

# The Spatiality of Being, Bodies and Buildings

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*The environment speaks loudly to all who participate in its presence, and even to those who do not consciously hear it.*

*Architecture is created and constructed by minds and bodies, whose intentions are grounded in some particular understanding of life. In other words, architecture is the embodiment and expression of cultural intentions.*

*Parallels in architecture can be made. When architecture 'speaks' with a respect for human intelligence, so too do the inhabitants have respect for themselves and others around them. A consciousness in architecture can instill similar levels in people, who in turn, can determine levels of existence for themselves and others, environmentally and existentially.*

Having written the above quote as a first year architecture student in 1974, I am reminded of my reasons for entering architecture, which were intrinsically related to human emotions and qualities of environment. From my very earliest days in architecture, my inspiration was sparked by the way that people feel in their environments, and how they behave and interact accordingly. Today, after having been in architecture for over thirty years, these words still hold true for me and resonate more deeply.

As a fifth year architecture student, my design thesis work included the construction of a few of the places that I had lived in whilst growing up, of which there were twenty-six by the time I was eighteen. I called these models 'memory form' in which I was exploring both my physical and emotional childhood spaces, memories and experiences that have sat inside me quietly for many years.

Gaston Bachelard's beautifully rich philosophical investigation, in his book 'Poetics of Space', calls this sort of exploration 'topoanalysis', a

"psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives". (GB p.8) In his book, Bachelard writes about the poets' recall of memory spaces;

*Virtues of shelter are so simple, so deeply rooted in our unconscious that they may be recaptured through mere mention ... a poet's word, because it strikes true, moves the very depths of our being (GB p.12).*

One of the 'houses' we lived in was a disused trolley-car turn around office in San Francisco. Our front yard was the old trolley-car yard with dusty machines in three sided timber barns. Below the office was the forbidden cellar. Stealthily, we five children would tip-toe down to push around the huge horizontal turning disc that had a diameter the length of a trolley car; and then rush back up giggling triumphant. I also constructed another house, which I call 'the house with seven gardens' where, as an eight-year-old girl, I spent many long hours alone, in communion with the very different rooms of the garden.

*The house shelters daydreaming  
the house protects the dreamer  
the house allows one to dream in peace  
(GB p.6).*

I also enjoy recalling in this house, the room under the stairs where I learned to use the telephone, to communicate with the world outside my 'family home'. Here was a tiny wooden paneled interior space with one hard wood shelf on which stood a heavy black telephone and an antique clock. Sitting on the stool whilst the tiny light warmly drew an arch over the telephone and clock sitting on the counter, I would dial the number to hear the exact time given by a recorded woman's voice, and safely

listen without having to respond. Here I would listen quietly to her voice speaking the minutes and seconds passing whilst the clock would rhythmically tick the increments, chiming richly on every quarter hour. It felt both simple and hugely monumental, to be sitting in this tiny warm room and 'connecting' with the outside world through this long thin telephone wire; experiencing the movement of each moment of time.

*Our house is our corner of the world  
it is our first universe  
a real cosmos in every sense of the word  
(GB p.4).*

Recalling the telephone room reminded me of the crypt at the heart of the Egyptian pyramid that we visited on a trip around the world by ship when I was nine years old. The small room, in the heart of the pyramidal mountain, had one tiny hole cut through the entire depth of the stone, connecting the inhabitant to the unattainable blue skies beyond. Both of these spaces, the closet and the crypt, were deep spaces, held within the body of the building, which had umbilical connections to the outside world. Through the process of reconstructing the memory of these places was made visible the inherent relationships between the layers of emotions about the environments in which I lived and journeyed.

