<sup>35</sup>. Here we return again to the relationship between house and cosmic order, which was discussed above. What is important to stress in this context however, is that the meaning of a building is related to its structure. Meaning and character cannot be interpreted in purely formal or aesthetic terms, but are, as we have already pointed out, intimately connected with *making*. Heidegger in fact defines the "method" of art as *ins-werk-setzen* (to "set-into-work")<sup>36</sup>. This is the meaning of architectural concretization: to set a place into work, in

102. Making. Clay houses in Tunis.

103. Making. Loft at Kleivi, Aamotsdal, Norway.

the sense of concrete building. The character of a work of architecture is therefore first of all determined by the kind of construction used; whether it is skeletal, open and transparent (potentially or in fact), or massive and enclosed. And secondly by the making as such: binding, joining, erecting etc. These processes express how the meaning of the work becomes a "thing". Thus Mies van der Rohe said: "Architecture starts when you put two bricks carefully upon each other".

Making is an aspect of *articulation*. The other aspect is "form". *Articulation* determines *how* a building stands and rises, and *how* it receives light. The word "stand" denotes its relationship to the earth, and "rise" its relationship to the sky. Standing is concretized through the treatment of the *base* and the *wall*. A massive and perhaps concave base and accentuated horizontals "tie" the building to the ground, whereas an emphasis on the vertical direction tends to make it "free". Vertical lines and forms express an active relationship to the sky and a wish for receiving light. Verticalism and religious aspiration have in fact always gone together. In the wall, thus, earth and sky meet, and the way man "is" on earth is concretized by the solution of this meeting. Some buildings are "ground-hugging", others rise freely, and in others again we find a meaningful equilibrium. Such an equilibrium is for instance found in the Doric temple, where the details and the proportions of the columns express that they stand *and* rise. By means of subtle variations in the treatment, the Greeks could express significant nuances within the general equilibrium<sup>37</sup>. In the first Hera temple in Paestum the strong *entasis* of the columns as well as other details brings us close to the earth, in accordance with the character of the goddess. In the temple of Apollo in



104. Making. Stone building in Montepidciano.  
 105. Standing and rising. Street in Innsbruck.  
 106. Standing and rising. Temple in Selinunte.

Corinth, instead, *entasis* is entirely abolished to express the more abstract, intellectual strength of the god.

A meaningful relationship between horizontals and verticals also depends on the form of the *roof*. Flat or sloping roofs, gables, domes and pointed spires express different relations to earth and sky, and determine the general character of the building. In his houses, Frank Lloyd Wright wanted simultaneously to express belonging to the earth and "freedom" in space<sup>38</sup>. Thus he composed the building of planes of "infinite" extension parallel to the ground, but introduced a vertical core as well as low hipped roofs to give it an anchorage. The (horizontal) freedom in space is also concretized by an opening up of the walls by means of bands of glass. The wall is no longer there to enclose space, but rather to direct it and to achieve a unification of inside and outside.

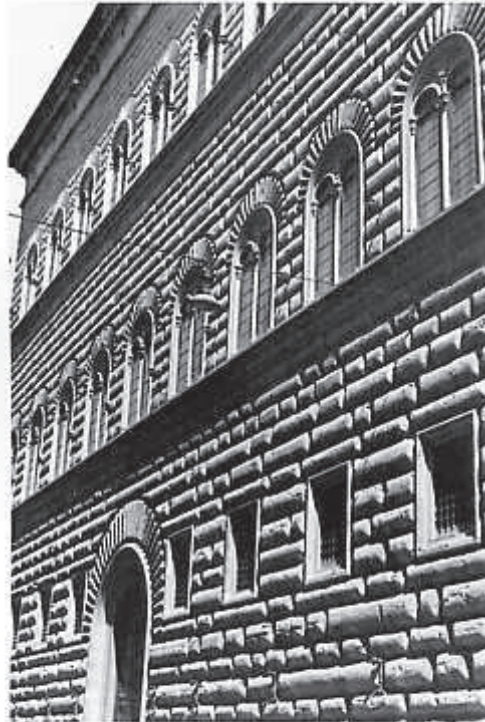
In general *openings* serve to concretize different *inside-outside* relationships. "Holes" in a massive wall give emphasis to enclosure and interiority, whereas the filling in of a skeletal wall by large surfaces of glass "de-materialize" the building and create an interaction between exterior and interior. Openings also receive and transmit *light*, and are therefore main determinants of architectural character. Large-scale environments are often characterized by particular types of windows and doors, which thereby become *motifs* which condense and visualize the local character. Finally, it ought to be mentioned that material and colour may contribute decisively to characterization. Stone, brick and wood are different "presences" which express the way buildings "are" on earth. In Florence, for instance, rusticated stone was used to concretize a rational, "built" environment possessing "classical" substance and order. In Siena, instead, the use of continuous





107. Roof as formal factor. Gateway at Götting by Hildebrandt.  
108. "French" window. Paris.  
109. Built architecture. Palazzo Strozzi, Florence.

110. Hole and massivity. Farm house in Bardonecchia, Piedmont.  
111. Continuous architecture. Street in Siena.



"de-materialized" brick surfaces create an atmosphere of Mediaeval spirituality. It goes without saying that the choice of material and colour is intimately linked with "making" in general, although a certain independence may be meaningful, as when built walls are painted in colours which have a mere characterizing function. A "freedom" of this kind is obviously more common in enclosed interior spaces, where the direct contact with the environment is weaker, and where character therefore implies a gathering of "distant" meanings.

It would in this context carry us too far to develop a systematic typology of man-made places. We have already mentioned the farm, the village, the urban house and the town as primary categories. A further differentiation ought to be based on the various "building-tasks" which make up a human settlement<sup>39</sup>. It ought to be repeated, however, that man-made places form a hierarchy of environmental levels. The settlement as a whole is externally related to a natural or cultural landscape by which it is contained. Internally the settlement contains sub-places such as squares, streets and districts ("quarters"). These sub-places again contain and are defined by buildings serving different purposes. Within the buildings we find the interior spaces, in the common sense of the word. The interior contains artifacts which define an innermost goal (such as the altar of a church, or the table in Trakl's poem). The structural properties of the various levels as well as their formal interrelations, concretize the "form of life" as a whole, in an individual as well as a social sense. We shall later introduce the concepts of "private" and "public" to arrive at a fuller understanding of the place as a "living" totality.

Structurally, orientation and identification means the experience of man-made

place within man-made place. The different "insides" are "known" in accordance with their structural properties. In most settlements in fact we find that the naming of the urban spaces reflects the existence of distinct man-made places which have a structurally determined identity<sup>40</sup>. The man-made *genius loci* depends on *how* these places are in terms of space and character, that is, in terms of organization and articulation.

### 3. *The Spirit of Man-Made Place*

Our discussion of the phenomena of man-made place has uncovered several basic types of man-made factors, which helped our understanding of the structure of man-made place, as well as its relationship to natural place. Any concrete situation is distinguished by a particular combination of these factors which constitute the *genius loci* as an integrated totality. There are man-made places where the variety and mystery of the natural forces are strongly felt, there are places where the manifestation of an abstract general order has been the main intention, and there are places where force and order have found a comprehensible equilibrium. We thus return to the categories of "romantic", "cosmic" and "classical". Although these categories are abstractions which are hardly concretized in "pure" form, they express concrete tendencies, and therefore serve a general understanding of the spirit of place. Any concrete situation may in fact be understood as a synthesis of these basic categories. Using the word "architecture" to denote the concretization of man-made places in general, we may hence talk about "romantic architecture", "cosmic architecture", and "classical architecture".

