

BEN MULHALL.

**THE POWER OF NOW:
RETURNING TO A SENSE OF THE SACRED IN THE PUBLIC REALM**
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Abstract:

The sacred has been on the decline over the last 5000 years of history. Once, every act of living and building was a sacred act; now little seems sacred. At the same time our public life has also been on the decline. The decline in public life follows and, in structural terms, parallels the decline in the sacred. This paper argues that in order to recapture a lively, functioning public life we need to reinvent a sense of spirituality for these times; the sacred must once again be found in our everyday lives and creations. The paper briefly discusses the historical decline of the sacred and the public realms. It then proposes a way to examine the sacred in today's world and, as such, identifies some characteristics of sacred places, objects, and events. The paper next presents a preliminary typology for sacred places. It concludes with the identification of processes and strategies that might assist in the realization of the sacred as we head towards the 21st Century.

Setting the Context:

Once when church bells tolled the citizens of the village, living within the sounds of those bells, would not only know the time of day and their associated tasks and religious duties but would know also of the arrival and departure of their fellow citizens. Different rings and numbers of tolls would describe the passing of a man, woman, or child and give their age. As each citizen knew all others, the ten tolls for a child or fifty tolls for an elderly woman inevitably meant a particular member of their community had died, had left the village for another journey. The death of one community member was, in a very real way, a form of death for all remaining citizens - in the great line of Jonne Donne: "Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee." Such bells spoke of continuity, belonging and intimacy; there was a sense that each citizen's whole being focused on a collective energy flowing up through the church, to the bells in the steeple and beyond to the heavens. While one can only imagine, it would seem that each citizen's sense of the presence, of the moment, must have been enormously powerful. It is certainly not surprising that many of these same townfolk undertook to erect great cathedrals that involved, as they knew perfectly well, some four or five hundred years to complete. Their sense of the presence, as such, extended well into both the past and the future, for endless generations gone by and to come. And all this occurred in a time when, even then, scholars were warning about the desacrilization of society and the human condition.

The bells of current times are relatively silent, competing with horns, the roar of traffic, and the blasting of radios, televisions, and jets in a frenzied, self-focused society.

Cultural criticisms document the fall of the public person as well as the sacred person (Mumford 1961, Relph 1976, Glazer and Lilla 1987, Sennett 1990, Sorkin 1992), the destruction of the meta-narrative (Riley 1990), the privatization of the public realm (Meyrowitz 1985, Crawford 1992), and the sense that we are "*Amusing Ourselves to Death*" (Postman 1985) as our languages, cultures, and societies deconstruct. We rush to hyper-reality (Ecco 1986) and virtual-reality, virtually assuring the disappearance of any concept of publicness.

The current planning, design and management of our public realm reveals the problem. Our edge cities are devoid of any significant public realm outside the privately owned "public" shopping malls (Crawford 1992); the newer contributions to the public realm in the central city, in the form of the ubiquitous plaza or the "Roussified" waterfront (Relph 1976) are devoid of content, meaning and joy; even the church's traditional obligation to the public realm, the *parvis*, no longer exists (Sennett 1990). We fill spaces rather than create places; we put things in the wrong place as if *topos* didn't matter (Perez-Gomez 1979, Scully 1969); and we leave the imagination of the urban child to find inspiration in video games and advertising promises. With the public realm in such a state, a realm that has been the traditional focus of our profession's moral and aesthetic concerns, we must wonder why and worry that we no longer seem to be actively creating a past for the future. Somehow our works lack the essential sense of the sacred, a sense of the power of now. Yet, it is in this sense of the sacred that the nature of "publicness" receives its clearest definition.

At the same time, the gap between theory and practice widens. Despite being one of the most widely quoted urban design texts of our times, few cities have actually analyzed or given form to their city in the manner recommended by Kevin Lynch (1959) in *The Image of the City* (Banerjee and Southworth 1990). The rich ideas and sensibilities expressed by Jane Jacobs (1961) in her equally famous text on *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* have not been incorporated into our daily urban fabric to any significant extent. And the humane and constructive ideas expressed by Christopher Alexander (1977) in *A Pattern Language* have all but been ignored by the majority of our planning and design professionals. Instead, it would seem that planning and design decisions are based on mind games, visual gymnastics, and faded images of the past - or the Postmodern, the Deconstructivist, and the Neo-traditional. This lack of connection between significant theory (as versus stylistically driven ephemeral theory) on the one hand, and design on the other hand pushes the potential to find solutions to the problems of the current public realm further and further into the background. It is a situation that should give us cause for great concern.

This paper, therefore, represents an attempt to redefine, in some ways "reinvent" the nature of spirituality for our present and immediate futures, despite the pluralistic nature of current society. In the words of Susan Sontag (1983, p. 181) "Every era has to reinvent the project of *spirituality* for itself. (Spirituality = plans, terminologies, ideas of deportment aimed at resolving the painful structural contradictions inherent in the human situation, at the completion of human consciousness, at transcendence.)" In this respect it may be said that the nature of sacred in the places we create must be continually assessed and reassessed. It

is clear that without an intentional regard for the making of the sacred, we quickly lose our perspective, and ultimately wallow in the shallow and inconsequential. In making a call for a return to the sacred it must be noted that I am not calling for some form of religious revival, but wish rather to reawaken the idea that much of our every day world can assume qualities of the sacred, or to use Lynda Saxton's term, "*Ordinarily Sacred*" (Saxton 1982).

The paper begins with a brief examination of the nature and definitions of the sacred in traditional terms. It continues with a suggestion of the range of qualities and conditions that we might use to define sacredness in current times. With such definitions in mind, a preliminary typology is suggested for some 100 sacred places, ideas, and associated activities that could be used to restore an important sense of the *public* to our urban realm. The paper concludes with a set of recommendations for changes in the way we think about, plan, design and implement our public realms, from the perspective of the sacred. These attitudes and processes are ultimately about giving emphasis to the power of each place, to the making of life in each place.

The Sacred and Place: a Brief Historical Perspective:

In traditional terms sacred space constituted a break in the homogeneity of space; the break differentiated sacred space from its surroundings. Man became "...aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane" (Eliade 1959, p.11). In this sense, parts of the world were seen to be qualitatively different from others. The difference might have been "...the essential differences between the poetic

language and the utilitarian language of everyday life." (ibid., p.16), the effects of a simple opening in a forest that forced our primitive ancestors to look up towards the heavens and beyond (Harrison 1992), or the existence in the human consciousness of a sacred component, a sacred seeker or, to use Otto's term, the *numinosum* (Otto 1949). Or it might have been the result of a peasant society "...which is capable of producing a food surplus and which, in local shrines and rituals, has articulated its persuasive anxieties about fertility, death, disaster, and the continuity of the human community." (Lynch 1981, p.8). Whatever the reasons, the qualitative differences were celebrated.

The break in undifferentiated space found in these qualitatively different places was symbolized, according to Mircea Eliade (1959) in his classic text on *The Sacred and the Profane*, by an opening through which passage was made possible from one cosmic region to the next - from heaven, to earth, to the underworld. This opening was a centre, an *axis mundi*, the axis of the world. The centre was symbolized by a pole, a ladder, a totem, a sacred tree, a sacred mountain, or even a shepherd's staff. The shepherd carried his staff with him at all times, not merely to rein in the straying flock, but also to serve as his personal *axis mundi* in order that he might dwell at all times, *in the center*, with his god. The shepherd's staff, therefore, embodied many levels of meaning as well as use and, above all else, served as a constant reminder of the presence of the sacred.

This *centering* with the gods was prevalent in all building activities of traditional societies. The temple was built as a representation of the universe with god in the center. Because all

members of the community could not live perpetually in the temple, each home was constructed to replicate the temple, to be yet another *center of the world*, an *imago mundi*.. And in this respect all building activity was a *founding*, a form of birth in a chaotic world.

This building activity also created the city, the first cities being primarily religious places. Around 4000 B.C. cities appear to spring up independently around the world, in Sumer, Egypt, the Indus Valley, Shang China, Mesoamerica and elsewhere, some eventually with populations of over 50,000. The city was, according to both Mumford and Lynch, "...a glorious expression of human pride, relief, and awe. As civilization develops, of course, the city takes on many other roles in addition to the primary one (of religion). It becomes storehouse, fortress, workshop, market, and palace. First, however, it is a holy place." (Lynch 1981, p.9).

At this stage in the history of the city, everything was, in large measure, both sacred and public. As a holy place, and like the temple and the home, the city was ordered and constructed in the image of a sacred universe. And, as sacred societies singular in their beliefs and intents, everything was of and for everyone; everything was public; even the kings and sacred leaders were "of the people".

By 1000 B.C., however, the mythicpoetic faculty and, hence, view of the world that so dominated these early holy cities was beginning to fade with the emergence of the written word, research on nature, and a growing sense of history (Detienne 1936, p. 126). The

decline in the sacred had begun. Aristotle, some 700 years later (384-322) would be the first to notice this decline and systematically formulate the theory of the "...religious degeneration of humanity." (Eliade p.220). The decline would continue into the present day. Science, for example, with such classic pronouncements as Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in the mid-1800s and his notion of nature acting in a form of "random mutation" to produce humans from apes (we no longer being created in the divine image of God) all but permanently altered humanity's view of its existence and, for many, "God was dead". (Young 1992, p.37-38).

The degeneration of the spiritual was paralleled by a narrowing in the view of what constitutes sacred places and activities. From Roman times on, notions of the sacred and profane have been viewed primarily in more fixed spatial terms: the *sanctum* was the inner world of the temple; the *profanum* was the space outside and in front of the temple, the place of everyday activity. The *parvis*, the space in front of the church that was part of the original zone of immunity and the place in which all those in need of care gained the right to receive such care, became instead a place of public rituals, plays and political speeches. (Sennett 1990, p. 17). And eventually, in our times, the doors of the church are locked when the church is "not in service" such that even a sense of entry into the sanctuary is lost from the outside for all but the devout few.

