VII
PLACE

The architecture of Rome gathers and visualizes a "complete" environment. This gathering obviously comprises influences from other cultures. Thus Goethe said that Rome "gave a dwelling to all gods". These influences, however, did not remain a mere foreign import; thanks to the multifarious structure of Latium, almost everything found a local reference. If the Alban hills had not been there, the classical gods would not have been really at home in Rome, and if the campagna had not possessed its grand and solemn structure, the image of a general cosmic order might only have seemed a far-fetched product of the human imagination. This general receptivity is the real meaning of the saying that "all roads lead to Rome". We might add that they also lead *from* Rome.

The power and versatility of the Roman *genius loci* has throughout history given the architecture of the city a unique self-assurance and *grandezza*. Even the pure and elegant *quattrocento* got a new substantiality under the influence of Roman Antiquity. A great unified *interior* such as Alberti's Sant'Andrea in Mantua is unthinkable without Rome, and its façade reproduces the Roman triumphal arch. The crisis of the *cinquecento* did not reduce Roman architecture to an arbitrary play with forms, as it did in other places. In Rome it rather brought about a resurrection of the chthonic forces. This is particularly evident in the villas of Bagnaia, Bomarzo and Tivoli, where man really returns to nature. It is in this connection interesting to note that the *cinquecento* preferred the "wild" nature of Etruria and Tivoli to the classical environment of Frascati, which instead became the fashionable place of the *seicento*. Still more important is the fact that even the tragic art of Michelangelo respects the Roman *genius loci*. The strong plasticity and immense heaviness of his bodies is truly Roman, and when he defines the body as the "prison of the soul", he interprets the local spirit relative to his own situation. Michelangelo's art thus remains within the Roman limits: it never becomes unsubstantially abstract like Nordic Mannerism. During the Baroque period the *genius loci* and the spirit of the time fitted perfectly together. Both wanted a comprehensive, triumphant synthesis, and the result was the exuberant works of Bernini and the integrated and dynamic spaces of Borromini. The complex personality of the latter certainly reflects a multitude of "influences" and a certain "romantic" approach to architecture, but his conception of space as an enclosed, indivisible unit, remains essentially Roman. Rather than being antagonists, Bernini and Borromini therefore offered different interpretations of the same local character.

Rome has conserved its identity down to our time. During the Fascist period a serious attack on the "idyllic" coherence of the city was carried out, but it was stopped in time. Unfortunately actual construction does not show much understanding for the *genius loci* either. Only in the Sports Palaces by Nervi do we still feel the Roman sense of space and plastic presence[27]. More dangerous than the new buildings, however, is the gradual destruction of the landscape of Latium. In the past a destroyed Rome meant a return to nature; for centuries the ruins of past civilizations were the distinctive mark of the Roman landscape. From this nature Rome was always reborn as Rome, but today the soil which gave the place its identity is becoming a mere memory. The Colosseum is still standing, but man obviously does not any more respect the *meanings* it embodies. Perhaps the fall of Colosseum was meant in this metaphorical sense!

1. Meaning

To arrive at an understading of the *genius loci*, we have introduced the concepts of "meaning" and "structure". The "meaning" of any object consists in its relationships to other objects, that is, it consists in what the object "gathers". A thing is a thing by virtue of its gathering. "Structure", instead, denotes the formal properties of a system of relationships. Structure ad meaning are hence aspects of the same totality[1]. Both are abstractions from the flux of phenomena; not in the sense of scientific classification, but as a direct recognition of "constancies", that is, stable relationships which stand out from the more transitory happenings. The child's "construction of reality" implies that it has learnt to perceive changing phenomena as representing the same thing[2], and comprises the basic concepts of "object", "spatial field" and "temporal field"[3], which correspond to our categories "thing", "order" and "time". This means that every child so to speak repeats the process of understanding which is reflected in the ancient cosmologies. It goes without saying that the child also develops an undestanding of the expression or character of the objects perceived, in relation to its own psychic structure. In fact, children, like "primitive" people, do not distinguish the psychic from the physical, and experience things as "animate"[4]. In general, meaning is a *psychic* function. It depends on *identification*, and implies a sense of "belonging". It therefore constitutes the basis of dwelling. We ought to repeat that man's most fundamental need is to experience his existence as meaningful.

When discussing the natural and man-made place, we gave a general survey of their basic meanings and structural properties. The natural meanings were grouped in five categories, which sum

279. *Place; enclosure and gathering.*
Monteriggioni, Toscana.