#### *Romantic architecture*

As "romantic" we designate an ar-

chitecture distinguished by multiplicity and variety. It cannot easily be understood in logical terms, but seems irrational and "subjective" (although the inherent meanings may be of general value). Romantic architecture is characterized by a strong "atmosphere", and may appear "phantastic" and "mysterious", but also "intimate" and "idyllic". In general it is distinguished by a live and dynamic character, and aims at "expression"<sup>41</sup>. Its forms seem to be a result of "growth" rather than organization, and resemble the forms of living nature.

Romantic space is topological rather than geometrical. On the urban level this means that the basic configurations are the dense and indeterminate cluster and the "free" and varied row. The urban spaces are distinguished by irregular enclosure, and contain functions in a general way, without aiming at regular, defined distribution. "Strong" romantic spaces and configurations demand a continuous but geometrically indeterminate boundary. In relation to the surroundings the romantic settlement is identified by the proximity of its elements, or by general enclosure.

The "atmosphere" and expressive character of romantic architecture is obtained by means of formal complexity and contradiction. Simple, intelligible volumes are avoided and transformed into transparent, skeletal structures, where the *line* becomes a symbol of force and dynamism. Although the construction as such may be logical, it usually appears irrational due to the multiplication of members, variation in detailing, and introduction of "free" ornament. The outside-inside relationship is usually complex, and the romantic building and settlement are characterized by a serrate and "wild" silhouette. Light is used to emphasize variety and atmosphere rather than

comprehensible elements. Usually it has a strong local quality, which may be stressed through the application of particular colours.

The Mediaeval town is the romantic settlement *par excellence*, particularly in Central Europe, where classical influence (natural or historical) is less strongly felt than for instance in Italy. The Mediaeval town makes its presence visible in towers and spires, and its spaces are characterized by the pointed gables of the houses, as well as by rich irrational detail. According to the natural environment the character varies, from the "wild-romantic" Alpine settlement to the idyllic interaction of buildings and surroundings in Northern Germany and Denmark. In Innsbruck, for instance, the houses are heavy and massive down at the ground with low and mysterious arcades, but they rise towards the sky with stepped and undulating gables. In a northern town like Celle, the gabled houses become skeletal and are transformed into an atmospheric play of colours. In Norway, finally, the Nordic character culminates in the eminently romantic structures of the stave-church and the *loft*, and in the white-painted houses which concretize the luminosity of the Nordic summer night. The summer night in fact became part of man's built environment when the colour white was invented. Before, the houses were dark, reflecting the mystery of the winter sky, which is also the light of the stave-church interior. In the stave-church it makes sense to talk about "dark light", as a Divine manifestation.

In more recent architecture, the romantic character is fully present and wonderfully interpreted in the *Art Nouveau*. Later it appears, in a different key, in the "forest" architecture of Alvar Aalto, differently again, in the works of Hugo Häring, who aimed at making an



112. Romantic architecture. Dinkelsbühl.

113. Romantic architecture. Street in Celle.

114. Romantic architecture. Dark and white-painted lofts at Tjøntveit, Numedal, Norway.

115. Romantic architecture. Own house by Guimard, Paris.

*organhaft* architecture, that is, buildings which are "organs" to the functions they serve, like the organs of our body. Thereby Häring gave the romantic approach an actual definition<sup>42</sup>. In general, the multiplicity and variety of romantic architecture is unified by a basic *Stimmung*, which corresponds to particular formative principles. Romantic architecture is therefore eminently *local*.

#### Cosmic architecture

As "cosmic" we designate an architecture distinguished by uniformity and "absolute" order. It can be understood as an integrated logical system, and seems rational and "abstract", in the sense of transcending the individual concrete situation. Cosmic architecture is distinguished by a certain lack of "atmosphere", and by a very limited number of basic characters. It is neither "phantastic" nor "idyllic", words which denote direct human participation, but remains aloof. Its forms are static rather than dynamic, and seems to be the revelation of a "hidden" order, rather than the result of concrete composition. It aims at "necessity" rather than expression.

Cosmic space is strictly geometrical and is usually concretized as a regular grid, or as a cross of orthogonal axes (*cardo-decumanus*). It is uniform and isotropic, although its directions are qualitatively different. That is, the qualitative differences are not expressed as such, but are absorbed by the system. Cosmic space, however, also knows an "inversion" which we may call "labyrinthine space". The labyrinth does not possess any defined or goal-oriented direction, it rests in itself without beginning and end<sup>43</sup>. Basically it is therefore "cosmic", although it seems to belong to another spatial family than the grid. "Strong" cosmic spaces demand a clear visualization of the system. In



116. Cosmic architecture. Decumanus at Gerasa.  
117. Cosmic architecture. Courtyard of the  
Mirimah mosque, Istanbul.



118. Labyrinthine world. Village at Tuti island,  
Khartoum.

119. Open grid. Massachusetts avenue,  
Cambridge, Mass.

relation to the surroundings it may remain "open", as it does not take the local microstructure into consideration. The character of cosmic architecture is also distinguished by "abstraction". Thus it shuns sculptural presence, and tends to dematerialize volumes and surfaces by means of "carpet-like" decoration (mosaic, glazed tiles etc.), or by the introduction of intricate geometrical webs. Horizontals and verticals do not represent active forces, but are put in a simple juxtaposition as manifestations of the general order.

In Islamic architecture the cosmic approach finds its major manifestation. The Islamic city, thus, consists of a combination of geometrical and labyrinthine space. Whereas the main public buildings are based on an orthogonal grid (Mosque, Medrese, etc.), the residential quarters are labyrinthine, a fact which expresses the desert origin of Islamic culture as well as the social structure of the Arabic settlement<sup>44</sup>, which, after all, are two aspects of the same totality. The "abstract" presence of horizontals and verticals (the Minaret), concretizes the general order, and gives a first suggestion of the cosmic character. In interior space this character becomes the manifestation of an ideal world, a paradise of white, green, and blue, that is, the colours of pure light, vegetation and water, which represents the goal of man's desert voyage.

But cosmic architecture may be interpreted in other ways. We have already described the absolute systems of the Egyptians and the Romans. The latter is of particular interest in our context, as it was brought along and implanted everywhere regardless of the local circumstances. In general the Romans thereby expressed that every individual place forms part of a comprehensive cosmic (and political!) system which it has to obey. In Roman architecture this



order penetrated all levels, down to the interior space of individual buildings. Thus the Roman conquest of the world happened as the manifestation of a preestablished cosmic order, "in agreement with the gods"<sup>45</sup>.

In modern times, the image of a cosmic order has degenerated into spatial systems which concretize political, social or economic structures. The grid-iron plans of American cities, for instance, do not express any cosmological concept, but make an "open" world of opportunities manifest. This world is open horizontally as well as vertically. Whereas the community expands horizontally, the success of the individual is indicated by the height of the building erected on the standard lot. Although the grid-iron thus possesses a certain "freedom", it hardly allows for the concretization of a distinct *genius loci*. Spatial systems of the cosmic type therefore ought to form part of more complex totalities.

#### *Classical architecture*

As "classical" we designate an architecture distinguished by imageability and articulate order. Its organization can be understood in logical terms, whereas its "substance" asks for empathy. It therefore appears "objective", in the double sense of the word. Classical architecture is characterized by concrete presence, and each element is a distinct "personality". Its forms are neither static nor dynamic, but pregnant with "organic life". They seem the result of a conscious composition of individual elements, and give man simultaneously a sense of belonging and freedom.

