

Chapter I

THE PLACE OF THE SACRED IN THE HOME

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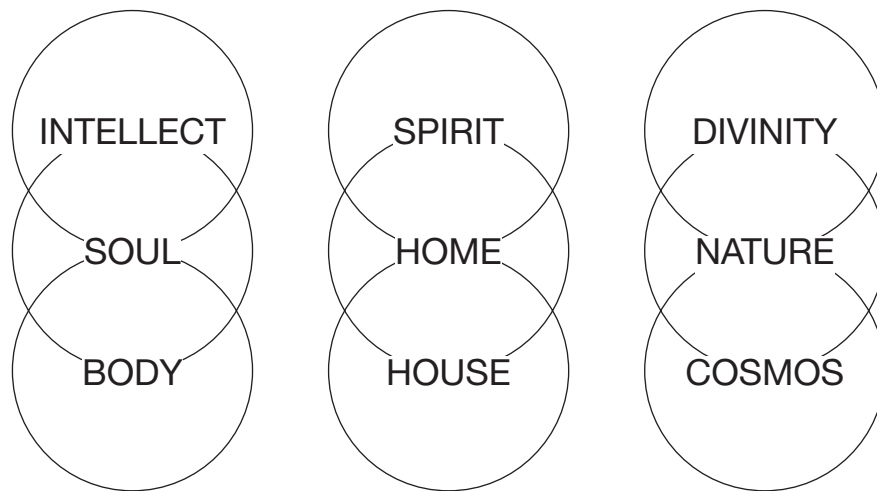


Figure 1 : Homologies,¹ vertically organized

THE PLACE OF THE SACRED IN THE HOME IS HERE addressed from a traditional perspective: the word traditional has a specific meaning in reference to cultures where the sense of the Sacred is paramount. This perspective springs from the *Philosophia Perennis*; in that its wisdom is of perennial validity, it is of relevance to modern domestic architecture.²

The idea of Home is distinguished from that of House. A House is the physical edifice that is designed and built, whilst a Home is rather the complex of images which the inhabitants experience in making their home within the house through the process of their dwelling, and which the house as physical artifact engenders and sustains. An analogy is made between the House and the Body, and between the Home and the Soul. Clearly, the architect's intention is to facilitate for the inhabitants a satisfactory house and home, and an appropriate dialectic between them.

House and Home are approached through three moments - Creation being the design and construction of the edifice; Inhabitation being its indwelling and appreciation; and Reabsorption being its recycling or decay, demolition and destruction.

Within the contemporary secular *Weltanschauung*, the "place of the Sacred" in the house or home - if given any credence at all - will probably be one among many. A place is found for the Sacred along with places for entertainment, relaxation, exertion, ablution, the new, the old, status symbols, and so forth - perhaps as a consequence of fashion or of sociopolitical influence. But from a Traditional perspective, this orientation is a consequence of an implicit and generally unrecognized metaphysic arising from an inadequate appreciation of the nature of things. Such a secular viewpoint distorts realities, and is evident of a lack of discrimination arising from an improper sense of proportion.

By contrast within the Traditional perspective the place of the Sacred is one before many - one that is central to the endeavor of dwelling. Primarily this orientation arises from an intrinsic sense of reverence and sanctity, which is expressed and sustained through the specific Tradition within which the act of dwelling occurs.

This sense of the Sacred is not only central; it is also embracing of the entire process and product of dwelling. In Scholastic terms, both the First and Final Cause of dwelling are Sacred, as are the Cosmology and Metaphysic within which the act of dwelling takes place, and which the House as artifact symbolizes.



Figure 2 : Homologies, centrally organized

What does this mean for the architect? Firstly there is the recognition of the need for modern architecture to be situated within an adequate - i.e. Traditional - Metaphysic. A Traditional conception of the Cosmos as the first house or home of the Divine, accords with the homology advanced by Eliade:³

BODY : HOUSE : COSMOS

Further homologies are made in that each of these is the respective place of dwelling of:

SOUL : HOME : NATURE

Each of these is inhabited respectively by:

INTELLECT : SPIRIT : DIVINITY

The first earthly home (after Paradise) arises in the sense that God inhabits the Creation. This might also be expressed as the Absolute giving rise to the Relative, or the Eternal Verities finding their expression in transient phenomena. Whilst the Absolute is not limited to specific expression as, or within, the Relative, nevertheless the Relative partakes of the Absolute insofar as it mediates that Absolute - which Tradition stresses is essentially beyond any and all temporal manifestation.