In my adult life I have experienced a different but equally profound relationship between my inner world and home. After many years of shedding layers of emotional baggage, my previously saturated house has emptied out, similarly. Where I once needed a lot of furniture to help me feel anchored and grounded in my home and in the world, after a childhood of constant moving, I now desire spaciousness, and am in the

process of de-cluttering my house, home, and life. Space, rather than objects, feels like a gift. Here is somewhat of a 'one to one' relationship between emotions and environment, such that emotional and environmental spaciousness is achieved through the dropping of emotional baggage and actual furniture. These interrelationships between emotions and environment are intrinsic to human existence. *Here we can see that how we feel about ourselves affects how we feel in our lives, and what we do with our environment.*

In this article, I explore the relationships between architectural and emotional space, as experienced through the body, as mediator between public and private space; the inter-relationships between the outside environment into the deepest spaces of the inner emotional world. The intimacy of space is my primary interest in this text, in which I explore intimate scales of human existence, architecturally and emotionally.

### **Space, spaciousness and spatiality**

Before engaging in any further discussion of space it would be good to identify, *very briefly*, different uses of the word space, such that in the 'naming' we can see the numerous ways in which this word is used, both literally and metaphorically.

First there is the *physical space* of the body. The subtlety of space can be experienced in the joints between the solidity of the bones, the air in the lungs, the expansiveness of breath, the fullness or emptiness of the stomach, in the floating of the eyes in their sockets or indeed the baby in the womb, and the space and movement between the cranial bones. *Emotional space* involves such things as 'looking in on oneself', feeling 'closed in upon' as in claustrophobia, feeling happily expansive, or in the precious opening of the heart after years of inner solitude. *Architectural space* involves the spaces inside buildings, between buildings, and such urban spaces as public squares, piazzas, streets and

roads, parks, etc. *Psychic space* includes the spaces and places we travel to in our dreams as well as the memories from our near and distant past; which involve the 'elastic scale' of memory.

Although separated here for the sake of naming phenomena, it is important to remember that all of these spaces are inextricably linked and are experienced simultaneously. In this text, any reference to *the body* includes *all* of the above and more; physical, emotional, spatial, psychic, spiritual, etc.; *not only physical*.

### **'Phenomenology of Perception': my body in the world**

In his book on *The Phenomenology of Perception*, the contemporary French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes, "I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body" (M-P p.82). The title of the chapter and section of his book in which this is written reveals his approach; 'The World as Perceived: The Theory of the body is already a theory of perception'.

Without my body, I cannot write this article, I cannot communicate my thoughts and feelings with others, I cannot move around and be in the world, as we know it. None of this or anything else would be possible, for me, without the existence of my body in the world. Every living body is the mediator between the inside, deeply private and personal world of the spirit self, and the outside, public world of action and interaction; spanning an almost infinite range from the most intimate to the international.

When we temporarily lose the use of even one tiny body part (because of a minor accident), like the tip of a finger or the smallest toe, we are astounded by how much we have always unconsciously relied on it to contribute in the workings of our everyday lives, and more. It is extraordinary how much we all take for granted (until we lose it), this being in the world with our bodies.

Understanding more deeply, the body in space, is key to understanding phenomenological existence in the world, both individually and collectively. Hegel's declaration that "the mind carries and preserves its past in the depths of its present" (M-P p.127) reminds me of the biodynamic belief that the whole body carries and preserves its past (memories, experiences, and emotions) in the depths of its presence.

Merleau-Ponty explores the highly complex relationships between the human psyche, the body and the world in his chapter on 'The Thing and the Natural World'. He looks at the ways that human beings perceive objects and things in the world, and how it is that we humans know that the other side of an object exists (like a cube, for example) if we can only see three of its sides at one time. He explains about looking when he says that there is "a certain way of directing my gaze in relation to the object (that) signifies a certain appearance of the object and of neighboring objects" (M-P p.301).

In other words, he believes that all things and beings are interconnected and that, far from being lifeless and dead, objects too contain a vital essence. "The significance of a thing inhabits that thing as the soul inhabits the body." (M-P p.319) He goes on to say that "the thing is inseparable from the person perceiving it ... to this extent, every perception is a communication or a communion" (M-P p.320). Equally, our relationship with architecture and landscape can be experienced in similar terms.