Classical space unifies topological and geometrical traits. The individual building may possess a strict geometrical order, which forms the basis for its identity<sup>46</sup>, whereas the organization of several buildings is topological. A certain "democratic" freedom is thereby



120. Classical architecture. Detail from the Propylaea, Athens.



121. Classical architecture. The acropolis, Athens.

expressed. Classical architecture is thus distinguished by the absence of a general, dominant system, and its space may be defined as an additive grouping of individual places. Whereas the classical landscape was understood as a *veduta*, classical architecture is described by means of *perspective*. In relation to the surroundings the classical settlement appears as a distinct, characteristic presence.

This presence is achieved by means of plastic articulation. In the classical building all the parts have their individual identity, at the same time as they condense, explain and perhaps differentiate the general character of the whole. Each character forms part of a "family" of characters, which are deliberately related to human qualities. In classical architecture the original forces are thus "humanized", and present themselves as individual participants in a comprehensive, meaningful world. The logic of construction is interpreted as an interaction of active and passive members, and the classical building therefore appears "built" in a direct and intelligible way. Light, finally, is used to give emphasis to the plastic presence of the parts and the whole by means of a play of light and shadow which "models" the form.

We have already made several references to Greek architecture, and should only add that it, in its developed Classical phase, represents the archetype of classical architecture. Throughout history the harmonious and meaningful equilibrium of Greek buildings and settlements has remained an ideal, which has been revived in ever new contexts. In Roman architecture the classical component was strong, but it faded away towards late Antiquity, when plastic presence was substituted by de-materialization and the symbolic "building" of light<sup>47</sup>. In the Florentine Renaissance, however, certain





122. Temple of Nike, Athens.  
 123. Renaissance. Ospedale degli Innocenti,  
 Florence by Brunelleschi.

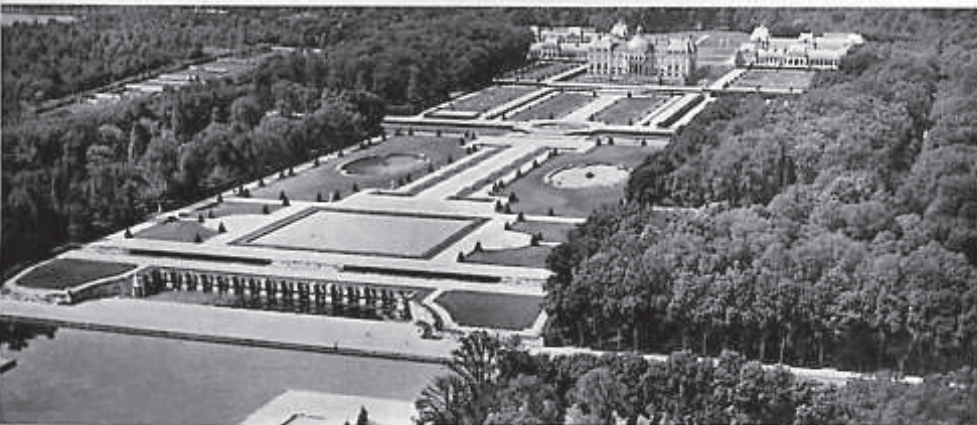
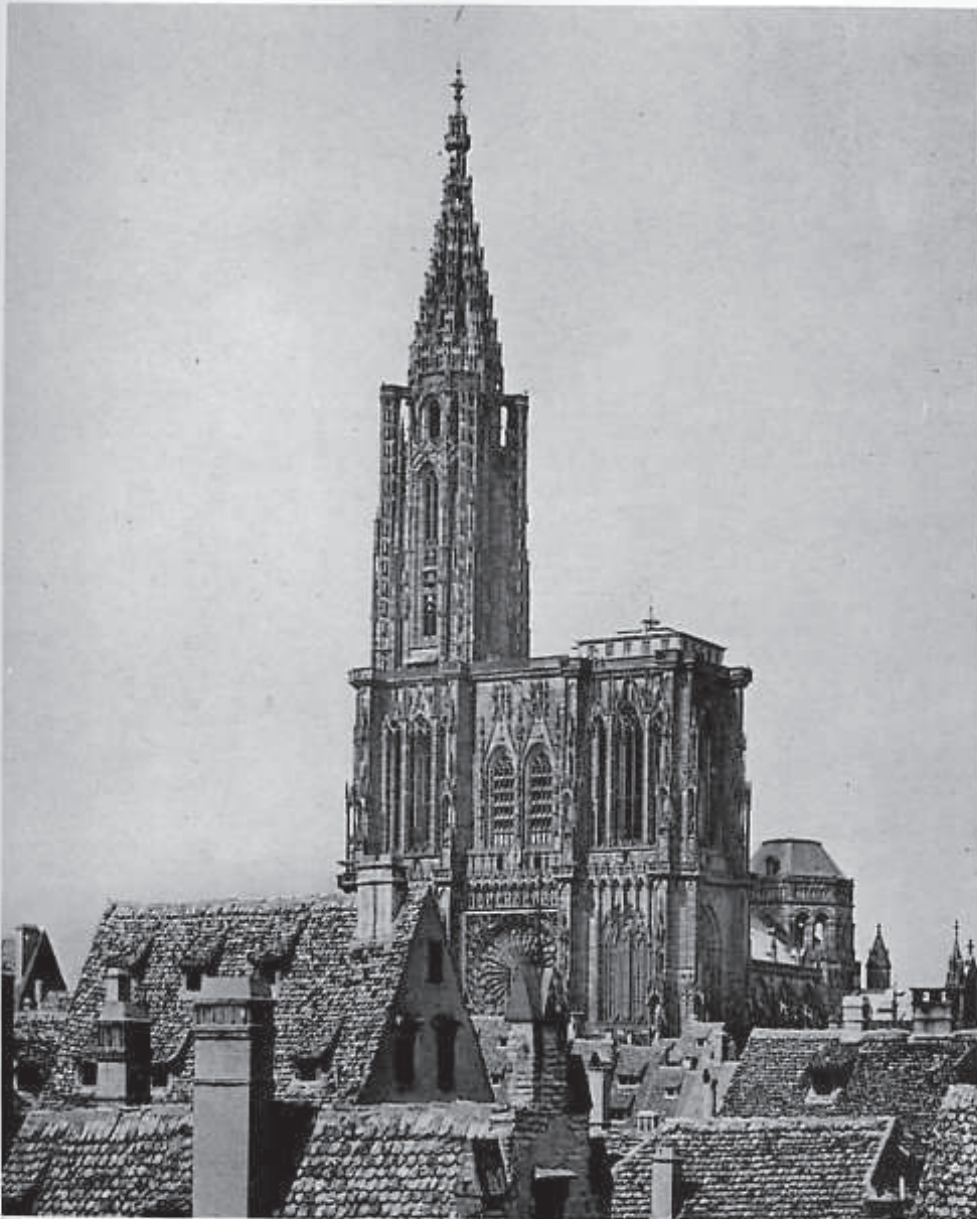
aspects of classical architecture reappeared. Again we find the wish for giving the buildings individual plastic presence and anthropomorphic characterization, in combination with simple, intelligible construction. We also find that spatial organization was understood as an addition of "independent" units. What is different from Classical Greek architecture, is the coordination of all parts within a comprehensive, homogeneous space, a concept which has cosmic implications and reflects a belief in a "harmonious" universe. The development of homogeneous space, however, did not prevent meaningful spatial differentiation<sup>48</sup>.