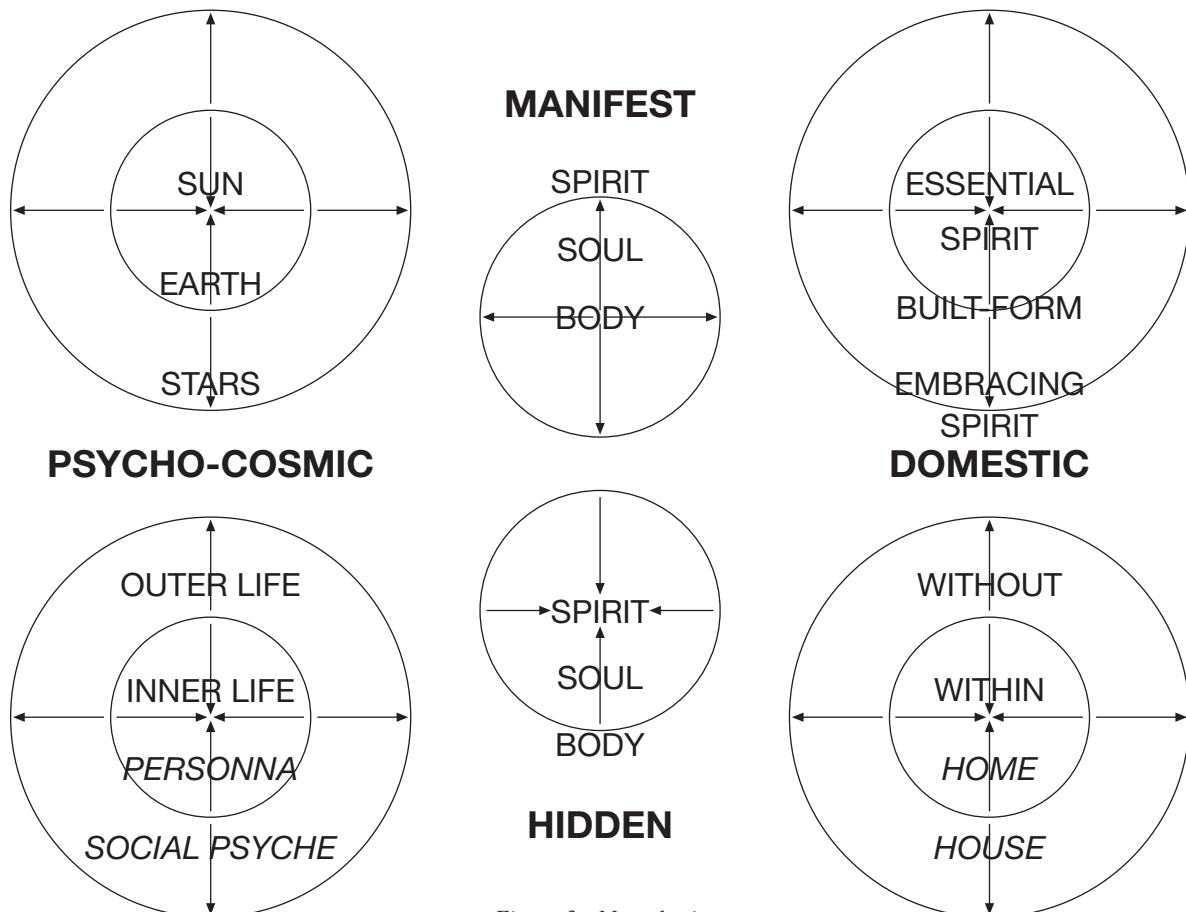


Figure 3 : Metaphysic

Within the Islamic perspective, Nature is found Sacred to the degree to which it is translucent in revealing the Godhead. Humanity has the responsibility of stewardship over Nature as God's agent on Earth. Nasr indicates how this gives rise to an ecologically responsible metaphysic.⁴

By analogy, the Human Body is the first temporal house of the Soul within which it fashions for itself a home, as the Soul is the first temporal home of the Spirit. Tradition suggests the Spirit is directly apprehended through the Intellect.⁵ The sensible realm is the dwelling place of the intelligible realm, as the intelligible realm is the place in which the indwelling of the spiritual realm is revealed. Thus:

Human Body as House as Cosmos
provides the place for the indwelling of:

Human Soul as Home as Cosmic Soul
as each in turn is inspired by:

Intellect as Spirit as Divinity

The individual in designing, building, inhabiting, or demolishing the home is both symbolically and immediately inhabiting and an integral part of a sanctified cosmic realm.