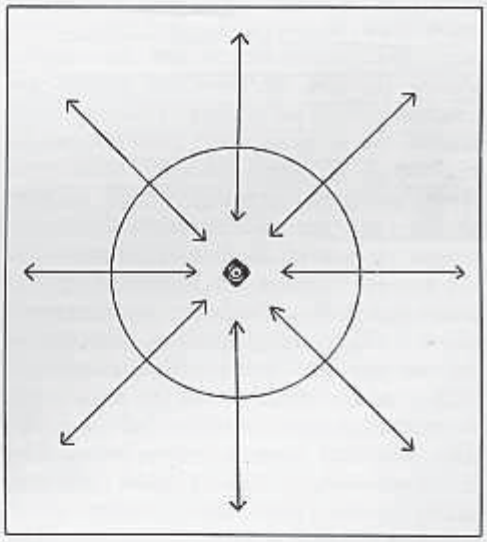
up man's understanding of nature. Evidently man interacts with these meanings. He is a "thing" among "things": he lives among mountians and rocks, rivers and trees; he "uses" then and has to know them. He also lives with the "cosmic order": with the course of the sun and the cardinal points. The directions of the compass are not mere geometry, but qualitative realities which follow man everywhere. In particular, man is related to the "character" of things. From the initial animistic stage he gradually develops a conscious or unconscious understanding that there exists an *Übereinstimmung*, a correspondence, between his own psychic states and the "forces" of nature. Only thus he may obtain a personal "friendship" with things, and experience the environment as meaningful. He cannot be friends with scientific "data", but only with qualities. Man also lives with "light" and is tuned by light. Personal and collective attitudes ("mentalities") are in fact influenced by the environmental "climate"[5]. Finally man lives in "time", which means that he lives with the changes of the other four dimensions. He lives with the rhythms of day and night, with the seasons and in history.

Man's dependence on nature has long been recognized. Hegel starts his "Philosophy of History" with a chapter on the "Geographic Basis of World History", and wants to define the "natural type of the locality, which is closely related to the type and character of the people which is born from this soil. This character is the way peoples appear and find their place in world history"[6]. Herder introduced the concept "climate" to cover the entire natural and man-made environment, and characterized man's life as "climatic". He added, however, that climate does not "force" man; rather it "tends" and "disposes"[7]. Arnold Toynbee interpreted the relationship between man and his environment as a "challenge and response"[8]. To a high extent Toynbee understands "environment" as physical nature. All these great historians thus recognized the importance of the natural environment, but simultaneously they stressed man's ability to "respond" and to shape his world. Man does not obviously only "build" nature, but also builds himself, society and culture, and in this process he may interpret a given environment in different ways.

The relationship between man and nature also forms a point of departure for Marx. It is a basic tenet of Marxism that man as a biological being is part of nature, and that nature is an "objective reality", which is given independently of man's consciousness. Man faces this reality in his work, and thus realizes his purposes "in nature". This implies that he may "master" nature, without however isolating himself from it. Rather he ought to arrive at an ever deeper undestanding of its "laws". Man's consciousness is both in its content and form a "reflection" of nature, although it possesses a certain independence and power of feedback. To understand Marxism, however, it is essential to add that it defines nature as *matter*. "Matter" is used as a simultaneously very wide and concrete concept ("matter as such does not exist, only its concrete manifestations"), but it does not cover our concepts of "meaning" and "character". Although structurally sound, as regards the relationship between man and his environment, Marxism therefore remains incomplete. The psychological aspect is left out, that is, the functions of orientation and identification. Because of this omission, Marxism does not arrive at a full understanding of "dwelling", and fails in its attempt to win human alienation[9].

Alienation is in our opinion first of all due to man's loss of identification with the natural and man-made things which constitute his environment. This loss also hinders the process of gathering, and is therefore at the root of our actual "loss of place". Things have become mere objects of consumption which are thrown away after use, and nature in general is treated as a "resource"[10]. Only if man regains his ability of identification and gathering, we may stop this destructive development. The first step to take is to arrive at a full understanding of the *objects* of identification and gathering, that is, an understanding of the concept of *thing*. Thereby we shall also be able to define the nature of man-made meanings and their relation to natural meanings. Again we have to ask Heidegger for help. In his essay *The Thing*, he uses a jug as example, and asks for the "jugness" of the jug. "The jug's jug-character consists in the poured gift of the pouring out... The giving of the outpouring can be a drink. The spring stays on in the water of the gift. In the spring the rock dwells, and in the rock dwells the dark slumbers of the earth, which receives the rain and the dew of the sky. In the water of the spring dwells the marriage of sky and earth... In the gift of water, in the gift of wine, sky and earth dwell. But the gift of the outpouring is what makes the jug a jug. In the jugness of the jug, sky and earth dwell..." "The jug's essential nature, its presencing... is what we call a thing"[11]. Heidegger takes the function of the jug, the pouring, as his point of departure. He defines the pouring as a gift and asks what is here "given". Water and wine are given, and with them earth and sky. The jug is understood as an artifact which serves a purpose. Its function, however, forms part of a life which takes place between earth and sky. The jug participates in

280. "Jug and fruit" by Paul Cézanne (Oslo, National Gallery).



281. Departure and return, diagram.

this taking place; yes, *it is part of the place* in which life is concretized. The function of real things is therefore to concretize or "reveal" life in its various aspects. If a thing does not do that, it is not a thing but a mere commodity. We dwell poetically when we are able to "read" the revealing of the things which make up our environment. Things are made with the purpose of revealing; they gather world, and may themselves be gathered to form a microcosmos.