This decline in the sacred was paralleled by a decline in the public realm, slowly at first, but with increasing momentum as the qualitative aspects of humanity's existence gave

way to the relenting pursuit of the "factual" (Young 1993). In Aristotle's time, even though the world was becoming desecralized, public life was at its zenith. The Greek definition for the size of a city - a population not to exceed the size of the town square - was perhaps as great a definition of the nature of "public" as an society has ever achieved (Mumford). In current terms, however, the profane mediums of the automobile (Mumford 1961), the television (Postman 1985, Meyrowitz 1985), and other mediums of a straying science would leave that public realm in disarray. Fewer citizens would dwell in the public realm and, inevitably, their actions would be of a more private nature (Sennett 1977, 1990). In the end, as with the sacred, we are left out of the temples of the civic as well as of the gods.

Shifting Paradigms and the Sacred:

The decline in religion, or perhaps more importantly the decline in the sacred can be seen as well in the significant reversals of many of the more important and fundamental paradigms that humanity has used to guide behaviour and thought over the centuries. Such paradigms have profoundly influenced the nature of objective and subjective reality, and consequently the manner in which we give meaning to nature, places, objects and events.

In imagining the traditional holy city, for example, it is important to remember that the overriding paradigm for those traditional, religious societies reversed what we now consider to be the subjective and objective realms. As Eliade notes (1959, p.28) "Religious man's desire to *live in the sacred* is in fact equivalent to his desire to take up his abode in objective reality, not to let himself be paralysed by the never-ceasing relativity of purely subjective

experiences, to live in a real and effective world, and not in an illusion." In short, to dwell with the poetic, with the energies and mysteries of the world was objective; the subjective was the other, everyday world we now call "reality". With a different reality, such traditional cities structured an entirely different world, a world that we can barely imagine unless we are willing to suspend the typically ingrained "objective = reality" thinking prevalent in current times.

Other paradigm shifts also occurred. Consider the notion of *topos*. In its original sense *topos* implied that the nature and meaning of objects and people could not be isolated from place (Perez-Gomez 1979; Scully 1969, 1991). A temple on a hill meant something different than a temple in the woods; a temple on an open knoll held meanings different from a temple on a craggy tor. The specific nuances of each site harboured different spirits with different energies, meanings, and intents. In the modern context, however, *topos* becomes irrelevant; the site is little more than a location, a spot to "plunk down" the activity or structure. For Vincent Scully, this single act, this act of ignoring nature, "...this blindness of the contemporary urban world to everything that is not itself, to nature most of all." results in the great demise of place making in modern times. (Scully 1991, p. xi).

In a similar manner, a form of *psychological topos* also existed. A man was known, not only by his name and family lineage, but also by his trade and his town or homeland. He was "John the Smythe from Coventry", not merely John Smith. We retain some of this sense of the importance of place to our sense of self in the classic, yet rapidly disappearing

phrase "You can take the boy out of the country but you can't take the country out of the boy!". As Dudley Young (1992, p.xxv) notes, however, "Unlike us, primitive man was not disposed to separate his soul from the world-soul."

These paradigm shifts are ones that not only remove us from nature and place, but also remove us from the the gods (the sacred) and community (the civic). They leave us as isolated souls, condemned to find our selves in our selves. And it is something that human nature does not do well or with ease (Ignatieff 1985; Hillman 1991).

Redefining the Sacred in the Now:

Despite our long and certain fall from the sacred, according to Eliade (1959, p. 13) "The completely profane world, the wholly desacralised cosmos, is a recent discovery of the human spirit." And even under such circumstances, we retain a large number of "crypto-religious" behaviours, or inherently instinctive ways of looking at things and doing things. In this respect we still recall the non-homogeneity peculiar to the religious experience of space, we seek differentiation. "There are, for example, privileged places, qualitatively different from all others - a man's birthplace, or the scene of his first love, or certain places in a foreign city he visited in his youth. Even for the frankly nonreligious man, all these places still retain an exception, a unique quality; they are the *Holy Place* of his private universe, as if it were in such spots that he had received a revelation of a reality *other* than that in which he participates through his ordinary daily existence." (Eliade 1959, p. 24). And we continue to bless new vessels before they are launched, lay cornerstones for new

buildings, and carry the bride, or groom as the case may be, across the threshold.

This "crypto-religious" behaviour, however, goes well beyond the ritualistic holdover, or some exaggerated sense of self-importance. The sacred can be found in any one of a number of perspectives of the world, life, beauty, the soul, the everyday object, or in the "doings of life". For Emile Durkheim (1968, p. 229) "What we find at the origin and basis of religious thought are not determined and distinct objects and beings possessing a sacred character of themselves; they (the sacred) are indefinite powers, anonymous forces, more or less numerous in different societies, and sometimes even reduced to a unity, and whose impersonality is strictly comparable to that of the physical forces whose manifestations the sciences of nature study." In short, the energy of the natural world, the winds and tides, is what called our attention to the life-forces in the world and the possibilities of the sacred, the gods. Or, as Charles Moore notes so eloquently in his introduction to *"In Praise of Shadows"*, "...breezes loosely captured can connect us with the very edge of the infinite." (Tanizaki 1977).

From a similar perspective Edmund Burke suggested that any thing of value (the sacred) lies hidden in those things, ideas and places that call our attention to something more, something beyond. "But let it be considered..." he says "...that hardly any thing can strike the mind with its greatness, which does not make some sort of approach towards infinity; which nothing can do whilst we are able to perceive its bounds; but to see objects distinctly, and to perceive their bounds, is one and the same thing. A clear idea is therefore

another name for a little idea." (Burke p.229). In the beauties and endless intricacies of nature, he suggests, lie the great ideas that challenge us to a larger view of our existence. Nature, as such, assumes a religious-like prominence.

And nature is not passive. "Consider first of all the phrase that Darwin actually used was *spontaneous variation*, not *random mutation*." (Young 1998, p.38). In this sense, nature is seen as aggressively testing out possibilities, not swinging blindly in the darkness of an evolutionary abyss. "At the heart of such a notion is the idea that life calls to life, that life desires its own increase - a desire that in so many evolutionary stories is artfully gained." (ibid., p.38). And, in this notion of life calling things to life, we sense the sacred and the notion that, in a similar manner, sacred objects, places, and events call our attentions to the possibilities of yet more life.

From a different perspective, Lynda Saxton argues that "Religion is not a discrete category within the human experience; it is rather a quality that pervades all experience." (Saxton 1982, p. 7). She sees the potential for the sacred as being embedded in all things, and not just in nature. As she notes, "There are no inherently sacred objects, events, or thoughts; they are made sacred by a special context. The usual, recognizable context is an institutional or traditional setting through which a culture agrees that something has sacred content," (ibid., p.3) but it is also possible, she argues that many things can become sacred via "...the work of the metaphor, a quality of experience manifested here by the little things we save, the "stuff" in children's boxes, by the things we say that get repeated - our texts

of our lives, by our jokes and our dreams, by the way we play." (ibid., p.3). For her, "Religion is the desire for depth." (ibid., p.16) and as we seek depth, through the employ of the metaphor and similar devices, we also seek and discover the sacred.

If we accept the position that all things, of both nature and humanity, possess the potential to be sacred, then it seems necessary to ask the question: What then is the difference between the sacred and the profane?

The difference is to be found, I would argue, in the energies, ideas, and imaginations of our existence. The sacred occurs when the power of the moment reaches into our being and fills us with life. In this sense of the sacred, sacred places, events and objects are those, which by virtue of their inherent or created qualities cause us to experientially and intellectually become aware of the world around us and our existence in that world - places, objects and events which give us a sense of our place in the "scheme of things". Therefore, in seeking the essential differences between the poetic languages and the utilitarian languages of everyday life we seek the sacred. Or, as is noted in the introduction to the selected writings of James Hillman, "By taking everything as poetry, Hillman (we) frees consciousness from its thin, hard crust of literalism to reveal the depth of experience." (Hillman 1991, p.15). The profane, by contrast, is the absence of life - the absence of ideas, energies, values, possibilities. The profane is a form of continuous disassociation with the present; it is part and parcel of the process of "Man's Efficient Rush Toward Deadly Dullness" (Watt 1978, p. 160).

Implied in this discussion is the fact that the sacred (*life directed*), or least the potential for the sacred, can be found in the profane (*the everyday and otherwise lifeless*) - but, and this is crucial, it requires an active search. Life can not be found if one does not wish to find it, to see it, and to revel in it. And for those of us who claim to design place our failure to *create life* is ultimately what leads to "placelessness" (Relph 1976).

Some Characteristics of the Sacred:

Concepts and ideas, their emotions and their sense of life, can be understood further as they are revealed by an identification of their characteristics, by their behaviours. This is one way to let things "*speak for themselves*". This section, therefore, attempts to elaborate on some of the characteristics that might be attributed to the sacred object, event, or place. (Table 1.).

The sacred object, event, or place:

1. **Creates differentiation:** Sacred places, objects and events differentiate themselves from other places and objects in the world that surround, thereby clarifying the scene and bringing the differences to our attention. Sacred events likewise create a differentiation in the flow of time. This fundamental characteristic of the sacred defines Eliade's notion that the sacred activity seeks to end the homogeneity of profane space (Eliade 1959, p. 37). In more basic terms it describes the primary language of landscape and place, the archetypes of space and place, the mesa, the butte, the cloister, the allee (Condon 1988). In this respect it is not surprising that great mesas were sacred sites where the gods dwelt or where man

and woman could create a sacred community in closer communion with the gods.

2. Reveals, Intensifies, and Elaborates Life: Sacred places, objects and events by their very strength, clarity, and sense of purpose reveal the "real" more than profane objects, events, and places could ever do. They are imbued with a life of their own, a life that is there in great detail, to be noticed if we so choose. The intellectual, experiential power of the stone garden at Ryoan-ji (in one sense little more than a walled collection of artfully-placed rocks in a raked gravel bed) calls our attention to the fact that there is "more to the world than meets the eye." A sense of sacredness is inherent in the place. As Relph notes (1993, p.26) places "...are, in other words, indeterminate wholes. It is impossible to draw precise boundaries around them or to break them down into their components without losing touch with them as places. Moreover, while it is safe to assume that most individual buildings are not possessed by ghosts, it is a defining characteristic of any worthwhile place that it have its own spirit - its own *genius loci*. In this sense, all places are sacred..."