At the same time as a Person finds his temporal Place in so dwelling, he has not yet found his spiritual Home - which in a traditional sense is understood to be Heaven or Paradise. The individual finds her rightful place in the reunification of her Soul with the Divine.⁶ In this more profound sense, the individual is essentially an exile, a pilgrim on an eternal search for her true home. The Temporal Home stands as an approximation of this, as a station on the path. From this perspective, the primary function of home is that of reminding - of providing for a proper reverence of God.

This brings into concordance the image of the home with that of the archetypal Sacred symbol. It guards against idolatry which, in failing to penetrate the symbolic nature of the home and of experience in general, views these as ends in themselves. This is indicative of an existential loss of insight. The place and purpose of the home, in the Traditional sense, is first and foremost as a support for contemplation - in expressing the individual's divine nature, it impresses him with this very Truth.

CREATION

The creation of the Home recreates the creation of the Cosmos. This process of architectural creation is approached by reference to the Philosophy of Sacred Art as expounded by Ananda Coomaraswamy and others, and to the morphology of the sacred advanced by Eliade. In that the process of dwelling is found to be Sacred, the design of the home may reflect that morphology.

Thus after initial dedication to the sanctity of the task, the first matter of importance is the establishment of the center and associated vertical axis; correlated with this is the demarcation of Sacred domain from Profane milieu. Whilst these are usually taken as spatial notions external to the consciousness of the meditator, they are also applicable internally - it is within the mind's eye that the process of design takes place. The establishment of the

center occurs as a hierophany; having prepared and concentrated the awareness, the image is received "in germ". The initial inspiration is received, and the intelligence of the heart is thus understood to be informed from "above" or "within", in accord with the development and preparedness of the meditator. This is understood as an embodiment of a spiritual source within the design.

In a Traditional sense, the "working of the Divine" in this process provides an approach to the Godhead. The receiving of an inspiration through Grace may be thought of as the receiving of a spiritual impulse. This quickening of consciousness, as center or vertical axis, is imagined as a primordial sound or divine chord. This resonates, propagates and reverberates throughout the hallowed chamber of the heart, forming in harmony the image of the home. Tantric techniques of visualization are deeply akin to this process, where following the receiving and reciting of a yogic *mantra*, the formation of the associated *yantra* and icon takes place.

The process is audibly imagined as a divine vibration penetrating and quickening the womb of consciousness, giving rise to the gestating embryo that is to become the Home. As vibration, primary number is developed into a reverberant harmonic numerical field, which mediates spiritual wisdom as it proportions extension. From the divine sound, by cosmogonic processes in accord with the Traditional science of Gematria, a constellation of meaning encoded as numerical proportion arises.

The correlation of the meaning of inscribed scripture with the architectural location of its inscription has been researched with regard to Islamic sacred architecture.⁷ Dodd and Khairallah present as an example a quote from the Koran that is inscribed at the great entrance to the Madrasa of Sultan Hassan, beneath the radiance of the mukarnas. The verse likens God to the Light that hangs in the niche, words that refer to the image of the light hanging in the mihrab. Occurring on the doorway of the mosque, they thereby associate the doorway with the mihrab in the interior of the building. It makes of the doorway a symbol of the mihrab, showing it as a mihrab for the outside world.

This approach suggests a way in which a proportioned structure of spiritual meaning may be developed, whereby the disposition of proportions and their intrinsic and relative meanings as expressions of the scriptures, divine names, and so forth, are obtained:

- firstly, the formal appropriateness of the meaning of the inscription stands in relation to its architectural location;

- secondly, the symbolic appropriateness of that number or proportion relates to its location and the architectural formal element it represents and with which it is associated, the number perhaps being reduced by cabalistic means:

$$37 = 3 + 7 = 10 = 1 + 0 = 1;$$

- and thirdly, the proportioning of the architectural element is derived by numerical manipulation of the numerical value of the relevant scriptural expression.