What, then, does this tell us about the nature of man-made things? Are they only reflections of natural meanings, or does man create meanings of his own? Have we not already shown that the meanings of man-made place are determined by economic, social, political, and other cultural phenomena? Heidegger's example, however, implies that man cannot create meanings that are *entirely* his own. Man is part of a "living world, and does not conceive meanings in a vacuum. Meanings necessarily form part of a totality, which comprises natural components. Everything created by man is *in* the world, it is between earth and sky, and has to make this state of affairs manifest. In doing this, the created thing gets roots in a locality or at least in nature in general. Our categories "romantic architecture", "cosmic architecture" and "classical architecture" denote different modes of being rooted in nature.

But the function of man-made things (places) goes beyond the manifestation of simple rootedness. The concept of gathering implies that natural meanings are brought together in a *new* way, in relation to human purposes. Natural meanings are thus abstracted from their natural context, and as elements of a language they are com-posed to form a "new", complex meaning which illuminates nature as well as man's role within the totality[12]. Evidently such a composition may also comprise elements which are *invented* by man. We have already mentioned how man makes a land-mark or a house, which *a posteriori* are used to "understand" his environment. To be meaningful, however, the inventions of man must have formal properties which are structurally similar to other aspects of reality, and ultimately to natural structures. If this is not the case, they would isolate themselves within a purely artificial world, and lose contact with reality. The basic kinds of structural similarity ought to be described in terms of our categories "space" and "character". Natural and man-made space are structurally similar as regards directions and boundaries. In both, the distinction between up and down is valid, as well as the concepts of extension and enclosure. The boundaries of both kinds of space are moreover to be defined in terms of "floor", "wall", and "ceiling". Natural and man-made space may thus *represent* each other reciprocally. The same holds true for natural and human characters, as was understood by the Greeks. The man-made forms which concretize characters obviously do not *imitate* the analogous natural forms, but we have again to ask for common structural properties.

"Gathering" means that things are brought together, that is, that they are moved from one place to another. This transposition is in general done by means of symbolization, but it may also consist in a concrete displacement of buildings and things. Whereas moving by means of symbolization is a creative act of interpretation and translation, concrete displacement is passive, and mostly connected with the wish for getting a "cultural alibi"[13]. The Greek *polis* was based on a creative transposition of meanings. The meanings which are revealed in certain natural places, were translated into buildings

282. *System of rivers.*
283. *Valley settlements, diagram.*
284. *Norwegian farm. Haraldstad, Heidal.*

and moved to the city, through the erection of similar buildings there. It is a grand conception, indeed, to visualize the qualities of a landscape by means of a man-made structure, and then to gather several landscapes symbolically in one place! We have seen that the *genius loci* of Rome stems from such a gathering.

Obviously meanings are moved because they are of *general* interest, that is, because they are part of "truth". The symbols which make truth manifest constitute *culture*. Culture means to transform the given "forces" into meanings which may be moved to another place. Culture is therefore based on abstraction and concretization. By means of culture man gets rooted in reality, at the same time as he is freed from complete dependence on a particular situation. We understand that the given economic, social, political and cultural conditions do not *produce* the meanings concretized by a man-made place[14]. The meanings are inherent in the world, and are in each case to a high extent derived from the locality as a particular manifestation of "world". The meanings may however be *used* by the economic, social, political and cultural forces. This use consists in *a selection among possible meanings*. The selection therefore tells us about the actual conditions, but the meanings as such have deeper roots. In general they are covered by our four categories "thing", "order", "character" and "light". Traditionally these categories have been associated with earth, sky, man and spirit, respectively. They thus correspond to what Heidegger calls the "fourfold" (*das Geviert*)[15]. Dwelling consists in "preserving" the fourfold, which in general means to "keep the fourfold in that with which mortals stay: in things"[16]. The nature of a thing resides in its gathering. The jug gathers earth and sky, and the bridge gathers the earth as landscape around the stream. In general things gather world and thereby reveal truth. To make a thing means the "setting-into-work" of truth. A place is such a thing, and as such it is a poetical fact.