3. Sanctifies Life: A sacred place has meaning and purpose which, in turn allows those places and people in and around that place to assume a sense of their own meaning and purpose. A totality of purpose emerges that blesses life. Those that return to visit a sacred place again and again, a Roanji or a beautiful clearing in a woods, re-seek the goodness that the human condition aspires to and feels in such a place and, in so doing, confirm the sacredness of that place. In this act, the basic religious act finds itself. "Religion, then, is the consecration of experience, or person, so that the person, or experience, is made whole

(holy)" (Saxton 1982, p. 7).

4. Is Outer-Directed and Heals: By its very nature of responding to other places, objects or people, a sacred place, object, or event is one that seems to give rather than take. The giving often takes on a form of healing, a healing of place as well as people. A wall can separate or join; it can be a barrier, or a place unto itself for those living on either side of the wall; it can act in a profane or sacred manner.

5. Respects Effort and Achievement: A place, object or event that celebrates effort and achievement in form, process, and meaning, celebrates and sanctifies the "doings" of life. Such attention to effort and achievement, for example, was an integral process of the home builders in northern Greece for many centuries. "Certain celebrations related to the building stages were spelled out such as the *themliatiki*, a celebration when the foundation was complete, and the paying of the *worn-out-clothes* replacement, or *mandilomata*, at the completion of the job. I have seen old and faded photographs from the last decades of the guild where the women from the owner's household have draped the ridge of the completed house with new shirts and handkerchiefs for the workmen." (Walkey 1993, p.138).

6. Slows Down Time: By drawing our attention to the ebb and flow of life, sacred places, objects and events make the pace of life seem to move in a slower, more natural, more controllable manner. We feel as though we can be masters over the onslaught of linear time we have been so otherwise trained to respect and obey. And we are given time, in the

process, to reflect. To stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon, for example, and stare at the magnificence of the scene that lies before, is to make "time stand still". For this one reason alone, it is not surprising that the Grand Canyon assumes sacred qualities.

7. Contains a Sense of the Immediate: Places, objects and events that are immediate to our existence often take on a sacred quality. The tools we use to build with assume a personality. So it is also with the things we build. In talking about the nature of the roof, for example, Silverstein notes that "The practical self, wet and cold, defenceless at night, craving a safe place, invents shelter, builds the First Roof, gets inside and lives there. Out of such inevitabilities, the practical self, now dry and warm, perhaps more at home, discovers the pleasures of material comfort." But.. he says "...something else is waiting to be found. For this roof has been built, the practical extension of the practical self, is like its builder, in some sense is the builder. In this identification, I suspect, lies the origins of the sacred. In the practical, the sacred is found." (Silverstein 1993, p. 90). From this view it is a short step to Hough's insistence on the importance of *necessity* in the creation of good place and place identity. (Hough 1990, p.34).

8. Is Authentic: For something to have life it must possess its own personality, its own values and meanings; it requires a sense of being "first-hand". In this respect, the "authentic" is an issue of process and intention, not form. (Dovey 1989, p.33). Conversely, as form is distanced from process, from its making, it loses its life, its meaning, and religious icons notwithstanding, much of its sacredness. Yet "The qualities we call beauty

(sacred)...must always grow from the realities of life." (Tanizaki 1977, p.46). Or as Harper would comment on the works of the Japanese cultural critic, Junichiro Tanizaki: Tanizaki's "...pessimism (and probably his earthiness too) would not be at all popular with the modern artistic establishment: the "master's" of flower arrangement, tea ceremonies, calligraphy, painting, dance. Many of these people make handsome livings by their art, and, as the government's chosen cultural emissaries, have been influential shapers of the image of Japanese culture that is packaged for export. The implication that their art is stillborn could not but be resented. Tanizaki, however, would dismiss it as cold and sterile, too far removed from the *sources of its life* to claim any vitality." (Tanizaki 1977, p. 47).

9. Consists of Repeated Centres: Sacred places, objects and events have a strong sense of centre, of being centered. In sacred terms, we seek the *axis mundi* to be located *in the middle*, at the *navel of the earth*, to dwell in the *center of the world*. Sacred places, by nature, contain a "...multiplicity of centres and this reiteration of the image of the world on smaller and smaller scales constitutes one of the specific characteristics of traditional societies." (Eliade 1959, p. 37). In current terms, Karsten Harries states that "The ethical function of architecture is first of all a public function. Sacred and public architecture provides a community with center or centers. Individuals gain their sense of place by relating their dwelling to those centers." (Harries 1993, p. 49). Likewise Alexander, in his search to describe the nature of order and beauty states that anything that is beautiful contains numerous centers, each center possessing a life of its own, and each center contributing in turn to the life of other centers that surround. As such, "...every center is

a field of centers." (Alexander 1988, p. 4.32) This recursive feature is also a characteristic of the sacred.

10. Is Holistic: By its very nature, in anything sacred, "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." At the same time, the nature of the parts contains the images, meanings and intentions of the whole. Both the parts and the whole are symbiotic, and the whole is similarly related to other wholes that surround and connect. (Alexander 1988). In traditional religious society, each act of development not only supported but replicated the ideas, functions, attitudes, indeed, the very presence of all other developments. (Eliade 1959).

These characteristics of the sacred are, of course, interdependent; it is difficult to imagine one characteristic at work without the other characteristics also being present. In total, however, they speak to the full nature of the sacred as it perhaps has always been and always should be.

Types of Sacred Places:

Another way to define the sacred is to let it be "revealed" through the various places, objects, and events that we sense possess, in some manner, a suggestion of the sacred. These places, objects and events hint at and elaborate on life. This section therefore identifies over 100 different sacred places, objects, and events according to 29 types sorted into 8 broad categories. (Tables 2.) Rather than elaborate on each category and type in great detail, however, a brief elaboration is presented below on the last category only, The Special

Places of the Everyday Life that come closer to explaining Lynda Saxton's definition of the *"Ordinarily Sacred"*.

The Special Places of Everyday Life: Our everyday life and the places, objects and events associated with our daily activities can, through love and attention, ritual, and community confirmation, achieve a sense of the sacred. Life becomes enriched, enveloped with an extra sense of energy, importance and meaning. Such places include the home, the garden, sites of local gatherings, a retreat, places of special memories, and little places that seem to come alive.

1. **The Home.** The home clearly must be a sacred place. It not only shelters but blesses the family. It is their sanctuary. And, in traditional terms, it is built in the image of the temple. In today's world, as well as in traditional times, the homes of other creatures are also sacred. As such, the home also includes the den, the lair, the burrow, and the nest.

2. **The Garden.** The garden, in classical terms, is the primary vehicle by which our search for a vision of paradise is created here on earth. It is our ultimate statement about what a sacred landscape entails and reveals. Villa Lante, as an outstanding example, is structured around the allegory of the receding waters of the Great Flood. But a well-tended every day garden is also sacred.

3. **Sites of Local Gatherings.** Local places that serve as a place of both functional and ritualistic gatherings become confirmed, over time, as sacred places. They become places beyond the ordinary, even though ordinary activities may dominate their use and

form. Such places include a traditional swimming hole, a local restaurant (Hester 1993) or a public well for washing clothes (the old quarters, Lisbon).

4. The Retreat. The retreat is, by definition, a form of sanctuary. It promises an opportunity to escape the pressures and confusions of the everyday, an opportunity to pause and reflect. In sacred terms, it is a prayer given physical form. Such a retreat may be famous, as in the retreat of a noted person (Roosevelt's Campobello, New Brunswick), a specific retreat for everyone (a community spa), or simply a place that an individual returns to again and again for comfort (a favourite meadow in nearby woods).

5. Places of Memory. Over time, our minds come to associate special moments in our lives with the specific places where the event occurred. A scenic overlook may also be the place of our first profession of love or a marriage proposal; a certain fountain may embody childhood wishes; a particular ferris wheel may still challenge our spirits to seek risk and adventure. Such places may embody individual or collective memories. Individuals often try to hold the memory in a photograph. But the collective memory seeks to save the fountain or the ferris wheel, and so doing bestows it with sacred honour.

6. Little Places that Are Given Life. The objects, spaces, and places we create can be typical, anywhere, any place creations, or they can instill a sense of delight, a sense of the presence in their creation. They can be made to seem as though "they speak to us"; they can be made to come alive. And in this creation, they are given a sense of the sacred. Such places can be a building corner, a park bench, a garden gate, a library window, a light, or wall. They are the details of the physical world we admire and photograph, that make us smile.

This typology of sacred places can be organized in other ways; the typology is also not complete. In particular, only passing attention has been given to the endless number of sacred events that are of importance to the public realm. These shortcomings, however, are not important. What the typology does and should serve to so is to give a clear sense of the extent to which our world must be sacred. If the list adds to an understanding of the nature of the sacred then it has served its purpose.

Implementing the Sacred for the Civic:

The civic emerges from the sacred act of giving life to all places, objects and events, and a subsequent sense that all these living things we are, have and create must "*come together*". And it emerges from the traditional notion that the city is first a holy place and secondly, in accordance with its etymology, a civic place. As Sennett notes (1990, p.10-11) "The conceiving of a Christian city in stone fell to Saint Isidore of Seville (ca. 560-636). He was a practical man. By force of arms he converted the Visigoth tribes to Christianity; he erected a coherent church hierarchy in Spain. His scholarly labors also had a practical aim; he wrote the *etymologies*, a book about the origins of words, in order to clarify their use. In this book he traced the word *city* back to different sources. One is *urbs*, the stones of a city. The stones of a city were laid for practical reasons of shelter, commerce, and warfare. The other root of *city* is *civitas*, and this word is about the emotions, rituals, and convictions that take form in a city."