In our own time the classical attitude has played an important part. Thus Le Corbusier wrote: "Architecture is the masterly, correct and magnificent play of volumes brought together in light. Our eyes are made to see forms in light; light and shade reveal these forms; cubes, cones, spheres, cylinders and pyramids are the great primary forms...; the image of these is distinct... and without ambiguity"<sup>49</sup>. Le Corbusier evidently wanted plastic presence and intelligibility, but a certain "abstraction" is also felt, which differs from the "organic" approach of Greek architecture. The true presence which brings the world "close", was in fact hardly understood by early modern architecture.

*Complex architecture*

Romantic, cosmic and classical architecture are archetypes of man-made place. As they are related to the basic categories of natural understanding, they help us to interpret the *genius loci* of any particular settlement. Being types, however, they hardly appear in pure form, but participate in various kinds of syntheses. In the history of European architecture two such syntheses are of particular interest: The Gothic cathedral





124. Gothic architecture. Strasbourg Cathedral.  
125. Baroque garden-palace. Vaux-le-Vicomte by  
Le Vau and Le Nôtre.

and the Baroque garden-palace. The Gothic cathedral belongs to the romantic Mediaeval town, but transcends its attachment in the natural environment. In the interior of the cathedral atmospheric light is translated into a Divine manifestation, and the systematically subdivided structure represents a visualization of the ordered cosmos described by scholastic philosophy<sup>50</sup>.

The cathedral therefore unites romantic and cosmic qualities, and through its transparent walls the locally interpreted existential meanings of Christianity were transmitted to the town, whose everyday life-world thereby got a cosmic dimension. In the Baroque garden-palace we find a different kind of synthesis<sup>51</sup>. Here the cosmic dimension is not represented by light as a symbol of the spirit and by a structural system which rises up to receive this light, but by a horizontally extended geometrical network of paths which concretizes the absolutist pretensions of the Sovereign located at the centre of the system. The centre is moreover used to divide the "world" in two halves: a man-made, urban environment on one side, and "infinitely" extended nature on the other. Close to the centre nature appears as a cultural landscape (*parterre*), further away it becomes more "natural" (*bosquet*), to end in a "wilderness". In the Baroque garden-palace, thus, man-made and natural place are united to form a comprehensive whole, with romantic and cosmic implications as well as a built form of classical derivation in the palace itself<sup>52</sup>.

As the urban environment is based on gathering, it usually offers many possibilities of identification. It is therefore easier to feel "at home" in a foreign city than in a foreign landscape. The *genius loci* of the human settlement in fact represents a microcosmos, and cities differ in what they gather. In some, the

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forces of the earth are strongly felt, in others the ordering power of the sky, others again have the presence of humanized nature, or are saturated with light. All cities, however, have to possess something of all these categories of meaning to make *urban dwelling* possible. Urban dwelling consists in the assuring experience of being simultaneously located and open to the world, that is: located in the natural *genius loci* and open to the world through the gathering of the man-made *genius-loci*<sup>1</sup>.

##### 1. Image

Few places exert such a fascination as Prague. Other cities may be grander, more charming, or more "beautiful". Prague, however, seizes you and remains with you as hardly any other place.

"Prague does not let go – either of you or of me. This little mother has claws. There is nothing for it but to give in or – . We would have to set it on fire from two sides, at the Vyšehrad and at the Hradčany, only thus could we free ourselves"<sup>2</sup>.

The fascination of Prague resides first of all in a strong sense of mystery. Here you have the feeling that it is possible to penetrate ever deeper into things. Streets, gates, courtyards, staircases lead you into an endless "inside". Over and over again this theme comes out in the literature of Prague; in Kafka it forms the ground for his images and characters, and in Gustav Meyrink's novel "The Golem", the unfathomable spaces of the Old Town become the bearing theme. These spaces do not only lose themselves horizontally, but also *under* the ground of everyday life. The symbolic content of "The Golem" is thus centred on an empty room which has a window but no door<sup>2</sup>. To reach it one has to go through a subterranean labyrinth and find an opening in the floor. The same *we* have to do if we want to understand the *genius loci* of Prague. Here all houses have deep roots in layers of history, and from these roots they rise up, having individual names which suggest a legendary past. Architecturally these roots are expressed by heavy and massive ground-floors, low arcades and deeply-set openings. Walking around in old Prague, one always has the feeling of being "down" in spaces that are mysterious and frightening, but also warm and protective.

This closeness to the earth, however, is only one aspect of its *genius loci*. Prague









127. Old street in Prague.

128. Tyn church from the Old Town Square.

129. The "Prague view". The Small Town across the Vltava.



is also known as the "city of hundred steeples"; and its architecture is in fact saturated with vertical movement. The urban spaces are focused on towers and spires, and the dormers and gables of the old houses accompany us everywhere. Simple vertical accents do not seem to be enough in Prague, and the mediaeval steeples of churches, town-halls and bridge-towers are surrounded by clusters of pointed spires. In the Baroque churches, the vertical movement seems transformed into flames which rise toward the sky. Thus the mysteries of the earth find their counterpart in heavenly aspiration.

The strength of Prague as a place depends first of all on the felt presence of the *genius loci* throughout; practically every old house is simultaneously ground-hugging and aspiring. In some buildings, however, the local character is given particular emphasis, and it is very significant that these buildings serve as foci to the different parts of the city. In the Old Town, thus, the Tyn church with its clustered Gothic steeples rises above the low arcades of the main square, whereas the Small Town on the other side of the river is dominated by the Baroque dome and tower of St. Nicholas, which grow out of a massive and heavy basement. But this is not all; also as an urban totality Prague is distinguished by the contrast between earth and sky. Thus the steep hill of the Hradčany castle contrasts with the horizontally extended cluster of the Old Town, and the castle itself gathers the local character in its long horizontal lines over which the Cathedral of St. Vitus rises vertically towards the sky. This last juxtaposition is the crowning motif of the famous "Prague view": the vertically climbing Small Town seen over the horizontal expanse of the Vltava. Is there any other city in the world where the character is thus

130. Charles Bridge from above.

131. Prague in winter.

132. Diagrammatic map of Bohemia.

133. Prague in the landscape.

concretized in one single *veduta* which comprises all environmental levels from the landscape down to the articulation of the individual building?

The two main parts of Prague, the Old Town down on the flat land within the curve of the river, and the Small Town and castle hill on the other side, are linked by the Charles Bridge. In Prague indeed "the bridge gathers the earth as landscape around the stream", but it also gathers what man has contributed to the place, as a townscape of unique quality. Landscape and townscape are thus unified; the "Prague view" is in fact saturated with gardens, without reducing however, the figural character of the man-made place. From the bridge the whole is experienced as an *environment* in the full sense of the word; the bridge constitutes the very centre of this world, which evidently gathers so many meanings.

The Charles Bridge is a work of art in its own right; its broken and partly curved movement collects the streets on either side, and its towers and statues form a counterpoint to the horizontal series of arches across the river.