The numerical values of architectural formal elements are deduced from the symbolic properties of number; 0 is the center transcendent, and 1 the center manifest, or the vertical axis. 2 is the portal. 3 is the heavenly realm, whilst 4 is the earthly and temporal realm. 5 is the aedicule or centered 4, the five senses and the sensible realm, and man. 6 is the number of Woman, and is perfect because:

$$1 + 2 + 3 = 1 \times 2 \times 3.$$

7 is the number of Creation which unites the heavenly and the earthly; and 8, 10, 12, 24, 28, and 360 are numbers of completion, fulfilment, and enclosure.

Hopper suggests that the "frozen eloquence" of cathedral architecture is to a great extent the eloquence of number - the altar steps are always 3 or some multiple; at the consecration of the cathedral the central door of the royal portal is sprinkled thrice with holy water, 12 candles are lighted, and triple thanks offered to Heaven, and so forth. The baptismal font is octagonal because 8 is the number of salvation.⁸

The numerical value of a phrase, obtained through Gematria and reduced by cabalistic procedure, may be put into symbolic correspondence with the number of the formal element with which it is associated. Thus the meaningful phrase is related to the architecture. The numerical value and constitution of the phrase also provides a starting point for the meaningful proportioning of the element, with different parts of the phrase correlating in meaning and in numerical proportion with the parts of the element.

The numerically encoded system or structure of meaning arises prior to the architectural embodiment; it is not an afterthought or vain decoration, but essential to the architecture which is then derived from it having regard to formal and practical requirements. The number constellation "takes the measure" of paradise, of the Divine Home; it is then expressed as architecture and as proper ornamentation; Man and Woman thereby live within the Divine Word. Divine Wisdom is heard, enumerated and meaningfully made manifest.