The question emerges as to how we realize the sacred, and hence the civic, in our

now fragmented world, when the power of now is eroded by personal, functional, and economic habits that divide our time and space into profane units. Can we end our essentially regulatory, reactionary planning modes of being? Can we end the rules of economics and law as the dominating forces that so poorly shape (give life to) our personal and public realms? Can we bring design back to its role as a creative and problem solving activity, as versus as image-making enterprise? The answer lies I suggest, to reiterate Susan Sontag, in reseeking our spirituality, where "(Spirituality = plans, terminologies, ideas of deportment aimed at resolving the painful structural contradictions inherent in the human situation..." (Sontag 1983, p. 181).

The types of ideas, attitudes, and processes needed to realize the sacred and the civic are long and varied. They involve, first and foremost, a paradigm shift: a change in our view of the world that comes to see our building activities as embodying values in the present, and hopes for the future. And they demand that we assume more responsibility for creating and ordering life. This section, therefore, briefly attempts to outline some twelve possible strategies, some "plans, terminologies, ideas of deportment" for implementing the sacred and the civic in the public realm. (Table 3.).

1. Identify the Existing Sacred Objects, Places, and Events: The first step in the process begins with an identification and mapping of the endless variety of sacred places existing in a city, region or landscape preserve. The mapping should include the numerous small places that exist, in each and every neighbourhood or small town, as well as the more significant sites. What emerges from such mapping is a wonderful, intense patterning of

"life as it exists on and in the land".

2. Describe in Words, Ideas, and Images, a Vision for the City: The energy and possibilities inherent in the existing sacred realm should serve as an inspirational basis for developing a rich, potent, long-term vision for each place as well as for the city. In Alexander's sense "Every project must first be experienced, and then expressed, as a vision which can be seen in the eye (literally). It must have this quality so strongly that it can also be communicated to others, and felt by others, as a vision." (Alexander 1987, p.59). Knowledge about the sacred, in particular, is essential to "knowing" what the vision means and how it is to be expressed.

3. Describe the Vision in Terms of the Lives of the Citizens: Visions must be owned by everyone to be shared; the sharing of a vision is essential to the sacred process. At the same time, the vision should be of such duration as to encompass the life of each citizen. The vision should say "When we are eighty we would like to see...". The vision then becomes a sacred vision.

4. Establish Civic-Public Space Programs that Reflect the Sacred Vision. Programming means, in one sense, to "...write in public" (Websters, 1962). It implies that we describe our "publicness" in the open, through the opportunities, actions, festivals, and celebrations that define our "coming together". Such events might consider, for example, a civic dirge in remembrance of those citizens ("lost souls") who have died unknown and neglected. Or it might include a community gathering to celebrate Thanksgiving. The dirge requires a sacred route; the Thanksgiving celebration requires a permanent home to embody the memory of the celebration.

5. **Identify the Profane, the Places in the City Without Life:** No sacred activity can ignore those people or places that have been left outside the "living". To confront life is to confront the absence of life. This activity, therefore, involves not only identifying and mapping the profane, but insists upon a search for and an understanding of why such places are profane in the first instance. The reasons must be made clear to all if any change is to occur.

6. **Describe the Patterns and Typologies Appropriate to the Place of the City:** With an identification of the nature of the sacred in the city, and with a vision of the values and activities that are desired for the city's future, there is a consequent need to examine how such information translates itself into a variety of patterns, types, arrangements, and orders. This exploration has two purposes. First, as has been noted in earlier discussions the sacred, by definition, seeks to order itself with respect to the universe, to reveal itself in those arrangements and forms that differentiate, inform, and mystify. The sacred is therefore typological. Secondly, public discussions on how to embody the sacred in pattern, type, and arrangement further assist each citizen in elaborating on their understanding of the sacred. Describing patterns and typologies, as such, is a process of discovering and informing as well as a process that seeks physical resolution.

7. **Define a Sacred Structure:** Having delineated the existing sacred objects, places and events, established a vision and a program, and described possible patterns and types for realizing the sacred, it is now possible to define an overall "*sacred structure*" (Hester 1993) for the neighbourhood, city, or region. Parts of the structure should be seen as being forever fixed as places that define the city, its society, its fundamental being, and its beliefs

in perpetuity. This act of *fixing* is a form of *consecration* (ibid, p. 281). Parts of the structure, however, should be seen as evolving and growing perpetually towards a greater sense of life. This act is a form of *religious re-discovery*; the everyday building gently adjusts and readjusts to assure that it effectively contains its dwellers. The sacred structure is a dynamic structure, as is life. And as with life, it retains the spine but alters the flesh and the extremities over time and with changes in use, age and purpose.

8. Make Each and Every Building Activity an Act of Healing: "Each and every increment of construction must be made in such a way as to heal the city." (Alexander 1987, p.22). This notion insists that each intervention in the creation of the city must demonstrate how it contributes to the well-being of the immediate, as well as larger urban fabric before it is allowed to proceed. The adjacent stream must be repaired; the indeterminate space must be given definition; the severed connection between two related spaces must be joined. By definition, such acts of healing are sacred acts.

9. Be Certain that Each Citizen Can Describe the "Joyfulness" in Each Proposal: Healing is a spiritual as well as a physical concept; joy is a condition of the sacred. Many people, despite living in a predominately profane world, nonetheless seem to possess an ability to identify objects and places that are imbued with life. They seek such places out in their photographs, their evening walks, and their vacations. As such, let people attempt to describe the "joyfulness" in any building activity. If they can not, then perhaps the joy is not there.

10. Limit the Size of Any Building Activity: There is a limit to the quality of any one individual's imagination, at any given time in the creative act. Individual and collective

minds have never been able to imagine and create alive places in one great plan; the failures of utopian and other mega-plans are legendary. The human spirit is inevitably dwarfed in such profanities. Therefore, it is essential that the building blocks that are used to create life in the city be at a scale that people can understand and that creative minds can imagine.

11. Allow Development to Proceed Incrementally: Incremental development (Alexander 1987) essentially requires that city building activity progress from one piece of development to the next, one step at a time, such that in each development the mistakes of the past may be corrected and previously unseen opportunities may be realized. The process is reflect; the process is corrective. While incremental growth takes place within the framework of a vision, much as a tree has an overall sense of its general formal structure, like a tree it is nonetheless able to respond to specific changes needed in its patterns to assure successful growth. As such, it is a process that constantly challenges the emergence of the profane, as well as a process that seeks the "most suitable life". It is a process that promotes the finding of the sacred.

12. Provide Places That the Citizens May appropriate: "Appropriation....embodies the dual qualities of both caring for the world and taking from it. As caring, appropriation speaks of our primary involvement in the world, our concern. ...It is through care that the world is disclosed." "Taking...is a kind of appropriation of the world into ourselves." (Dovey 1985, p.37). In these notions lies the sacred act. It is through the "doing in the world", therefore, that our understanding of the sacred emerges. When people are given places they can appropriate, can claim ownership over, they eventually learn to become "*hierophanists*", or creators of the sacred.

These twelve strategies for realizing the sacred are clearly interdependent; one act assists in the understanding and performance of another act. They seem simple enough, straight forward, and even possess a "naturalness" to their intents and processes. Indeed, the creation of the sacred is a natural process.

A Brief Conclusion:

We face, in our world, an experiential crises as severe as the environmental crises. The resolution of one can not be resolved without also resolving the other. They are both crisis that result from a loss of the sacred. They must be re-solved, therefore, in a re-discovery of the sacred, in the sacred in every aspect of our daily existence, in the life that is found in the presence, in the power of now. Like the citizen ploughing his fields within the toll of the church bells, we must find, in our moment, a presence that informs and fills us with life. Maybe then, what we do will achieve a sense of the sacred and will be remembered as such: "...the past has been saved as being good, and this promises that the future will so save the present. We have the sense that we and our works will also reach uninterrupted old age." (Lynch 1972, p. 40).

Table 1.
SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SACRED:

1. Sacred places, by definition, create differentiation.
2. They reveal, intensify, and elaborate Life.
3. In the process, they sanctify life.
4. Sacred places are outer-directed and heal.
5. They respect effort and achievement.
6. Sacred places slow down the passage of time.
7. They contain a sense of the immediate.
8. As such, they are also authentic.
9. Sacred places are comprised of repeated centers.
10. By definition, sacred places are also holistic.

Table 2.
A TYPOLOGY FOR SACRED PLACES:

1. Places For and Of the Gods:

1.1 Places of Worship: including temples, churches, monasteries, sacred groves, wailing walls, tors, ceremonial rings, altars, and places of sanctuary.

1.2 Sites of Myths and Legends: including places of great legends such as Ayer's Rock, Australia or local legends such as Deadman's Island, Vancouver.

1.3 Places of the Imagination: that challenge us with possibilities such as a pond (lost Lagoon, Vancouver) or a large bare hill (Nose Hill, Calgary).

2. Places of Life and Death:

2.1 Places of Major Life Events: including places of birth, baptism (the sacred stream), marriage proposals, weddings, anniversaries and burials (the cemetery).

2.2 Sites of Natural Disasters: such as huge landslides (Hope Landslide, B.C.), volcanic eruptions (Mount St. Helens), or tsunamis (Port Alberni, B.C.).

2.3 Places of Bravery and Remembrance: including sites of courage, memorials (the Vietnam memorial), and battlefields (the Plains of Abraham, Quebec).

3. Places that Differentiate:

3.1 Unique Places: including an endless number of wonderful places such as swamps (the Okefenokee, Georgia), a natural bridge (Yoho National Park, B.C.), a mesa (Acoma Pueblo, New Mexico), an oasis (Furnace Creek, Death Valley), a great tower (the Eiffel Tower, Paris), or an unusual street (Lombard, San Francisco).

3.2 Places with a Strong Sense of Position: that are cognitively powerful including

great parks (Central Park, New York City; Stanley Park, Vancouver), and strongly situated streets and roads (Princess Street, Edinburgh).