When I am in a landscape, I become a part of it and it becomes a part of me since the image is inside me as my memory of sight, smell, sound, temperature and touch recall the place long after I have been there. On the other hand, my friend and colleague, Dr Dalibor Vesely asks, "How is it that we know that Australia exists, if we have never been there?" Exploring the human relationship with the world we live in is a philosophical

passion for Vesely as well as Merleau-Ponty, who tells us that, "reality is not a crucial appearance underlying the rest, it is the framework of relations with which all appearances tally" (M-P p.300).

### **The phantom limb/building**

Merleau-Ponty also discusses the 'phantom limb' phenomenon, in which an amputee experiences a limb on his or her body, after it is gone. This person still has a relationship with, say, her arm, even though it may have been removed. The experience of feeling it itch, feeling its weight, of closing one's eyes and believing that it is still there is a puzzling phenomenon, which I believe has architectural parallels.

People in a city, town, or any size community can grieve the loss of a cherished building. One highly dramatic example is that of New York's World Trade Center. Although not necessarily well loved and admired by all before the 911 attack, the traumatic event and loss of life, and buildings as significant skyline markers, caused a profound disorientation within the city, akin to the loss of part of one's own body, such that the whole city may have experienced collectively, the 'phantom limb' syndrome.

And after the initial shock of the towers collapsing, the city mourned the loss of the buildings and craved their image, and with it a return to normalcy, but in vain. "To have a phantom arm is to remain open to all actions of which the arm alone is capable; it is to retain the practical field which one enjoyed before mutilation" (M-P pp.81-82). But finally, when people came to terms with the fact that the towers would never return as they once were, they let go of the images they craved. "Thus are delimited, in the totality of my body, regions of silence" (M-P p.82). Finally, "the phantom limb becomes a memory, a positive judgment"; and not the infinite waiting for what will never be (M-P p.80).

Is the number two also significant? Instead of one paternal corporate image being symbolically represented in the tower, here are twin towers,

representing what; parents, twins, camaraderie, partners, competition, siblings? Whatever associations are conjured up for different people, the number two signifies *relationship*, whereas *one* can imply a singular heroic stance of the egoistic corporate skyscraper. The scale of the urban shock suggests that these two towers held highly potent imagery on profoundly personal levels, as well as their politically symbolic embodiment of America on an international scale as a prevailing corporate, capitalist, paternalistic, political power. Here, the experience of the body and the world, the individual and the international, have interchangeability, which can be disturbing and disorienting, physically and emotionally.

### **Internal and international**

Dalibor Vesely believes that to speak of the world around us as outside the body, rather than *being* in the world, is to experience a discontinuity between the outside world and the inner spirit such that continuity between inner and outer is tragically lost. When the outside and inside worlds are not connected, people feel alienated and have a fragmented experience of the environment, leading to what Vesely considers to be the schizophrenic condition of contemporary life and urban space (DV).

As Merleau-Ponty puts it, we must "... avoid saying that our body is *in* space, or *in* time, it *inhabits* space and time. ... I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them" (M-P pp.139-40). From this follows easily, an understanding of, my body as one with space and time. Allowing oneself to 'be here now', to experience the world in its own presence, seems to be one of the most difficult spaces to be in for the contemporary urban dweller.

Vesely writes about the urban phenomenon as a tragic loss of connection with our own interior selves, as well as with each other,

as human beings in the world. (DV) Here, we begin to reveal the enormously rich and complex relationships between the internal and the international. If one *cannot* reach one's own self internally, can he or she communicate successfully with others collectively? When there is dialogue between inside and outside, can both sides gain and grow? Merleau-Ponty writes, "the body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be involved in a definite environment" (M-P p.82).