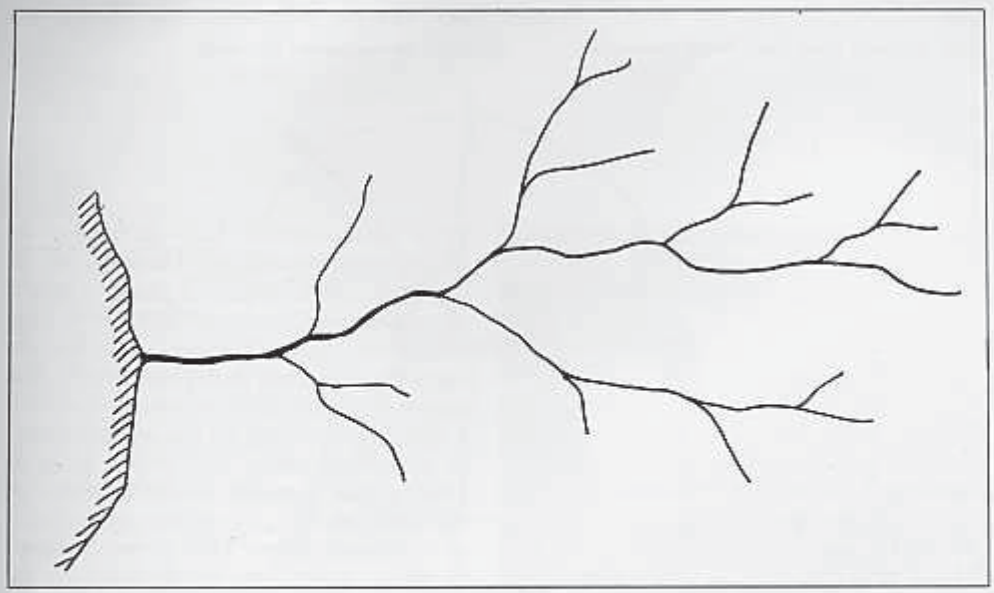
The making of places we call architecture. Through building man gives meanings concrete presence, and he gathers buildings to visualize and symbolize his form of life as a totality. Thus his everyday lifeworld becomes a meaningful home where he can dwell. There are many kinds of buildings and settlements. What they gather varies according to the building task and the situation. Vernacular architecture, that is, farms and villages, brings the immediate meanings of the local earth and sky into presence. Hence it is "circumstantial" and intimately connected with a particular situation. Urban architecture, instead, has a more general value, as it is based on symbolization and transposition[17]. Urban architecture therefore presupposes a formal language, a "style". In the town, "foreign" meanings meet the local *genius*, and create a more complex system of meanings. The urban *genius* is never merely local; although the examples of Prague, Khartoum and Rome have taught us that the local character plays a decisive role in giving the settlement its particular identity. Urban gathering may be understood as an *interpretation* of the local *genius*, in accordance with the values and need of the actual society. In general we may say that *the meanings which are gathered by a place constitute its genius loci*.

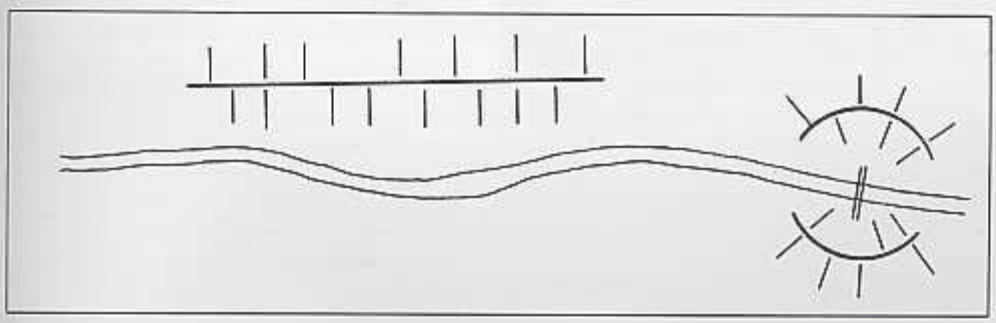
Architecture is born from the dialectic of departure and return. Man, the wanderer, is on his way. His task is to penetrate the world and to set its meanings into work. This is the meaning of the word *settle*. A settlement sets truth into a work of architecture. To set-into-work here means to build the boundary or "threshold" from which the settlement begins its presencing. The threshold is the meeting of "outside" and "inside", and architecture is hence the *incarnation* of the meeting. "The place-searching and place-forming characters of plastic incarnation"[18] here find their "look" and at the same time man finds his "outlook"[19]. Thus the threshold is the "gathering middle"[20], where things appear in "limpid brightness".

2. Identity

Places where natural and man-made elements form a synthesis are the subject-matter of a phenomenology of architecture. The primary relationship between the two kinds of elements is denoted by the world *location*. Where does man locate his settlements? Where does nature form places which "invite" man to settle? The question has to be answered both in terms of space and character. From the spatial point of view man needs an enclosure, and accordingly tends to settle where nature offers a defined space. From the point of view of character, a natural place which comprises several meaningful things, such as rocks, trees and water, would represent an "invitation". We have in fact seen that Rome was founded in a place where these elements were present. Some times the conditions may be favourable both with regard to space and character, other times only one of the two needs is naturally satisfied (or even none). Where the actual conditions are favourable, visualization becomes the most important means of place concretization, whereas a location where nature offers less, has to be "improved" by complementation and symbolization[21].