3.3 Places with Difficult Access: including mountain tops (Mt. Steele, Kluane), volcanic cones (Devil's Monument, Wyoming), and islands (Isola Piscatori, Lake Maggiore).

3.4 Parks and Reserves: including state and national parks, the international biophysical reserves, bird sanctuaries, ecological reserves, and wilderness preserves.

3.5 Places that Reveal and Elaborate on Time: such as autumn woods in full colour, an orchard or farm, a plaza that floods at high tides, or a river where salmon run.

4. Places that Contain and Reveal a Sense of Order:

4.1 Sources, Beginnings, and Ends: including the source of water (the sacred wells of Ireland), the mouth of a stream (the Mississippi Delta), or the city gates or points of arrival (Ellis Island, New York City).

4.2 Places that Connect: or forms of an *axis mundi* including bridges (Lions' Gate Bridge, Vancouver), or great stairs (the Spanish Steps, Rome).

4.3 Places of Appropriate Order: that create meaningful structure such as promenades (the Boardwalk, Quebec City), and boulevards (Royal Palm Way, Palm Beach).

5. Places of Achievement:

5.1 Places of Founding and Discoveries: such as Plymouth Rock, or the cornerstone for a new public building.

5.2 Sites of Special and Unique Events: including events such as the signing of the

Magna Carta (Runnymede), or the spot that marks the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (B.C.).

5.3 Places of Individual Effort and Success: such places range from a urban garden of an elderly gentlemen (Percy Linden), to the place where Roger Banister first broke the four-minute mile (Empire Stadium, Vancouver).

6. Places that Give Community a Heart:

6.1 Places that Protect. including walls (the Great Wall of China), defence installations (the Belvedere, Florence), palisades (the Alamo, San Antonio), the moat (the Tower of London), and the levee (New Orleans).

6.2 Places that Define the Civic Aspirations of Society: including the capitol, city halls, court houses, hospitals, town commons (Brompton, Yorkshire), campus dining halls (Mississippi State University), and places of community values (Peace Park, Vancouver).

6.3 Places that Witness the Passage of Community Life: such as places of community gathering (Plaza Mayor, Salamanca, Spain), or places of great events (Red Rock Theatre, Denver).

6.3 Historic Routes and Processions: including processional routes (the Royal Mile, Edinburgh) and historic routes (Via Appia, Italy).

7. Literary Places, Symbolic Sites:

7.1 Places of Art, Literature, and Great Ideas: such as the site of great social-political addresses (Gettysburg), or significant art (the Canadian wilderness and the Group of Seven painters).

7.2 Places that Accentuate Hell: such as tragic wastelands (where nuclear waste is buried), or places that represent hell (the shell catch basin, the Campo, Sienna).

8. The Special Places of Everyday Life:

8.1 Places of the Home: including the owned or rented home, the nest, the den, the burrow and the lair.

8.2 The Garden: as statements of paradise and as hopes for tomorrow.

8.3 Places for Local Gathering: including a local restaurant, a special community laundry facility, a local market, or a small outdoor stage in a local park.

8.4 The Retreat: including the lodge, the cottage, the summer camp, or local woods.

8.5 Places of Memory: such as a scenic overlook, an old amusement park, or the ferris wheel.

8.6 Little Places that are Given Life: including a gate of welcome, a delightful bench, a detailed canopy, and other places that make us smile.

Table 3.
STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE SACRED AND THE CIVIC:

1. Identify existing sacred places, objects, and events.
2. Describe, in words, ideas, and images a vision for the city.
3. Describe the vision in terms of the lives of the citizens.
4. Establish civic-public space programs that reflect the characteristics of the sacred.
5. Identify the profane, the places without life.
6. Describe the design typologies and patterns appropriate to the place of the city.
7. Define a sacred structure for the neighbourhood, city or region.
8. Make each and every building activity, first and foremost, an act of healing.
9. Be certain that each citizen can describe the joyfulness inherent in each proposal.
10. Limit the size of any one building activity.
11. Allow development to proceed incrementally, so that all may reflect on the vision.
12. Provide places that citizens can appropriate, where they can claim ownership.

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THE POWER OF NOW:

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A Representative Selection of Illustrations:

THE POWER OF NOW:

RETURNING TO A SENSE OF THE SACRED IN THE PUBLIC REALM.

The following is a selection of various illustrations that represent the spirit of the paper and the nature of the illustrations that would be used in the final paper. A number of intended illustrations are not used for reasons of economy at this time.



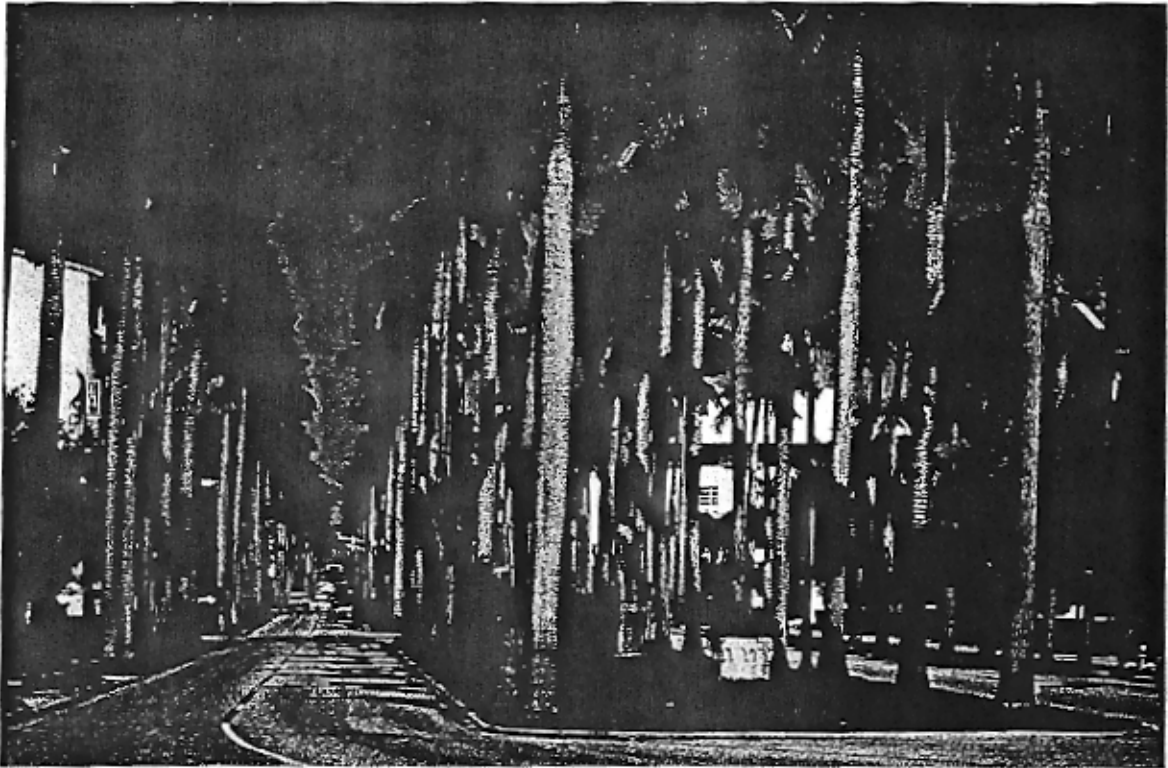
Slowing Down the Passage of Time: The great oak alley at Oak Alley Plantation, Louisiana creates a strong sense of the infinite, as well as a sense of permanence. In its arms, the passage of time slows down to a gentle pace. (Photograph by the author).



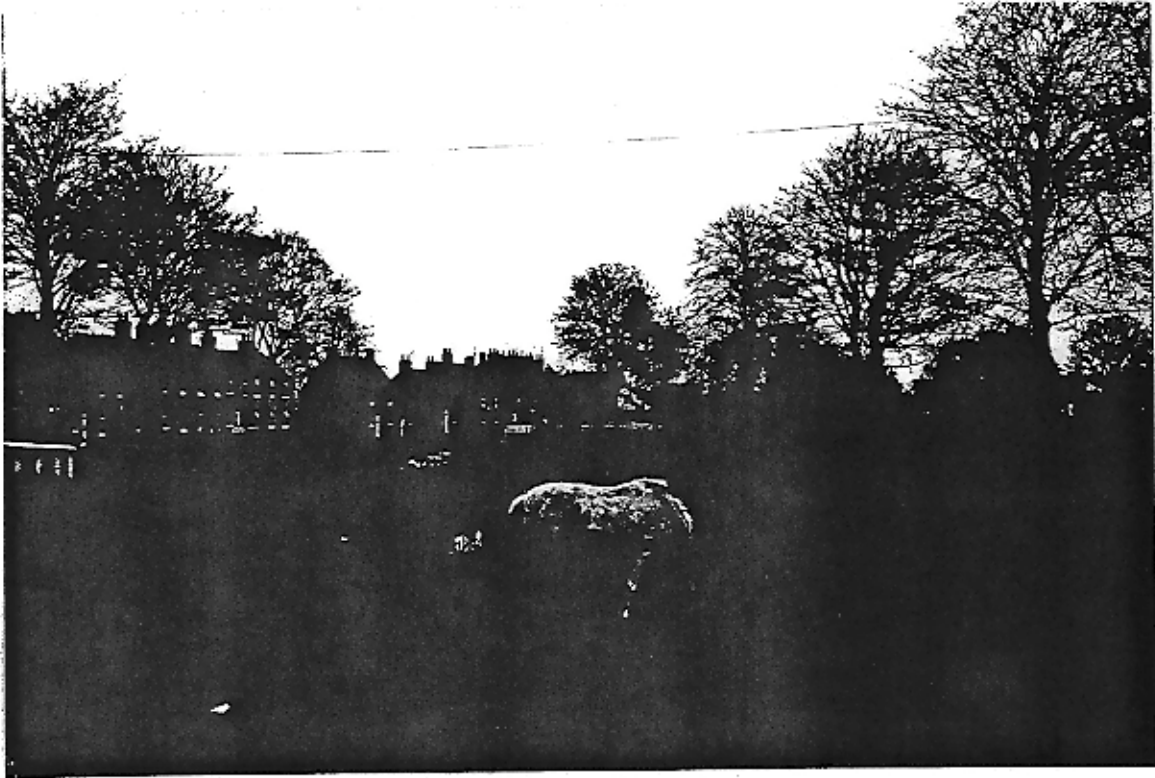
The Consecration of a Tree: Each year nurses, in an Atlanta hospital, hang their old training gowns on this tree to signal their graduation from nursing school and their transition into a new phase of their life. The act consecrates the passage, and in turn blesses the tree. (Photograph by the author).