This reminds me of the psychotherapy journal that is named after this phenomenon, 'Self and Society', publishing numerous articles, quarterly, which discuss all of these issues from many different perspectives. Gill Westland also writes about this in her training leaflet for the Cambridge Body Psychotherapy Centre (CBPC). In it, she tells us that:

*Body psychotherapy explores what it means to be alive and what hinders this ... health means reconnecting with the essential self. When this occurs the individual has a zest for life, feels connected with others and the environment; their skin has a bloom to it, their eyes shine, and they live with more ease. Body psychotherapy addresses connections both individually and in relationship with others (GW).*

### **'Flesh and Stone'**

There are also interesting parallels in history relating to urban space and the health of the body and mind, particularly in Antiquity. Richard Sennett, in his book 'Flesh and Stone', discusses the long history of the relationships between bodies, buildings, and cities. He explains how the twelfth century philosopher, John of Salisbury referred to the body and the city; the city's palace or cathedral, he thought of as its head, the central market as its stomach, the city's hands and feet, as its houses. People should therefore move

# News and Courses (continued from page 14)

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## Cambridge Body Psychotherapy Centre

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### *Biodynamic Massage Study Day*

14 May 2005, £60, with Gill Westland. Please note this date has been revised from earlier information.

### *Foundation Body Psychotherapy*

9/10 April, 28/29 May, 18/19 June, 9/10 July, £480, with Gill Westland. Four weekends to explore the basics of body psychotherapy. Suitable for counsellors, psychotherapists and healthcare workers who would like to become familiar with basic theory and practice of body psychotherapy.

### *Introduction to Biodynamic Massage*

18/19 June, £120, with Kathrin Stauffer

### *Working with Physical Symptoms*

9/10 July, £120, with Kathrin Stauffer. Highly recommended to biodynamic massage therapists and body psychotherapists using biodynamic massage as a form of access to process.

### *New Somatic Trauma Therapy Training*

May 21-24 2005, October 8-11 2005, May 11-14 2006, £990, with Babette Rothschild.

For details of all of these courses please see the web site [www.cbpc.org.uk](http://www.cbpc.org.uk). For booking, please contact [gillwestland@cbpc.org.uk](mailto:gillwestland@cbpc.org.uk) or phone 01223 214658 / 416166

## London School of Biodynamic Psychotherapy

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### *Introductory workshops in Biodynamic psychotherapy.*

(30 April/1 May and 23-24 July). These workshops are primarily experiential. We will also introduce some of the basic biodynamic concepts underlying our work. They are open to all. For those who are considering applying for the Diploma Course, attending an introductory weekend workshop is a requirement.

### *Introductory weekend in Biodynamic massage*

(2-3 April). In this workshop we focus on a biodynamic massage technique, giving the opportunity to practice and experience that technique and develop awareness of 'presence' and quality of touch.

### *Introduction to Biodynamic Psychotherapy for professional counsellors and therapists*

(4-5 June). With Clover Southwell (training director). A weekend workshop for accredited psychotherapists and counsellors, to explore and experience some biodynamic ways of involving the body in psychotherapy without using touch.

All the weekend workshops are £150.  
Venue is in North London.

### *Contact details:*

Tel: 0700 079 4725

Email: [enquiries@lsbp.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@lsbp.org.uk)

Web site: [www.lsbp.org.uk](http://www.lsbp.org.uk)

Office address: 73 Marylebone Lane, London W1U 2PN

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of psychic, literal and emotional spaces. When the outside places reflect the inside spaces, then one can feel a sense of harmony within oneself, and experience the continuity of the internal and external environment.

### **Acknowledgement**

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slowly in the cathedral because the brain is a reflective organ, and rapidly in the market because digestion occurs like a quick-burning fire in the stomach (RS p.23).

This is a particularly interesting point in relation to the perception of peristalsis in Biodynamic Body Psychotherapy, which holds that the intestines not only work on physical food but also enable emotional digestion. The peristalsis that takes place in the intestines during the course of a session, when memories and experiences are addressed, processed, and 'digested', enables the body to let go of 'old baggage', and leave space for new growth and development. This reflects my experience of letting go of emotional 'baggage', actual furniture, and growth into spaciousness.