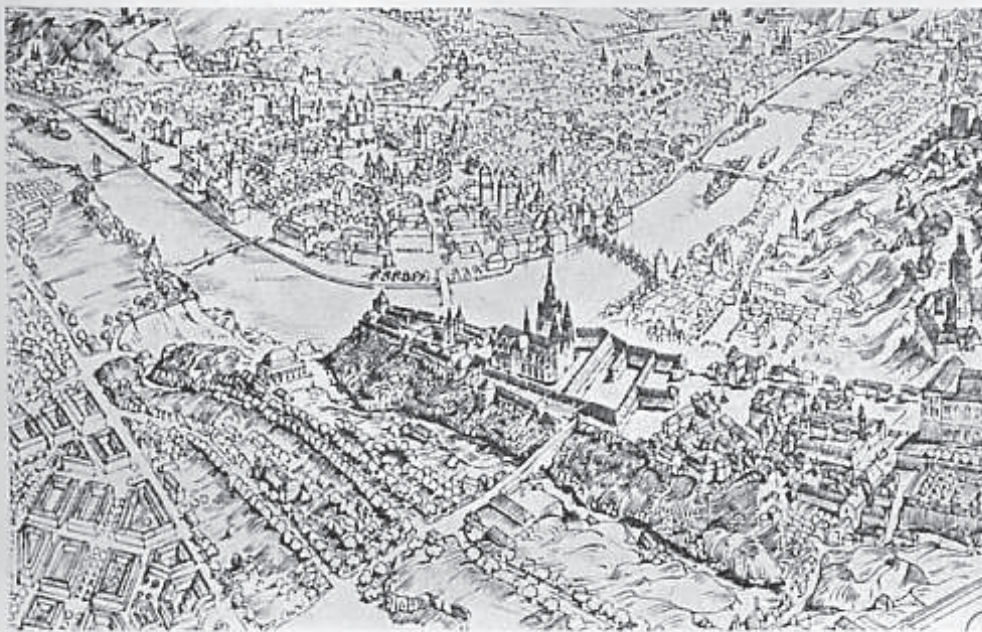
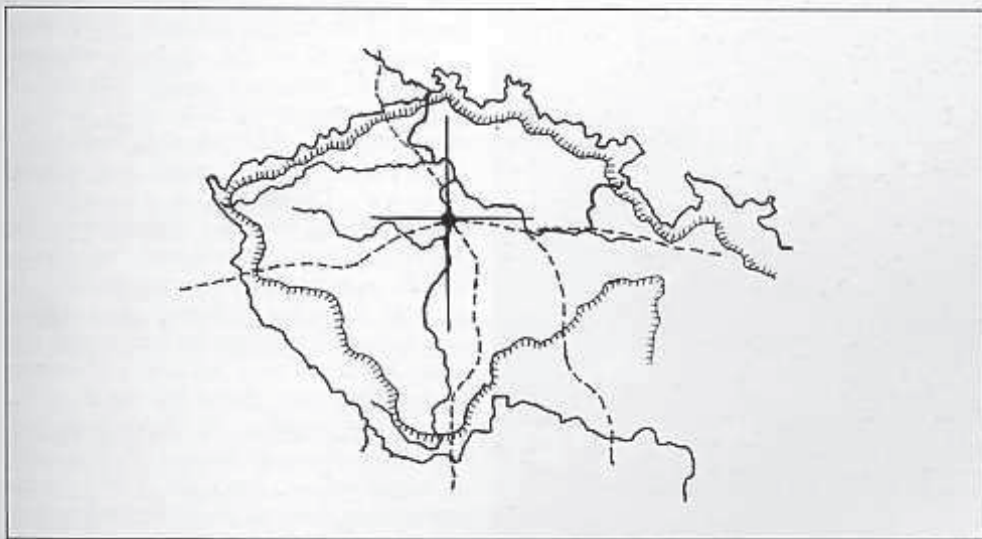
Men and women crossing dark bridges,  
past the statues of saints  
with their faint glimmer of light.

Clouds drifting over grey skies,  
past churches  
with misty towers.

A man leaning over the parapet  
and gazing into the river at evening  
his hands resting on ancient stone<sup>1</sup>.

The strength of Prague as a place therefore also depends on its imageability. Its secrets do not make us get lost, the unfathomable insides always form part of a meaningful general structure which ties them together as the facets of a mysteriously glimmering gem. Like a gem, indeed, Prague changes with the





weather, the time of the day and the seasons. Only rarely, however, the sun gives its buildings their full plasticity. Mostly the light is filtered through clouds, the towers become "misty" and the sky is hidden. And still, this does not mean a loss of presence. In Prague what is hidden seems even more real than what is directly perceived. The presence of the invisible is used by Kafka at the very beginning of "The Castle" to intonate the basic atmosphere of the novel. In Prague, thus, we encounter a particular kind of "microstructure"; a structure whose richness does not only reside in the micro scale, but in what is dimly suggested. In the night the street lights make this characteristic particularly evident. The illumination is not continuous and even; strongly lit and dark zones alternate, and make us remember the times when a street lamp created a place.

The architecture of Prague is cosmopolitan without ever losing its local flavour. Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, *Jugend* and "Cubist" buildings live together as if they were variations on the same theme<sup>4</sup>. Mediaeval and classical forms are transformed to make the same local character manifest; motifs from the Slavic east, the Germanic north, the Gallic west and the Latin south meet in Prague and blend into a singular synthesis. The catalyst which made this process possible was the *genius loci* proper, which, as we have already suggested, consists in a particular sense of earth and sky. In Prague classical architecture becomes romantic, and romantic architecture absorbs the classical characters to endow the earth with a particular kind of surreal humanity. Both become cosmic, not in the sense of abstract order, but as spiritual aspiration. Evidently Prague is one of the great meeting-places where a multitude of meanings are gathered.



134. *Horizontals and verticals. The Hradčany over the Small Town.*



## 2. *Space*

If we take a look at the map of Central Europe, the particular location of Prague is immediately evident. Not only is Prague situated at the centre of Bohemia, but Bohemia is also in the very middle of those countries which for centuries have constituted the complex and turbulent core of the Western world. The central location of Bohemia is emphasized by the almost continuous range of mountains and hills which surround the area. A kind of basin is thus created, although the land has a very varied surface relief and natural "content". The feeling of a boundary is strengthened by the vegetation; the fertile interior is enclosed by forests which accompany the mountains. In general Bohemia appears as a rolling and friendly countryside, but it contains many surprises such as wild and strange rock formations. From the south to the north the country is divided in two halves by the river Vltava (Moldau) and its continuation, the Labe (Elbe). In the past it was difficult to cross these rivers; only one ford had a convenient, central location. Here the ancient road from Ucraina and Poland crossed the Vltava and continued into Germany. At the ford, it met the road which led from Austria in the south, to Saxony and Prussia. A very important node was thus created, and already in the sixth century it gave rise to a settlement which should become the city of Prague.

The geographical properties of Bohemia made the country predestined to become a cosmopolitan centre. A similar role is played by Switzerland, but here the geographical definition is less distinct, and a primary nodal point is lacking. In Europe, with its many ethnic groups and civilizations, a meeting place necessarily means problems. Hardly any other European country, in fact, has had a more complex and difficult history than

Bohemia. It is obviously due to the clear geographical definition that the first permanent settlers, the Czechs, have been able to survive. Possessing their own limited world, they have for centuries resisted the pressure of the neighbours, who managed, however, to occupy the zones along the border<sup>5</sup>. Throughout history, thus, Bohemia has been both a meeting place and an ethnic "island" with its own distinct identity. The double nature of the country is a main reason for its very particular character. As an ethnic island it has always conserved its roots in the proper soil, and as a meeting place it has been exposed to the impact of the entire European culture. The fact that the foreign import has always been transformed when it came to Bohemia proves the strength of its people and its *genius loci*.

At Prague the rolling landscape of central Bohemia is condensed to form a particularly beautiful configuration. Along the large bend of the Vltava an extended hill rises which visualizes the curve of the river. The hill and the river are opposed but complementary forces, which make nature become alive with expressive power. Within the curve, opposite the hill, the land opens up in horizontal expanse before it starts to rise gently towards the south-east. At either end of the river – bend two marked isolated hills give definition to the area. The two halves of this extraordinary landscape were linked by a ford, a little to the north of the present Charles Bridge. On the left bank at the height of the ford, there is a valley which makes it possible to reach the castle hill and the lands towards the west. As predestined for an urban settlement was this site, not only because of its beauty, but because it satisfied the three basic demands of the early Middle Ages: the flat plain for a market place, the hill for

a protecting castle, and the ford for communication and commerce.