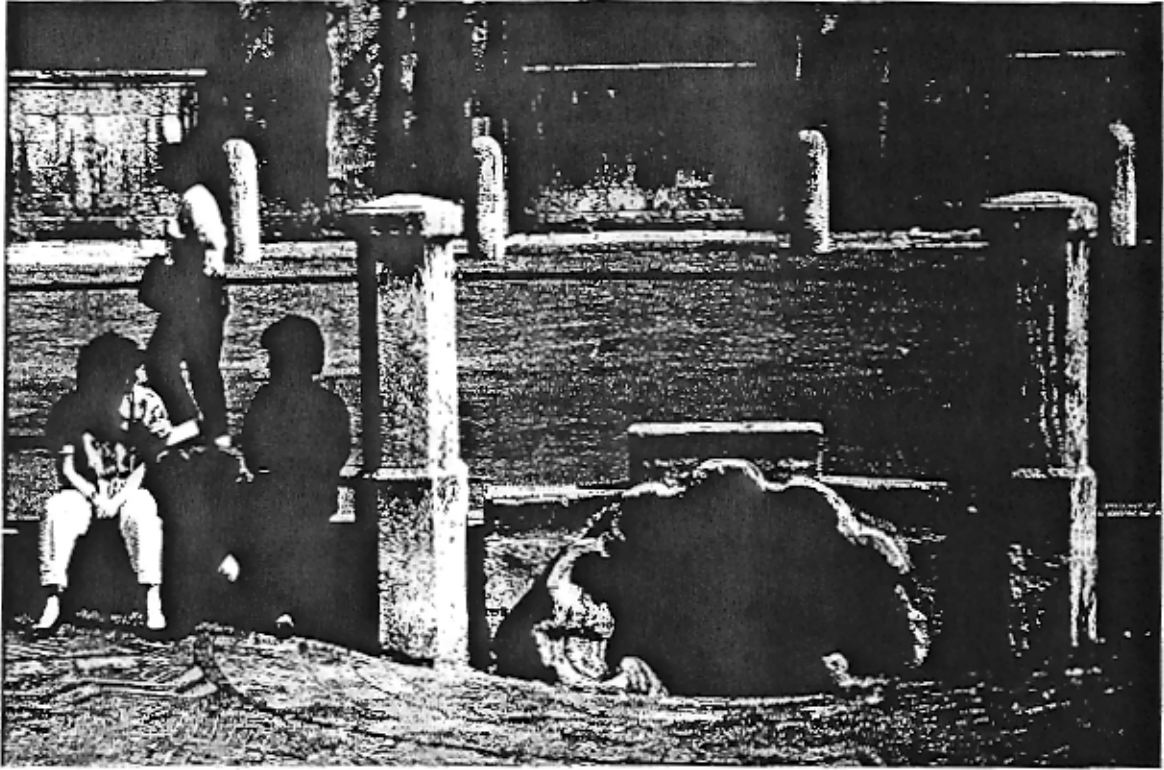
Places of Natural Disasters and Death: The remains of Spirit Lake, and several citizens lie buried a thousand feet below in the aftermath of the eruption of Mount St. Helens. The place, as such, assumes sacred proportions. (Photograph by the author).



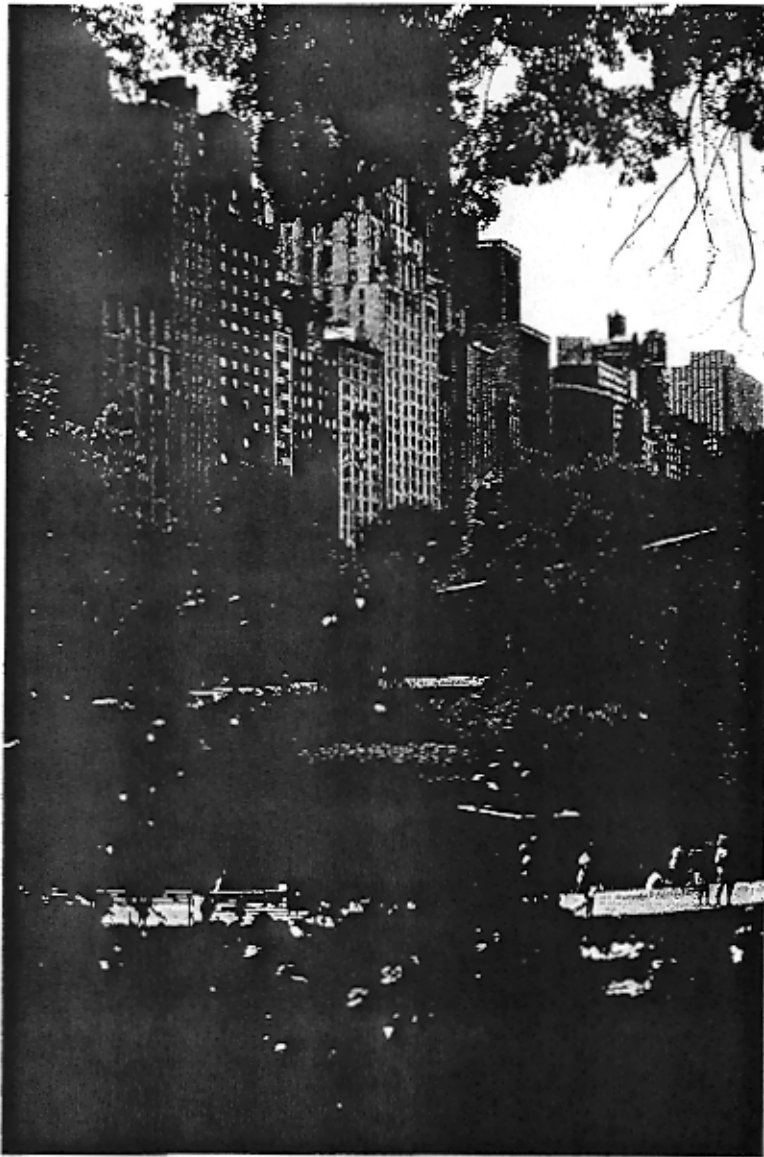
Creating a Processional Heart to Place: Royal Palm Way in Palm Beach captures the elegance, the name, and the spirit of the place in its presence. In the process it becomes a place of processions as well as a place of the heart. (Photograph by the author).



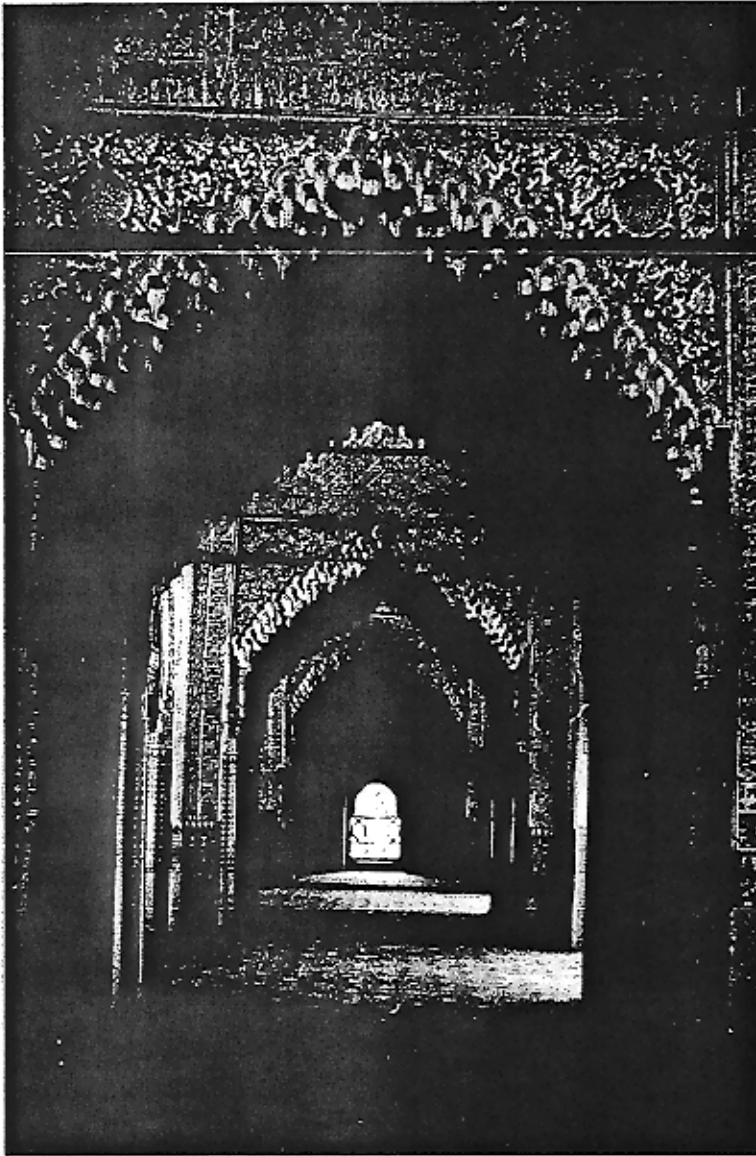
Shared Places as Civic Places: The town commons in Brompton, Yorkshire create a gentle sense of a community coming together to share and to watch over. The commons bless the life of the village. (Photograph by the author).