In a very general sense, the surface relief of the earth slopes down towards the





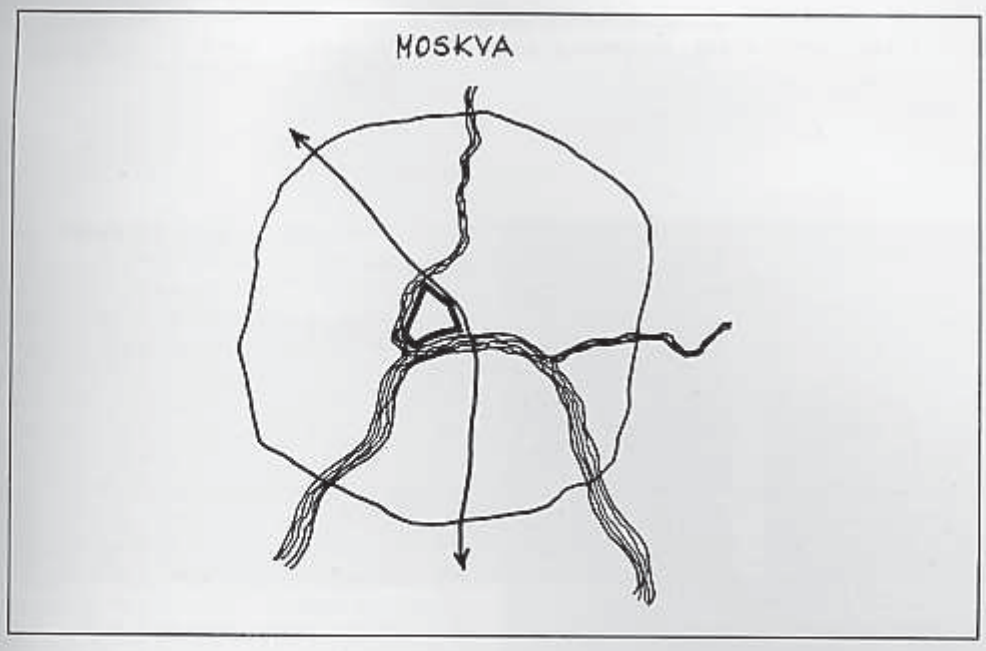
sea. Except for a few isolated internal basins (possibly of volcanic origin), a "normal" country is always directed towards the sea[22]. On an extended plain this direction is obviously less strongly felt than in a valley. In general, the movement of the land corresponds to a system of rivers (and lakes) which visualize the spatial pattern. When the river approaches the sea, the valley usually opens up and becomes an amphitheatrical bay. The location of human settlements are to a high extent determined by these conditions. Spaces such as plains, valleys and bays have given rise to characteristic types of settlements, and mostly a river, a confluence, or a shore have been used for spatial fixation. The endings of numerous place names express this state of affairs: "ford", "port", "mouth", "gate", "haven", "bridge". When the surface relief of a hill landscape gets accentuated, however, the natural places are found on the tops and crests of the hills rather than in the bottom of the valleys. We see thus that the scale of the surface relief may influence location. A top is obviously also often chosen because it forms a natural centre to the surrounding landscape. Another general factor which influences location is the direction of the sun. A slope exposed to the south is evidently more favourable than a northern one, and in many parts of Europe it is therefore common that farms and villages are situated on the north side of the valleys. Sometimes exposure and natural space collaborate to create very favourable conditions for settlement, other times they are contradictory and some kind of compromise becomes necessary.

If man-made places are at all related to their environment, there ought to exist a meaningful correspondence between natural conditions and *settlement morphology*. The basic problem to be solved

285. *Ponte Vecchio, Florence.*
286. *Florence from Piazzale Michelangelo.*
287. *Moscow, diagrammatic plan.*
288. *Montagnana, Po valley.*

by a settlement is how to gather the surrounding landscape. How do we, in terms of space, gather a plain, a valley, an undulating series of hills, or a bay? Evidently, each of these situations are open to different interpretations[23]. The simplest, *vernacular*, solution consists in a direct adaptation to the natural space. In a defined valley this would mean to form a row parallel to the direction of the land, that is, along the natural path of communication. This pattern is found in many countries, for instance in the narrow valleys of Telemark and Setesdal in Norway, where the row-*tun* is the dominant type of rural settlement[24]. An *urban* valley-settlement, instead, represents a centre which gathers the surrounding space. This is achieved by introducing an axis across the valley, mostly in connection with a ford or a bridge-point. The centre thus formed is still a function of local circumstances without "cosmic" implications. When the Romans used a site of this kind, however, they usually placed their *cardo-decumanus* axes on one side of the river, reducing thus the importance of the local space (London, Paris, Cologne, Ratisbon, Turin, etc.). The Roman colonial settlement therefore represented an absolute system, albeit of natural derivation, rather than a gathering of the local landscape. This is particularly evident in Florence where the Roman axes were turned at an angle to the river and the valley. During the Middle Ages the boundary of the urban enclosure was turned back to correspond with the river. Another example of "place-free", "cosmic" orientation is the traditional east-west axis of the Christian church, which in many Mediaeval towns contradicts the dominant directions of the urban tissue.