In the ninth century the Czech Přemyslids built the first castle and in 890 the first historically known Czech king Bořivoj added the first church in Bohemia, which was dedicated to the Holy Virgin. The Czech word for castle, *hrad*, determined its name, Hradčany. The oldest report on Prague stems from 965, and was written by an Arabic-Jewish merchant Ibrahim Ibn Jakub. He tells that the town was built of stone and mortar, and that it was the richest place in the whole country. The population already comprised groups of German, Jewish and Latin origin. About 1200, Romanesque Prague had 25 churches, many monasteries and a stone bridge. Shortly afterwards the different settlements on the right bank were gathered within a city wall, and in 1232-34 the Old Town (Staré Město) was a legal reality. The Small Town (Malá Strana) on the left bank was founded in 1257, and about 1300 the settlement on the Hradčany got urban rights. A fourth city, the New Town (Nové Město) was added around the Old Town by Charles IV in 1348.

Already in the Middle Ages, thus, the spatial structure of Prague had been defined. The city had found its form in accordance with the natural situation. First of all it consists of three parts: the dense settlement down on the plain, the dominant castle on the hill above, and the river as a separating and connecting element between them. We have seen that this structure is still alive, and it becomes immediately evident when the place is experienced from its centre, the bridge. During the course of history the basic juxtaposition has been interpreted and enriched by the buildings of successive generations. The verticalism of the hill has found an echo in the steeples and towers of the town, and the

attachment to the earth of the latter is reflected in the horizontal expanse of the castle. In this way Prague has become an integrated totality, where the particular relationship between horizontal and vertical, between "above" and "below" serves as the unifying force. When we walk around in the streets or along the river, the relationship between town and castle is experienced in ever new variations. During history this juxtaposition has had its particular meaning. Whereas the castle in the Mediaeval cities meant protection and security, in Prague it often represented a threat. On the Hradčany lived the rulers, who, at several crucial occasions, spoke another language and professed another faith than the majority of the inhabitants. The Thirty Years war in fact started in Prague with a revolt, when the infuriated crowd threw the Imperial governors out of the windows of the castle, according to an "old Czech custom".

Prague's growth into an industrial capital from the nineteenth century on, has brought about some changes which weaken the general urban structure. The clear delimitation of the Old and New Towns by means of city walls is gone, although the street pattern still gives them a certain spatial identity. The urban sprawl around the old core has impaired the figural character of the city, although the generous extension of Charles IV for centuries allowed Prague to grow inside its walls. Certain urban districts have disappeared, first of all the Ghetto which was situated in the north-western part of the Old Town. It was one of the most characteristic parts of the city, but because of its slum-like conditions it was torn down after 1893. Today the Small Town and the Hradčany best preserve the general structure; here the habitat is still surrounded by green, such as the Petřín and Letná

135. Model of Prague with main thoroughfare.



parks at either end of the castle, and even the city-walls are in part standing.

The interior urban spaces of Prague still to a high extent follow the pattern laid out in the Middle Ages. The old thoroughfare between East and West serves as a backbone, connecting the main foci of the Old and the Small Towns. As the visitor walks along this path, the history of Prague becomes alive, and gradually a rich and coherent image of the city is formed in his mind. It starts at the Powder-Tower (1475), which is what remains of the old city wall. The tower is richly ornate and was obviously intended as something more than a mere "functional" city-gate. Inside the gate a well conserved street, the *Celetná* leads to the Old Town Square (*Staroměstské Naměstí*). On the way it passes the oldest part of the town, the *Týn*, where the merchants throughout the centuries paid duty for their goods. The *Týn* is a large courtyard enclosed by buildings whose Mediaeval core is covered with Renaissance and Baroque façades. The Old Town Square is a large "ring", subdivided by the centrally placed Town Hall and adjacent buildings into a larger and a smaller part. It is surrounded by relatively narrow gabled houses, and dominated by the twin towers of the *Týn* church (1365ff). From the Small Square the path continues rather tortuously to the Charles Bridge (1357ff). The bridge is a space in its own right, having Gothic towers with gates at either end and being lined with statues. Its bent movement is due to the fact that it was partly built over the foundations of the old Judith-bridge (1158-72) which collapsed in 1342. Upon entering the Small Town another splendid, well-conserved street, the *Mosťecká* leads up to the Small Town Square (*Malostranské Naměstí*) which repeats the "ring" pattern of the Old Town Square. Here, however, the

136. *The Powder-Tower.*  
 137. *The Týn courtyard.*  
 138. *The Old Town Square.*

church of St. Nicholas (1703-52) with adjacent Jesuit college takes up the centre, whereas the Town Hall is situated along the eastern side of the square. Another beautiful, steeply rising street, the Nerudová, connects the Small Town with the Hradčany. Actually the Nerudova continues towards the west under the castle; a steep hill however leads up to the Hradčany Square, which is situated between the castle proper and the castle town. From here the view of Prague is splendid; the hill and the arch of the river embrace the Old Town, which responds with its towers and steeples. Under the castle the Small Town steps rhythmically down towards the river with its dense cluster of houses and gardens. But our walk is not finished before we enter the castle. Here a cluster of courtyards and lanes represents a variation on the spatial themes of the city itself, and in the centre we find the splendid interior space of the Cathedral (1344ff).

Whereas the urban structure of the Old Town and the Small Town follows the early Mediaeval pattern, the New Town was deliberately planned. As it forms a wide belt around the eastern side of the Old Town, a radial lay-out was natural. Rather than being a centralized structure in its own right, it prepares for the almost circular enclosure of the Old Town<sup>6</sup>. The radial pattern is visualized by three large squares which in the past served as hay market, horse market and cattle market, respectively. The middle one, St. Venceslaus' Square (Vaclavské Naměstí) has the rather unusual length of 680 mt., and functions today as a kind of "main street" for the whole city. Up till our time the New Town remained quite open and green. Thus the Old Town always was the dense core of the whole conurbation.

When the old city walls were torn down in the nineteenth century, streets were



139. *Old house in the Charles street.*



140. *The Old Town bridge tower.*

141. *On the Charles Bridge.*

142. *The Mostecká with St. Nicholas in the Small Town.*







143. *St. Nicholas in the Small Town* by C. and K.  
I. Dientzenhofer.

144. *The facade of St. Nicholas* by C.  
Dientzenhofer.





145. The Small Town Square with St. Nicholas.



laid out according to the old pattern and new bridges were built to connect the main streets on both sides of the river. Although the Charles Bridge is no longer alone, it has maintained its focal importance, and the new bridges are well integrated in the "organic" path structure of the city.

The secondary streets of old Prague have the character of narrow, twisting alleys. As such they possess an out-spoken continuity, but many small-squares are introduced as subordinate urban foci. In the Old Town it is very common that the houses may be entered from two sides (*Durchhäuser*). It is therefore possible to walk through certain sections of the town without using the streets. This particular spatial property contributes decisively to the "mysterious" quality of Prague. The internal passages often lead through several courtyards which are mostly surrounded by characteristic balconies (*pavlač*). In the past these balconies were the stage where the colourful popular life took place. Spatially they served as a semi-public transition between the urban outside and the private interior of the houses. We understand, thus, that the feeling typical for Prague, that one might penetrate ever deeper inside is determined by its spatial structure. In the Small Town the spaces are somewhat different. As it was a well-to-do district, the houses are larger and also more secluded. What is lost in penetrability, however, is gained in movement up and down. In the Small Town many of the secondary streets have steps, and the broken surface relief creates an exceptionally varied richness of urban spaces, which offer ever new perspectives and bits of panoramic views.