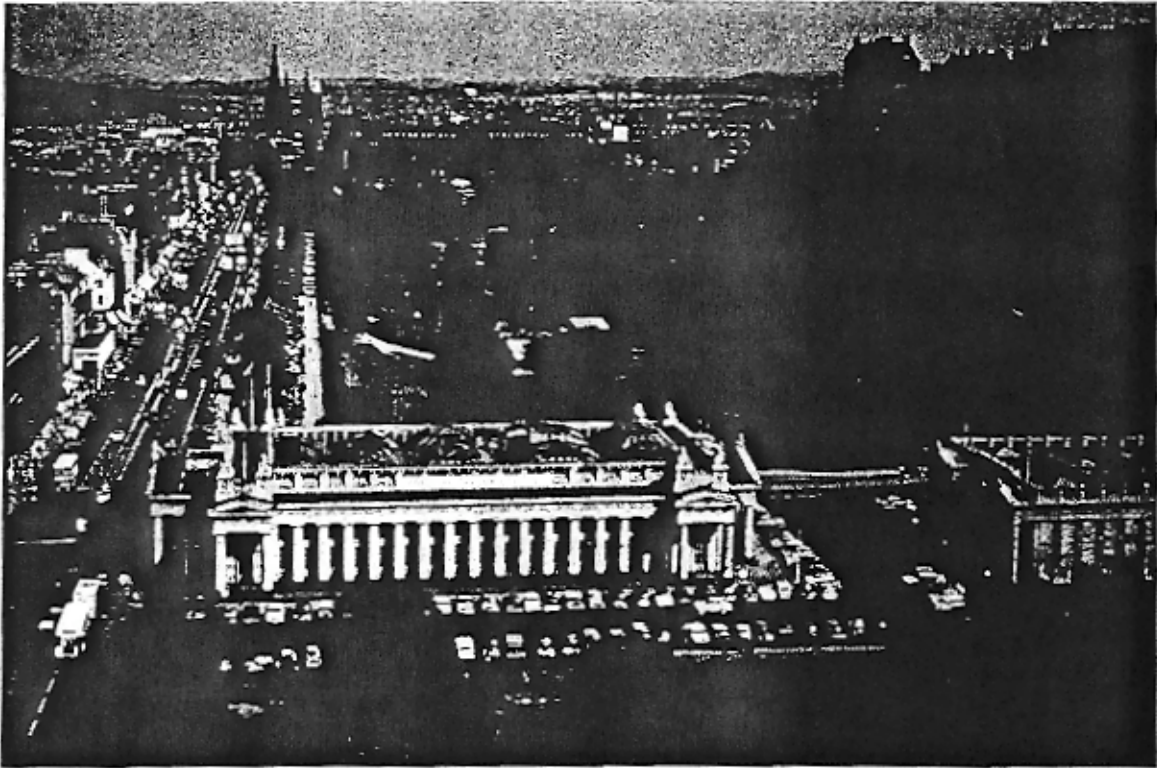
Accentuating Hell: The shell-like opening that drains the surface water in the Campo, Siena delightfully addresses the underworld and hell. By pointing the direction towards hell it also suggest that the present location contains a sense of the sacred. (Photograph by the author).



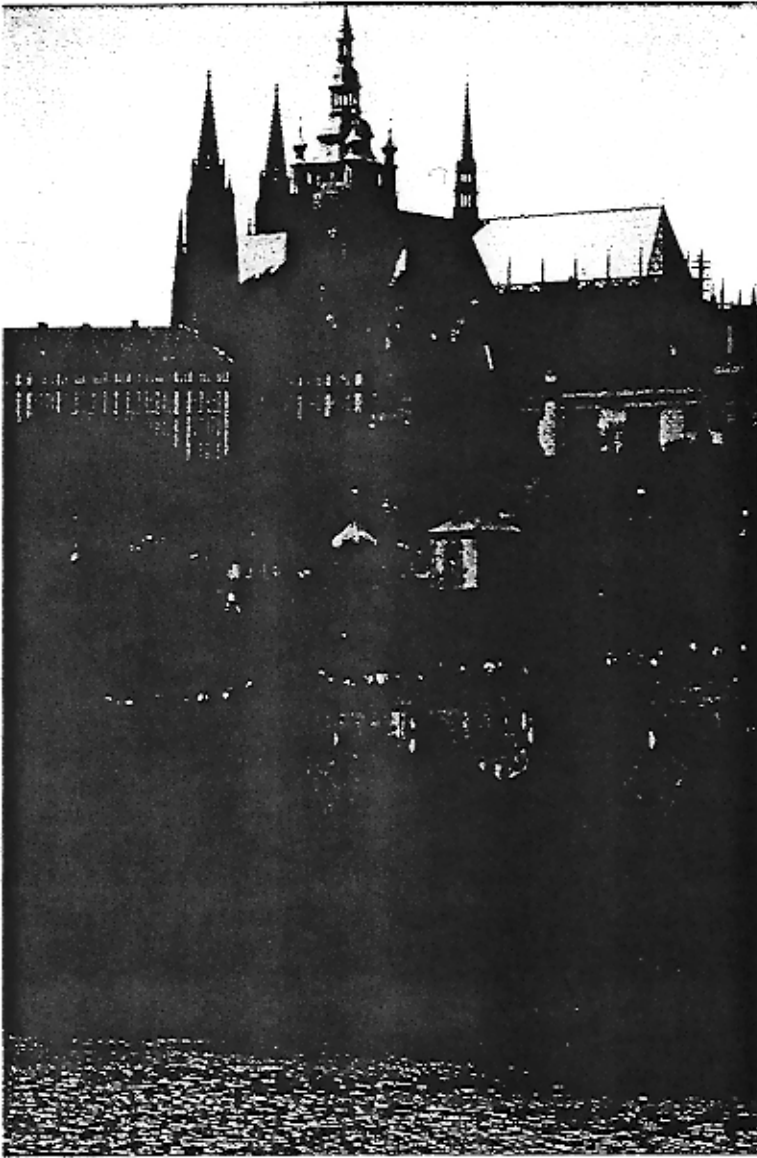
Differentiating the Scene: Central Park in New York City creates a powerful differentiation in the grided urban fabric. In the process it gives a powerful sense of order to the city and accounts for an important component of the city's sense of place. (Photograph by the author).



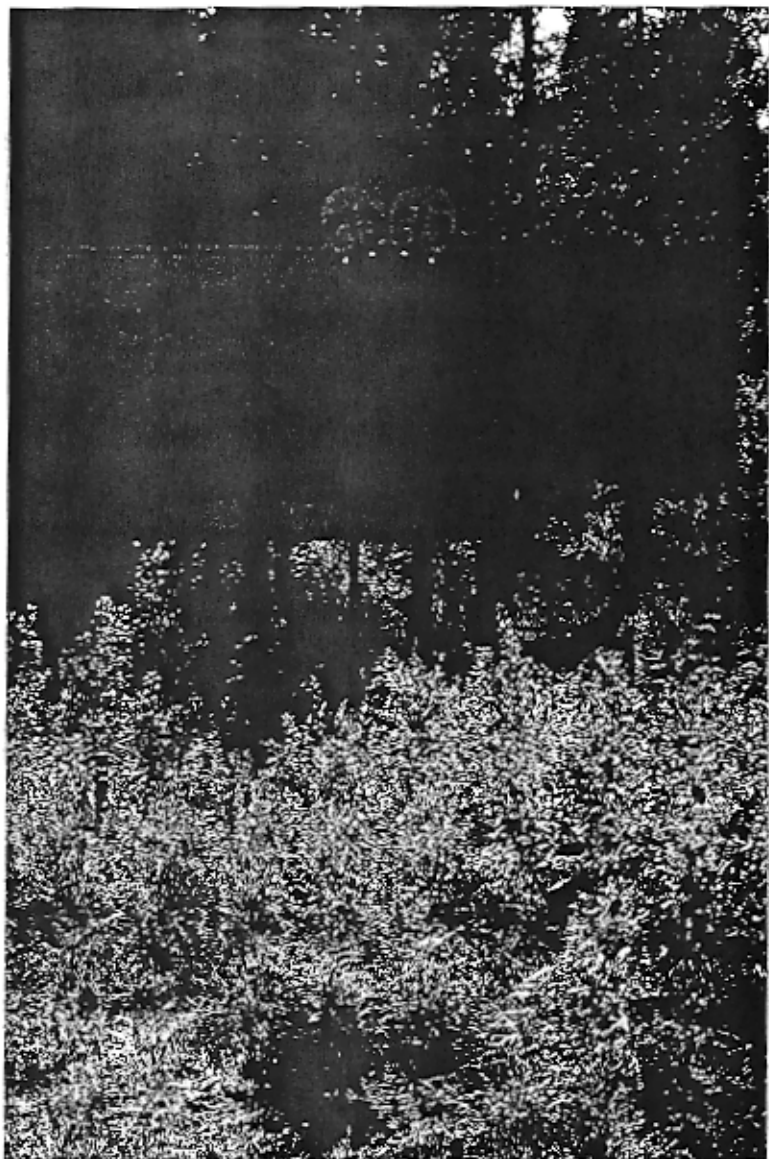
The Sacred as Repeating Centers: This passageway in the Alhambra is a series of centres, from the smallest of patterns to the structure of the passageway itself, in total creating a sacred whole. (Photograph by the author).



Creating a Sacred Structure: Princess Street in Edinburgh orders the city, creating a strong sense of differentiation in the urban scene, and an equally strong sense of center that also defines the city's history. (Photograph by the author).