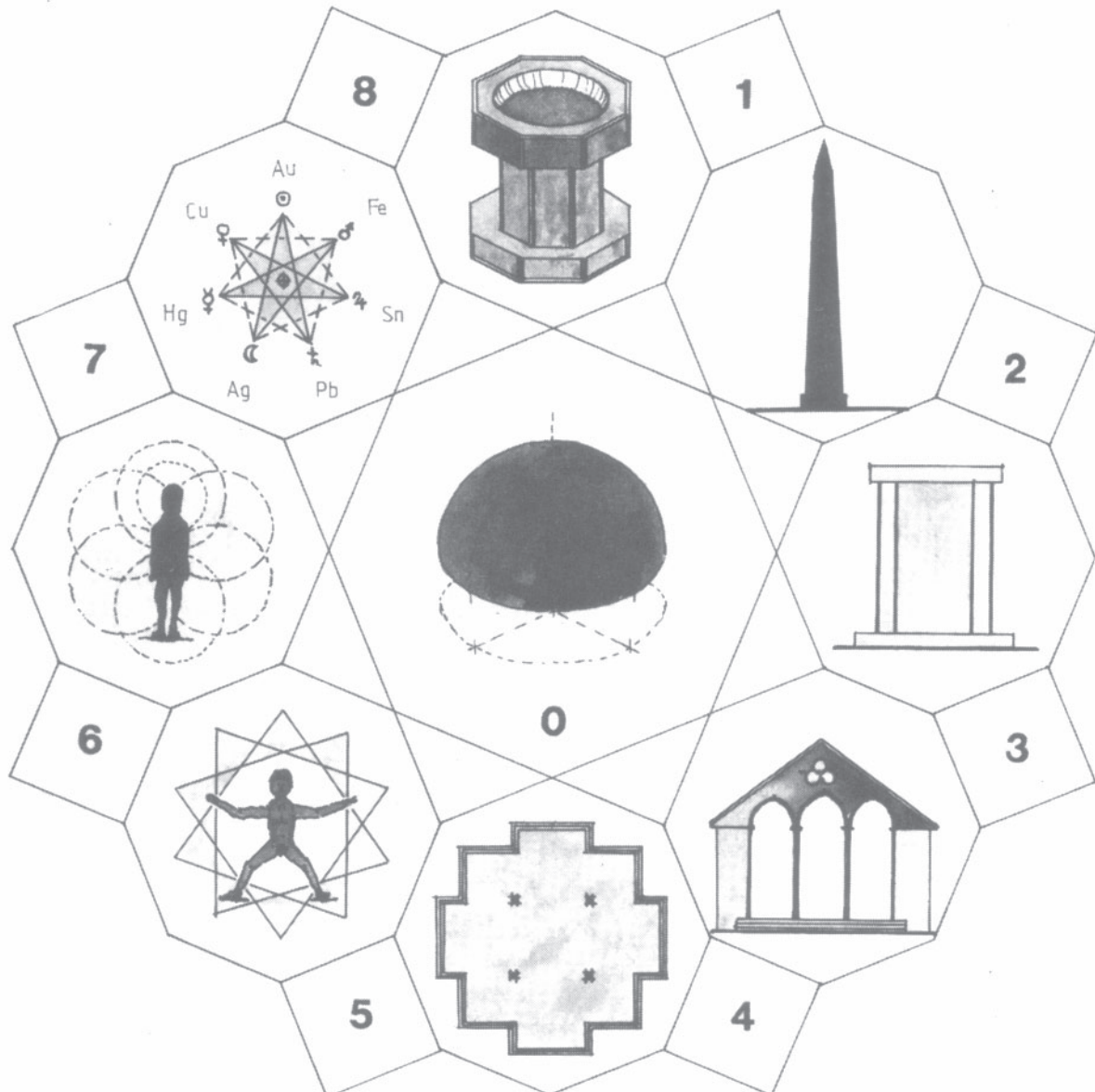


Figure 4 : Numerical Architectural Archetypes

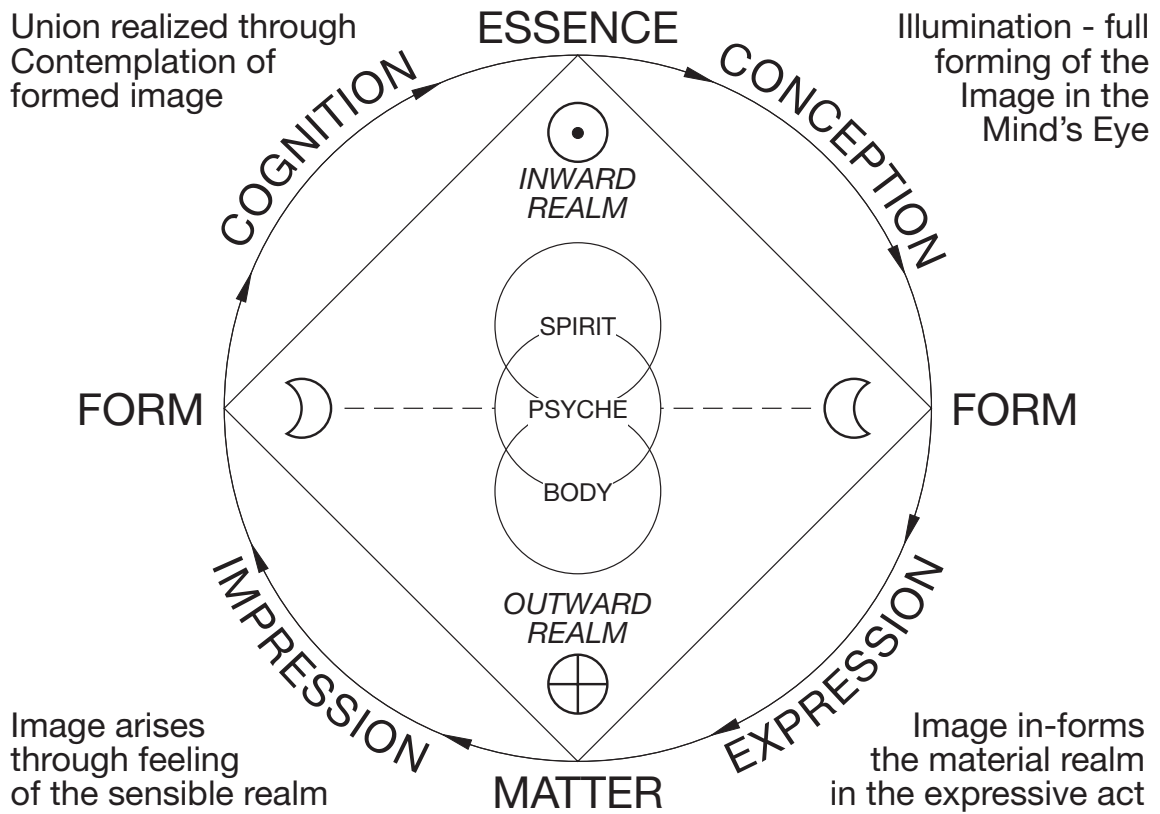


Figure 5 : Aesthetic

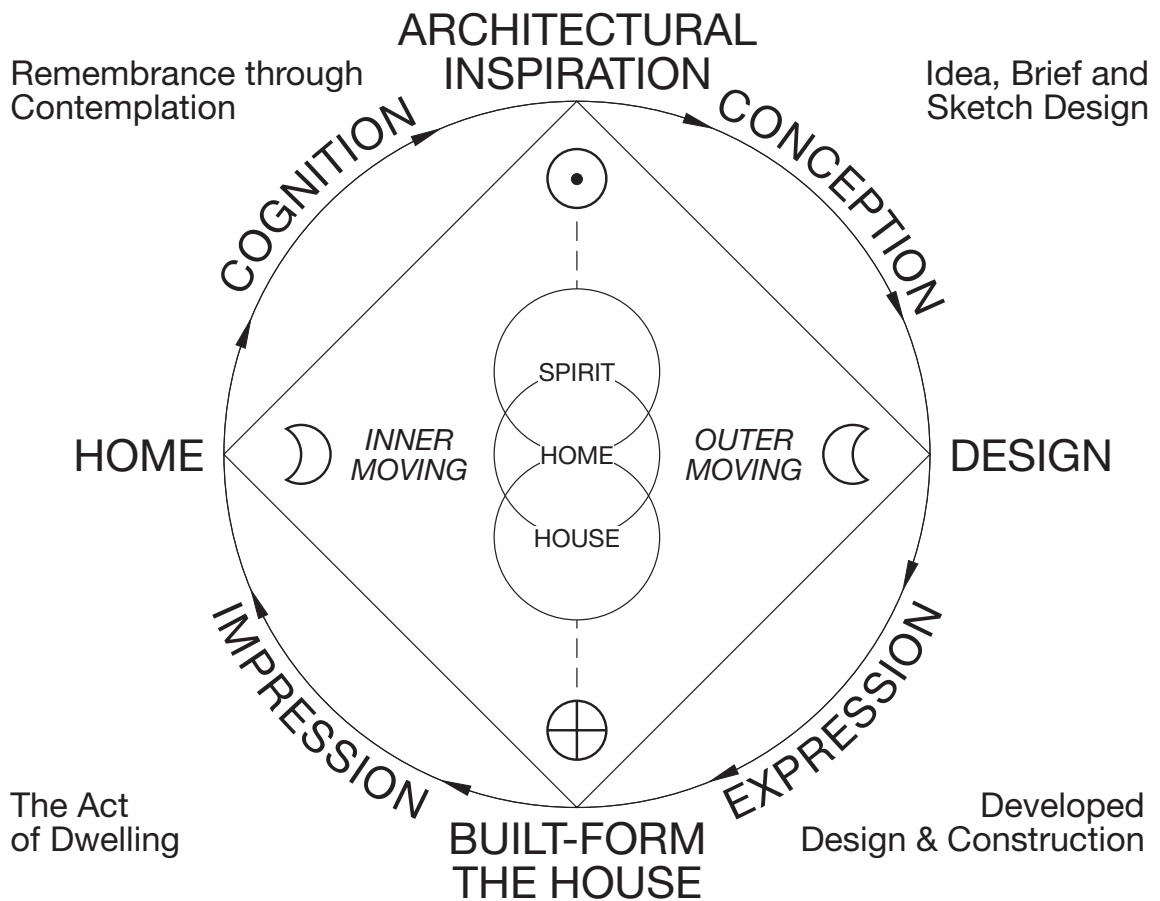


Figure 6 : Architectural Aesthetic

The image is by these means fully formed in accord with the art of the artist, and in response to the initial and sustaining inspiration. When fully formed, it is expressed, informing the material realm. The physical artifact imitates the mental image in accord with accidental reality. The inspiration thus reaches maximum externalization, being at the furthestmost “distance” from the Godhead. Paradoxically, it may then be most translucent in revealing the qualities of the Godhead - which by comparison are held latent in the formed image in the imagination, and more so in the idea-in-germ.