### 'Poetics of Space'

Other intimate connections between bodies and buildings can also be found in analogies between the home and the self. Whether we were lucky enough to experience *home* in childhood or not, somewhere we all know it instinctively. In his novel, 'House of Breath', William Goyen writes:

*That people could come into the world in a place that they could not at first name and had never known before: and that out of a nameless and unknown place they could grow and move around in it, until its name they knew and called with love, and call it HOME, and put roots there and love others there; so that whenever they left this place they would sing homesick songs about it and write poems of yearning for it, like a lover. (WG p.40)*

Gaston Bachelard discusses the house in relation to the cellar, living floors (kitchen, dining room, living room, bedrooms, etc), and the attic, as akin to the bowels, the torso, and the head, of the body, respectively. (GB pp.3-37) Standing vertically, both body and building have strong

parallels. The cellar as the lowest level of the house, in the earth, represents its darkest depths and mystery. The bowels and sexual organs are at the base of the torso of the human body and embody our deepest most ancient primeval instincts. Similarly, grottoes in gardens are well known to represent the womb and the tomb, the sacred space in mother earth from which life is born and whence it returns. (NM)

The living levels of the house and the upper torso of the body are both highly interactive, internally and externally, in self and community with others. The attic and head cap the house and the body respectively, defining the boundaries and connections between them and the heavens. Closest to the sky, these are the intellectual spaces of thought, creativity and dreaming, to name but a few.

On other levels, when the head of an institution does not listen to the constituents, the *body politic* may rise up in protest to be heard. Similarly, when the head does not listen to the numerous messages from the body (back pain, ulcers, skin disorders, etc.) the body can finally resort to creating more serious or potentially fatal illness such as heart attack, cancer, multiple sclerosis etc. almost as if to shock the person into a deep awareness of self and life.

### Memory gardens

Bachelard also discusses the experiential, in which smell and memory do not escape his attention. His anecdote of visiting an aged relative is particularly poignant and relevant. He recalls opening a drawer in a bedroom from which escaped the smell of lavender, which had the affect of instantly transporting him back in time to his boyhood experiences of visiting his grandmother. The smell and experience opened up a flood of memories and feelings about the lovely long Summer days of his youth and invaluable times with Granny. People never cease to be amazed at the power of smell to transport

us through space and time.

Bachelard's experience at his grandmother's house reminds me of some intriguingly intimate spaces in CBPC. Complementing the intentionally discreet but welcoming quality of environment of the Centre are highly evocative 'memory gardens', quietly tucked away in the fireplaces of two of the psychotherapy rooms. Filled with mirrors, shells, glass, found objects of curiosity and plants, these enchanting spaces are evocative of childhood fantasy spaces and daydreams to which one might turn to resource, for reinforcement and/or replenishment. Here is an architecturally intimate space of invitation into the interior spaces of our most cherished memories and dreams. These psychic emotional spaces hold the potential for being positive resources, recalling feelings of hearth, home and paradise lost. In Bachelard's words,

*Every corner in a house, every angle in a room, every inch of secluded space in which we like to hide, or withdraw into ourselves, is a symbol of solitude for the imagination; that is to say, it is the germ of a room, or of a house (GB p.136).*

In this article, I have explored human emotions and bodies in relation to architectural and urban spaces and places. I have looked at some of the profound influences of environment on emotions and also at the embodiment of bodies in buildings and cities. We humans build what we know, consciously and unconsciously, creating national road systems and motorways that can look remarkably like veins and arteries of the body. Additionally, how we feel about where we are affects what we do and say in the world. Quality of environment is essential to existence, and the experience of being in the world. Here, I have aimed to reveal the extraordinary and inextricably linked relationships in the spatiality of being, bodies and buildings. Together, they illustrate the interconnectedness