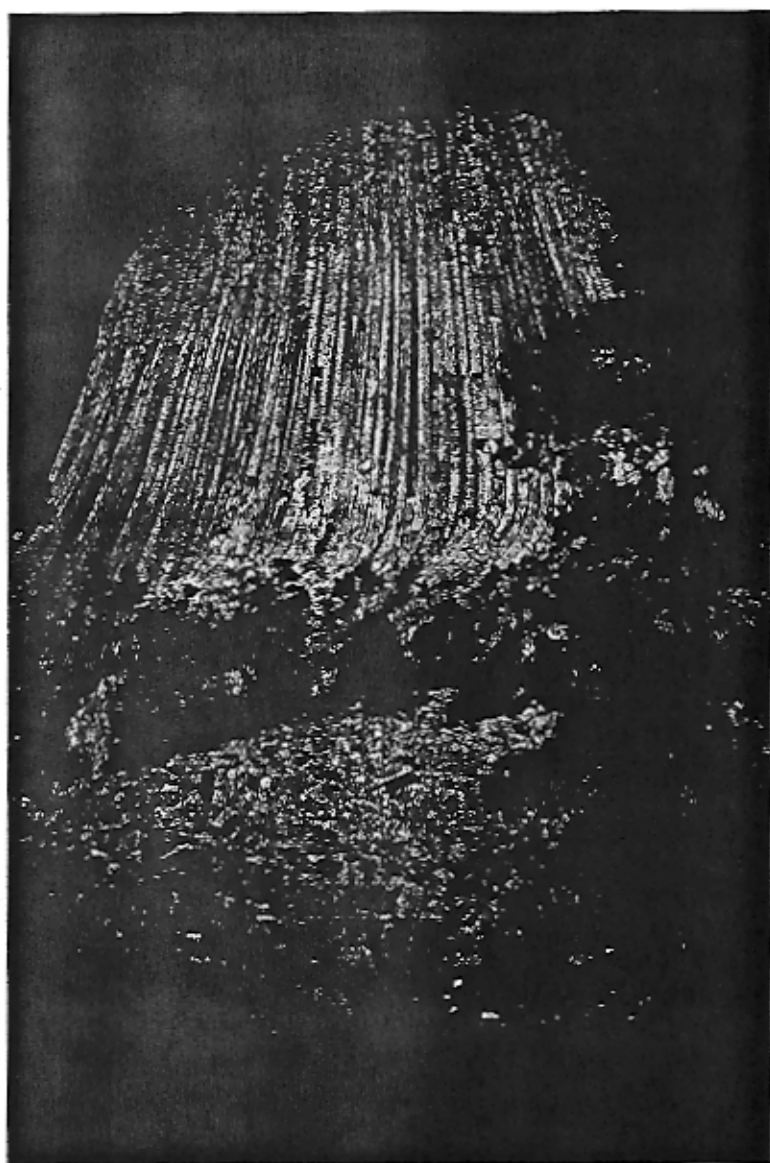
A Sacred Connection: The Charles Bridge in Prague connects the old town and the new and in the process becomes the spiritual heart of the community defining the communities history, its energies, and its sense of itself. (Photograph by the author).



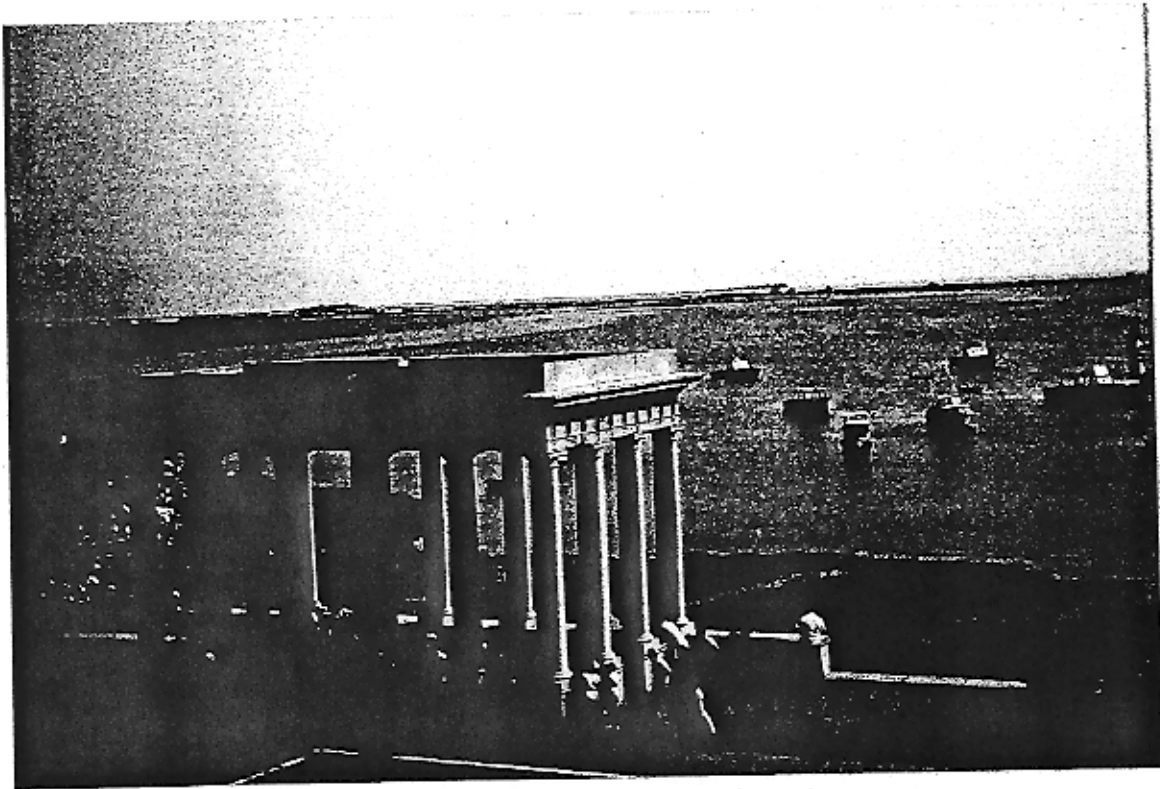
The Way Gone Astray: In a manner typical of the times, a sacred statement is presented in a profane medium and, in the process, desacralizes the surrounding landscape. (Photograph by the author).



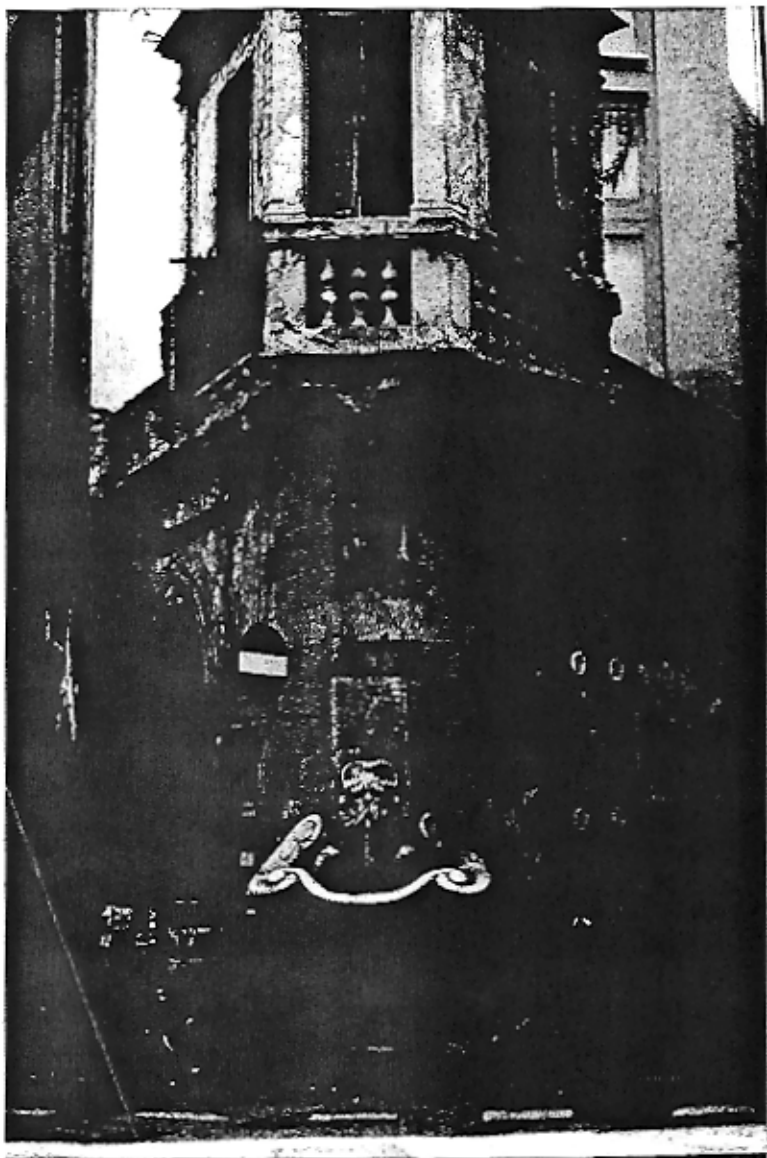
Places that Witness the Passage of Life: The Red Rock Theatre in Denver, carved from the landscape, becomes a timeless places to witness the theatrical and festival activities of a city for endless generations. As such, it gives a sense of the sacred to each person in attendance and to each performance. (Photograph by the author).



Places with Difficult Access: Places with difficult access, such as Devil's Monument, Wyoming, assume a sacred presence. It is not surprising, therefore, that the film "Close Encounters of a Third Kind" was filmed at this location. (Photograph by the author).



Places of Founding: The act of founding, of differentiating and blessing place from out of a chaotic world is a fundamentally sacred activity. Plymouth Rock is such a sacred place that we choose to consecrate. (Photograph by the author).



Making Little Places Come Alive: This small street corner in Rome is clearly alive. it has its own sense of its self; it is a place to throw open the shutters or stop to pause for a drink. As such, it assumes a sense of the sacred. (Photograph by the author).



Consecrating Place: The wreath of a citizen who loved the rituals of his days in the Piazza del Signori, Florence adorns the plaza floor. The place and the person reinforce the existence and importance of one another. As such, the place is consecrated. (Photograph by the author).