Settlements on a plain have analogous possibilities of interpretation. Here the basic vernacular form is not the row,



but the dense cluster or the enclosure (*Rundling, Vierkanthof*). These forms express the general, directionless extension of the surrounding land. The development of an urban centre is usually combined with geometrization, such as the building or a regular, square or rectangular enclosure (Montagnana etc.), or, less frequently, a ring. When a river is present, interesting combinations of enclosure and longitudinal-transversal directions are formed. A good example is furnished by Moscow, where the triangular shape of the Kremlin is due to the interpenetration of ring, river and transverse axis. On a plain, the Roman scheme is congenial, but evidently it still represents an abstraction, as is shown by Lucca, where the system was filled in by a dense cluster of houses during the Middle Ages.

Building in an extended hilly landscape poses different problems. Here directions are neither in fact nor potentially present, and the only possible structuration consists in visualizing the tops and crests by means of concentrated or longitudinal clusters. The result is well known from Italy, where "hill-towns" are legion. In general they belong to the vernacular category, but sometimes they gain the importance of a centre, mainly due to an isolated, dominant location (Orvieto) or through vertical accentuation (Palombara). A centre is also formed when several crests meet, as is the case in Siena, where the town integrates three significant directions: north (Florence), south (Rome) and west (Grosseto, coast). When the scale increases and the hills become mountains, the settlements are usually located in the sloping mountain-side, forming a series of terraces. Good examples are furnished by Gubbio and Assisi. Terraces also represent a natural solution when an amphitheatrical bay has to be built, which moreover demands a continuous

289. *Alatri, Lazio.*
290. *Siena.*

291. *Assisi in the landscape.*
292. *Assisi from above.*

293. *Giglio, Castello.*
294. *Sperlonga.*

engirdling disposition of the houses. Islands and promontories are somewhat related to the tops and crests of the inland. Sperlonga is thus clustered along the crest of a promontory, whereas the Castello on the Island of Giglio rests on an isolated hillock near the top of the island. On the same island an archetypal bay-settlement is also found (Giglio Porto).

Our few remarks on the location and spatial morphology of settlements might seem trivial. Today, however, these simple structural relationships are hardly understood and still less respected. As the general identity of our places depends on such structures, they form an important part of the phenomenology of architecture. In general, all the types of settlement mentioned, represent variations on the *figure-ground* theme. We understand that "figure" here does not mean a "foreign" element which appears on a "neutral" ground, but a visualization of potentially present foci.

So far, we have mainly treated the external structure of settlements, that is, their "direct" relation to the environment. The *internal* structure is necessarily coordinated with the external relations. The urban spaces do not form an independent interior world. To allow for man's orientation and identification they have to concretize the general situation of the settlement. Obviously this cannot be done by means of visualization, and symbolization comes to play a decisive role. This implies that the aspect of character gains in importance, but a few spatial problems also have to be mentioned. Whereas the interior spaces of vernacular settlements form a continuation of the surroundings, or a simple "space within space" relationship[26], urban settlements are distinguished by a definition of spatial foci which make the citizen experience the general role of the place as a local or

295. *Piazza San Marco, Venice.*
296. *Piazza San Marco, the Piazzetta.*

regional centre. To fullfil their function, these spaces ought to contain all those "things" (buildings, monuments etc.) which make manifest the meanings gathered by the place. Thus Heidegger says: "...the things themselves *are* the places, and do not only "belong" to a place"[27]. In European towns the path structure is usually centred on the foci, making thus the whole settlement appear as a meaningful organism, where the meanings present at the centre determine the form, in interaction with the external situation. The paths so to speak illustrate how the meanings were brought inside from the "threshold" of the city gate.

Examples which illustrate the role of urban foci as gathering centres are legion. We have already mentioned the Greek *agora* and the Roman *forum*, and may add the Mediaeval markets and cathedral squares[28]. On the European continent the cathedral is preceded by an urban space which serves to unite the symbolic interior of the building with the town as a whole. The integration of outside and inside is furthermore expressed by deep embrasured portals. In England, instead, the cathedral is located within a precinct; a more conservative solution which divides space in two qualitatively different domains. The formal solution of the urban foci is particularly beautiful in Siena, where the squares of cathedral and town hall are placed on either side of the meeting point of the three paths mentioned above. A splendid answer to the problem of urban gathering is also offered by St. Mark's square in Venice, where the large *piazza* forms a meaningful transition between the dense labyrinth of the city and the glittering expanse of the sea.

The urban paths and squares are constituted by buildings which embody the meanings gathered by the city. We have

297. *Piazza San Marco, Venice.*
298. *San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice.*

already shown that this embodiment depends upon how the buildings *stand*, *rise* and *open*, and have mentioned that their "behaviour" is usually condensed in *motifs* which characterize an urban environment as a whole. Such motifs are not applied decoration, but consist in a characteristic solution of the "critical parts" of the structure[29]. Analyzing the functions of standing, rising and opening, it follows that the critical parts are base, roof, corner and opening (window, door); that is, the "elements" which relate the building to its environment and defines how it "is" on the earth[30]. The possible solutions are obviously legion, but some primary types of motifs may be singled out.