INHABITATION

Having been fully expressed, the house is ready for the indwelling of the spirit, a presence that is considered to guide its manifestation from the very first. The house is ready to be made a home. This is symbolically achieved by consecration - Spirit and Nature consenting to dwell together within their renewed Sacred Cosmos.

In inhabiting, Man and Woman live within the Home as Temple, within a sanctified, properly portioned, and meaningful place. It is helpful for the architect to imagine there to be an “etheric body” of the work of architecture - conceived as a work of divine numerical harmony in the intelligible sphere - which directly sustains and affects the subtle body of its inhabitants. The inhabitants are reoriented to the Divine through their contemplation - directly upon their place of dwelling, and indirectly in the providence of a suitable ambience for that meditation. The Traditional perspective is that it is in nurturing Man and Woman’s essential divine nature, whilst providing shelter, that the House performs its preeminent function and becomes a Home.

REABSORPTION

This integral part of the process is neglected in modern secular culture, partly as a consequence of the inadequate metaphysic that characterizes the modern age. The linear past-present-future view of existence denies deeper patterns of connection. In contrast, Traditional Metaphysics considers such connections important - as in the cyclic temporal connections of karma. If the past is gone and cannot affect one, then presumably one is free to do whatever one can get away with. By repressing any rightful reaction to present corruption, one imagines oneself secure. But this denies the Sacred and Ecological perspective: it is as if the “accounting system” for existence has run amok.

Within the Traditional perspective, Death and Dying are integral parts of the great cosmic processes; death gives meaning to life, and is necessary for rebirth. So the Temple, or House, is ritually desanctified; the Spirit - *which bloweth where it listeth* - has moved on, a mere husk remaining. Just as the human body on death is returned to the elements from whence it arose, the Home, as House, is ritually dismembered and returned to Nature.

And from nature, in the fullness of time, life springs afresh - a new Home!

CONCLUSION

From the Traditional perspective, the place of the Sacred in the Home is central, integral and embracing. The implications for the architect are:

- a recognition of the need for modern architecture to be situated within an adequate Traditional Metaphysic;
- the process of design is facilitated by the concentration and purification of the consciousness of the architect; and
- that clarification is more readily achieved by recourse to the wisdom of the *Philosophia Perennis*, and in particular to authentic spiritual practices.

- 1 These derive from a key diagram of the KAIROS School of Sacred Architecture taught by Keith Critchlow FRCA.
- 2 The word “tradition” is used as in the writings of the traditional scholars Titus Burckhardt, Ananda Coomaraswamy, René Guénon, Martin Lings, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Marco Pallis, Frithjof Schuon and so forth, who interpret the Traditional doctrine. For example, “...traditional man, whose life and thought are moulded by a set of principles of transcendent origin and who lives in a society in which these principles are manifested in every sphere...”, S.H. Nasr, *Living Sufism*. Unwin, London, 1980, p.107. The *Philosophia Perennis* is described as “...the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man’s final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being - the thing is immemorial and universal.” Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, Harper & Row, London, 1970, p.283.
- 3 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane - The Nature of Religion*. Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1959.

- 4 See S.H. Nasr, *Man and Nature - The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*. Unwin, London, 1976.
- 5 In the Traditional nomenclature, the Intellect is the faculty of direct apprehension of the Spirit, in the intelligible realm. It is not to be confused with the intellectual mind.
- 6 This follows from the traditional understanding of the individual’s essential nature being Divine - one has “forgotten who one is” in mistakenly identifying with one’s historical personality. Coomaraswamy frequently writes on this theme, e.g. *On Being in One’s Right Mind*, *Review of Religion*, VII, 1942, pp.32-40.
- 7 Erica Cruikshank Dodd and Shereen Khairallah, *The Image of the Word*. American University of Beirut, Lebanon, 1981. See Vol. I, Ch. IV, pp.43-60. Although scriptural inscriptions on mosques, madrasas, and other forms of Islamic sacred architecture have been studied, they were and are also commonly found on Islamic domestic architecture. I am indebted to Professor John D. Hoag of the University of Colorado at Boulder, for drawing this work to my attention, and for assistance in developing these ideas.
- 8 Vincent Foster Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism - Its Sources, Meaning, and Influence on Thought and Expression*. Cooper Square, New York, 1969, p.114.