The spatial structure of Prague is gathered and condensed in the interiors of its main public buildings. From the

146. *St. Nicholas in the Small Town, detail.*



147. *The Castle and the Cathedral seen from the Petřín.*

148. *View from the Castle.*



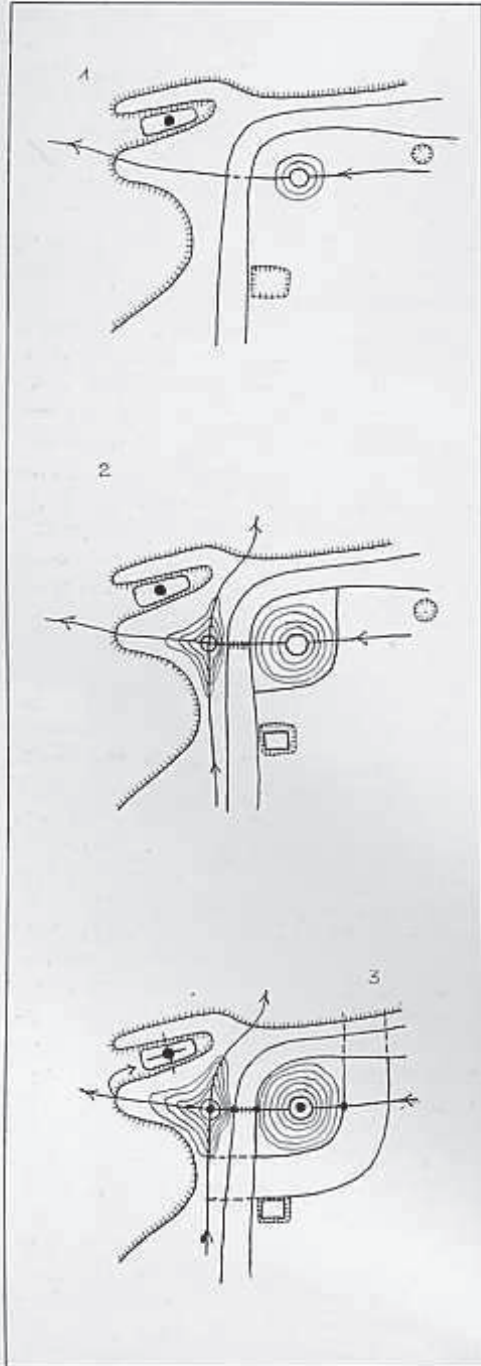
149. *Interior, St. Vitus Cathedral by Peter Parler.*

Middle Ages on, the local architecture has had its particular spatial properties. In general we note a strong wish for integration and dynamism. The classical principle of individual, static units, which are added together, is unknown in Prague. In St. Vitus the integration, horizontally and vertically, is stronger than in any other great Gothic cathedral, and in the Vladislav Hall (B. Ried 1493-1502) it has become impossible to talk about "bays"; the space is an indivisible whole which is saturated with dynamic movement'. The wish for spatial integration and dynamism culminated with the "pulsating" interiors of Christoph and Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer<sup>8</sup>. The nave of St. Nicholas in the Small Town by the former (1703-11) consists of a series of interpenetrating ovals. In the vault however, the spatial definition is dislocated relative to the floor. As a result a spatial "syncopation" is created, which represents a unique invention in the history of architecture.

The environmental richness of Prague is intimately related to the spatial properties outlined above. These properties are not only distinguished by variety, but they also constitute an imageable whole. Summing up we may take a look at the basic structure of the four primary domains. The Old Town is situated *on* the flat promontory embraced by the river, and is gathered *around* the Old Town Square. The New Town *fans out* from the Old Town and rises slightly. It is located *between* the St. Vitus hill in the north and the Vyšehrad in the south, and is given internal structure by the three radial markets. Ideally the New Town is a segment of a ring, but the shape is stretched to reach the more distant Vyšehrad. The Small Town is situated *under* the hill, *within* the concave valley, and is gathered *along* the Mostecká-Nerudová path. The Hradčany is *above* the other domains on



150. Diagrammatic plans of Prague.



151. Street in the Small Town.



152. The Vladislav Hall in the Castle by Benedikt Ried.

153. Interior, St. Nicholas in the Small Town by C. and K.J. Dienzenhofer.



the convex hill, and *stretches out* along a ridge. Whereas the New Town is subordinate to the Old Town and does not possess an independent focus, the other three domains are centred on significant inner cores which have their spatial identity at the same time as they are identified in the townscape by vertical "landmarks". All the domains are integrated by the Charles Bridge. The many prepositions needed to describe the spatial structure of Prague indicate its richness. In general it is *topological* and therefore does not make one particular environmental system manifest. It is open to many interpretations, and teaches us that "orientation" does not only mean imageability, but also "discovery" and "surprise". Knowing Prague is like listening to a great work of music: it always discloses new aspects of itself.

### 3. Character

The character of Prague cannot be understood without taking the natural environment into consideration. With "natural environment" we do not only have in mind the site of the city, but Bohemia as a whole. For centuries Bohemia has been the object of an exceptionally strong patriotism and love. Not only the historical circumstances have demanded full human identification, but the country as such has given the "Bohemian" a particular identity. In the past this identity was not the property of a single ethnic group. During the religious wars Czech and German speaking people fought together on both sides and the "nation" was first of all a qualitative geographical concept. We may very well say that the inhabitants of Bohemia loved the *genius loci*; the country was theirs because they identified with its qualities. Their love has been expressed in literature and music and not least in building. Few

154. Bohemian landscape.

155. Popular Baroque houses in Třebon.



other countries have an architecture which is more unified and at the same time more varied. The themes are eminently Bohemian, but the variations are legion and give testimony to the exceptional artistic abilities of the Bohemian people. Like some other great cities, such as Rome, Prague has shaped the foreign artists who have settled there. From Peter Parler to Christoph Dientzenhofer they all became Bohemian and adapted their own cultural import to the local idiom.

What then are the natural phenomena behind the *genius loci*? We have already mentioned the rolling countryside of Bohemia, and the many surprises which break the general continuity of the land. Towards the border these surprises become dominant; wild rocks, hot springs, deep valleys and impenetrable forests bring the original forces of nature into presence. The Bohemian landscape, however, is not characterized by simple imageable elements, such as well defined valley-spaces or dominant mountains. Rather one might say that everything is simultaneously there, a fact which was noticed by Goethe: "Beautiful view over Bohemian landscapes, which have the particular character that they are neither mountains nor plains nor valleys, but everything at the same time". Obviously the whole of Bohemia does not have this "synthetic" quality. It is, however, the distinctive mark of the more characteristic parts of the country, and therefore becomes a general "Bohemian" trait. Such a generalization is natural, because Bohemia is a simple hydro-geophysical unit.

In Bohemia all the basic natural elements are present within a relatively small and well-defined area. Mountains, vegetation and water are there, not as separate "things", but mixed to form a "romantic" microcosmos. The earth in its different manifestations is exper-

156. *The Small Old Town Square.*  
 157. *House in the Small Town.*  
 158. *Palace in the Old Town by K.I. Dientzenhofer.*

ience as the primary reality, and asks man for identification. The Bohemian microcosmos is centred on Prague. Not only is Prague situated in the middle, on the river Vltava which in popular imagination is the main identifying element of the country, but its site comprises all the main natural "forces". In Prague we find the juxtaposition of an undulating plain, rocky hills and water. Thus the site beautifully gathers and represents the surrounding country. To experience Prague fully, one therefore has to know Bohemia. It cannot be understood in isolation, but only as a "world within a world".