In general a building may stand *in* the ground, *on* the ground, or *over* the ground. To be "in the ground" expresses an intimate "romantic" relationship to the "forces" of the earth. It is usually concretized by making the building grow out of the ground without a distinct base. "On the ground", instead, means that the building is set off on a base as an individual, "classical" thing between earth and sky. "Over the ground", finally, implies that the continuity of the ground is preserved; the building is placed on de-materialized stilts (*pilotis*), and seems to exist in an abstract, "cosmic" space.

There are also three basic types of rising. Either the building is vertically "open" and joins the sky in a "free" and serrate silhouette, or it is "closed" as an individual body by means of a heavy entablature or voluminous roof, or it is simply delimited by a neutral horizontal line which gives emphasis to lateral extension.

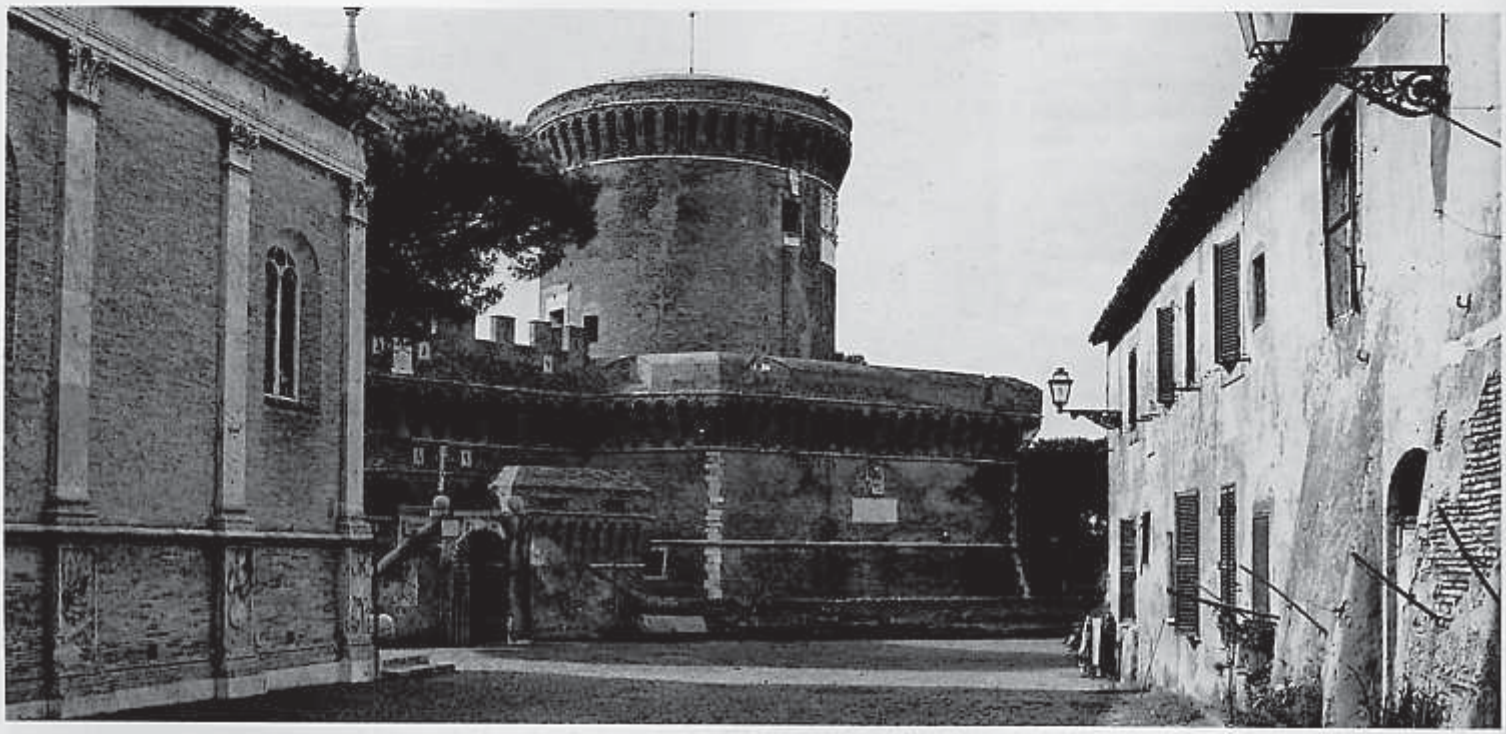
The basic types of opening depend on the conservation or dissolution of the continuity of the boundary. In any case the result is determined by the size, shape and distribution of the openings.