The same holds true for the architecture of Prague. Although the city was a meeting-place for a multitude of artistic currents, the basic architectural themes are intimately related to the vernacular buildings and settlements of Bohemia. The types of urban spaces are similar; everywhere in the country we find the same continuous but varied streets lined with narrow houses, and the same "ring"-shaped arcaded squares. As typical examples we may mention České Budějovice in the south, Domažlice in the west, Jičín in the north and Litomyšl in the east<sup>10</sup>. The basic settlement pattern is evidently the Slavic ring-village where the "ring" may be round or square. There are in fact towns in Bohemia which only consist of a single row of houses around the square (Nové Město nad Metují). In some places the houses are small and simple, in others richer, but the basic type is the same. Normally it is a two-storey structure with a third floor in the gable. Arcades are normal when the houses face the square. This may even be the case in small villages with timber houses. The houses have a very particular character, which mainly consists in a massive and heavy appearance. The ground-floor is set directly on the ground, the windows





159. "Durchhaus" with "pavlač" in the Old Town.

160, 161. The Portheimka by K.I. Dientzenhofer.



are low and relatively small, and the wall is usually kept down by the optical weight of large roofs. As a contrast to these ground-hugging properties, richly articulate and ornate gables rise up towards the sky. The houses may have Gothic, Renaissance or Baroque forms, but their basic relationship to earth and sky has remained the same for centuries. Regional differences exist; in Southern Bohemia for instance, the mural houses are white and the decoration richer, but the basic Bohemian qualities are maintained.

In the architecture of Prague the Bohemian relationship to earth and sky reaches a splendid climax. Everywhere the old urban spaces make the basic themes clearly manifest, and the presence of great architects has made possible particular interpretations which make them shine in "limpid brightness". One of the best examples is offered by the house Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer built for himself (1726-28) in the suburb of Smichov<sup>11</sup>, today known as the *Portheimka*. The rectangular volume has tower-like elements at the four corners and a convex *ressault* in the centre towards the garden. The scheme is "international" and directly derived from Hildebrandt's Upper Belvedere in Vienna. The articulation, however, is truly local. Over the heavy rusticated basement with its low-set windows, the forms become gradually "free" towards the sky. The main architrave is broken in the centre to give place for a pointed gable, whereas the corner towers rise up through the horizontal members. Small blind dormers are added to give emphasis to the vertical movement, and the top cornice of the towers is bent upwards as a last expression of its aspiring force. At the same time however, the towers are tied to the main volume by the horizontal lines which circumscribe the whole building even at



162. St. Nicholas in the Old Town by K.I. Dientzenhofer.

the break in the Mansard roof. A rather violent but subtle interplay of horizontals and verticals is thus created, an interplay which represents a particularly sophisticated interpretation of the basic Prague theme. Another characteristic property may also be pointed out. In general the surface relief of the façade is slight, and the flatness is accentuated by the windows which flush with the wall. The windows thus reflect the colours of the surrounding vegetation and the sky, and give the whole building a certain immaterial feeling which contrasts with the general voluminous character. In certain points strong plastic accents are added which give emphasis to the ambiguous mass-surface relationship. A similar ambiguity is found everywhere in Prague and creates an urban character which is simultaneously sensually earth-bound and "spiritualized". Another main work by Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer, the St. Nicholas church in the Old Town (1732-37), gives the same themes a "sacred" and truly grandiose interpretation. Here the towers and the central *ressault* free themselves completely but gradually from a continuous, horizontal base, and rise towards the sky with violent dynamism. Other examples could be added *ad infinitum*, and we may also recall that the main Prague *veduta* gets its singular impact from the same "integrated dichotomy" between horizontal and vertical "forces". Thus the buildings of Prague gather and condense the *genius loci*, and make the city appear as a place which is saturated with locally rooted meaning.

The houses which make up the streets and squares of Prague vary the basic themes, and the urban spaces appear as sets of variations, some of them more modest, some more imaginative and splendid. The greatest set of variations is found in the Old Town Square where arcaded gable houses surround most of



the space. They are not mechanically lined up, but constitute a topological succession which gives variety and life to the enclosed space. The houses are quite narrow and create a dynamic movement full of surprises. The variations reach a climax in the stern Týn Church, which prefigures the basic articulation of St. Nicholas near by. The only old building which because of its size breaks the continuity of the boundary, is the Kinsky Palace (1755-66). Again, however, Kilian Ignaz Dientzenhofer demonstrates his artistic abilities and respect for the *genius loci*.<sup>12</sup> Instead of centering the building on a dominant gate, he doubled the composition, and used two gabled *ressaults* to break down the large volume so as to suit the general dimensions and rhythm of the urban boundary. A similar adaptation is found already in the Toscana Palace by J. B. Mathey (1689) and the Clam-Gallas Palace by Fischer von Erlach (1715ff).

We have characterized Prague as a world where it is possible to penetrate ever deeper "inside", and, in fact, in the interiors of the main buildings we encounter a character which represents a further condensation of the properties which distinguish the urban space and the city as a whole. This character is determined by a particular articulation, which basically remained the same through several centuries. The first great manifestation is the presbytery of the Cathedral by Peter Parler (1352-85)<sup>13</sup>. In general the scheme follows the disposition of the French cathedrals, but the articulation shows several significant innovations. First of all we notice that the arcade is simplified in such a way that it appears as a continuous wall with cut-out openings. At the same time the triforium and the clerestory are combined to form one large glazed surface. The interior is covered by a net-vault which unifies the space horizontally and



163. *St. Nicholas in the Old Town, detail.*  
164. *St. Nicholas in the Old Town, interior.*

165. *The Kinsky Palace on the Old Town Square*  
by K.I. Dientzenhofer and A. Lurago.

makes it dissolve vertically. The horizontal integration is moreover emphasized by the introduction of small, diagonally placed elements in the triforium and clerestory, which make the bays unite in a continuous undulating movement. The space is characterized by a strong contrast between the "massive" arcade and the de-materialized upper wall and vault, and in general by an expressive interplay of horizontal and vertical "forces". We see thus how a generally valid building-type has been modified to suit the *genius loci*.

The same basic traits find a still more original and mature interpretation in the Vladislav Hall in the Hradčany by Benedikt Ried (1493-1502)<sup>14</sup>. Here the interior consists of an integrated series of baldachins which are closed off laterally by massive walls. Two systems are thus combined: the earth-bound "box" made up by the walls, and the de-materialized "heavenly" net-vault which seems to hover over the space.

The theme of the Vladislav Hall reappears in the most significant Baroque buildings of Prague. The "syncopated" space of St. Nicholas in the Small Town is set-into-work by means of an integrated series of baldachins, and the same solution is used in the church of the Břevnov Monastery by Christoph Dientzenhofer (1709-15)<sup>15</sup>. In the latter building curved arches span diagonally across the space from wall-pillars (*Wandpfeiler*) which are set against the neutral surface of the massive outer wall. The basic properties of the Vladislav Hall and the churches of Christoph Dientzenhofer are thus the same, and the intention is obviously to make a particular relationship between earth and sky manifest. The exterior of Břevnov is also a typical specimen of Prague architecture; a Ionic Order rises over a continuous base, and a row of