299. *Sacred, military and residential architecture, Ostia Antica.*

300. *Standing and rising. Old house in Rothenburg.*

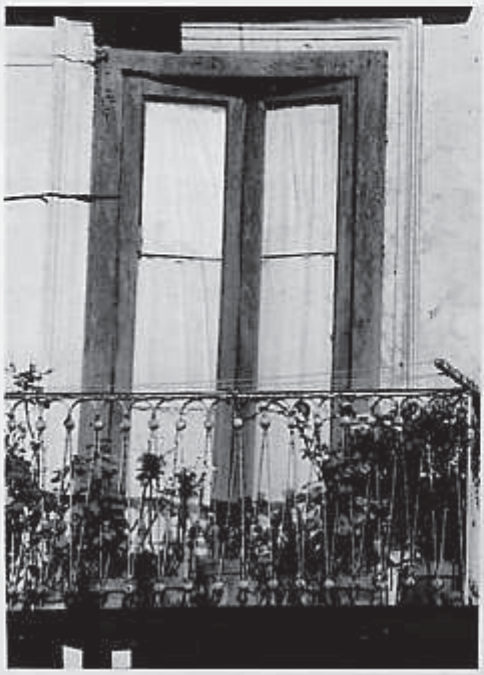
301. *Standing and rising. Palazzo Comunale, Velletri.*

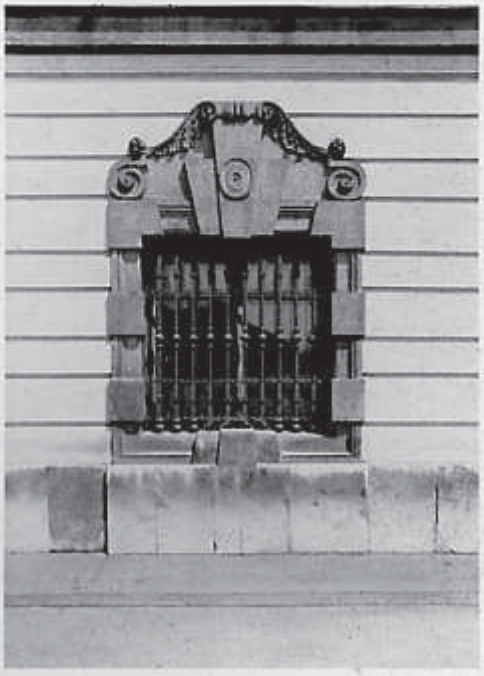
302. *Standing and rising. Kloster Banz, corner pavilion by Neumann.*



303. *Window in Salerno.*
304. *Window in Paris.*

305. *Window at the Upper Belvedere, Vienna by Hildebrandt.*
306. *Window at St. George in the East, London by Hawksmoor.*





It is thus possible to create a "romantic" interplay between exterior and interior by means of irregular and surprising transitions; or a clearly defined communication where inside and outside preserve their distinct identities; or an abstract, systematic integration where the two domains seem made of the same extended "substance". Among all *motifs*, the window is particularly important. It does not only express the spatial structure of the building, but also how it is related to light. And, through its proportions and detailing, it participates in the functions of standing and rising. In the window, thus, the *genius loci* is focused and "explained".

The *identity* of a place is determined by location, general spatial configuration and characterizing articulation. As a totality we experience for instance a place as "a dense cluster of enclosed stone houses in a hill side", or as "a continuous row of brightly coloured veranda houses around a small bay", or as "an ordered group of half-timbered gable houses in a valley". Location, configuration and articulation do not always contribute in the same measure to the final result. Some places get their identity from a particularly interesting location, whereas the man-made components are rather insignificant. Others, instead, may be situated in a dull landscape, but possess a well-defined configuration and a distinct character. When *all* the components seem to embody basic existential meanings, we may talk about a "strong" place[1]. The three cities analyzed above, are such strong places, although Khartoum leaves something to be desired as regards characterizing articulation. The elements, however, are there, and the "strength" of the place could easily be improved if the *genius loci* is understood and respected.

In any case a strong place presupposes

307. *Theme and variation. Dutch town.*
308. *Theme and variation. Houses at Procida, Naples.*
309. *Porch-motif. Street in Cambridge, Mass.*
310. *Massive and skeleton structure. Farm in the Po-valley.*

that there exists a meaningful correspondence between site, settlement and architectural detail. The man-made place has to know "what it wants to be" relative to the natural environment. Such a correspondence can be achieved in many different ways. We have already mentioned the vernacular "adaptation" and the urban "interpretation". The possibilities of interpretation are evidently determined by the site itself and by the historical circumstances which may both favour a certain approach of the "romantic", "cosmic" or "classical" type. Moreover an interpretation is always open to individual variations. In general settlements are therefore characterized by basic motifs which are varied according to the circumstances. *Theme and variation* is in fact a basic means of artistic concretization. The "theme" represents a general complex of meanings, and the "variations" its circumstantial realization. Such themes may be a particular type of building as well as motifs of "critical" importance. Well-known examples are the Italian *palazzo*, the French *hôtel* of the *cour d'honneur* type, and the Central European *Bürgerhaus*[32]. The *entrance* is also in most settlements a characteristic motif of "thematic" importance. American towns are thus distinguished by the varied repetition of conspicuous porches. In general "theme and variation" allows for the expression of individual identity within a system of manifest common meanings. Thus it conserves the "spirit" of the place without making it become a life-less straightjacket.

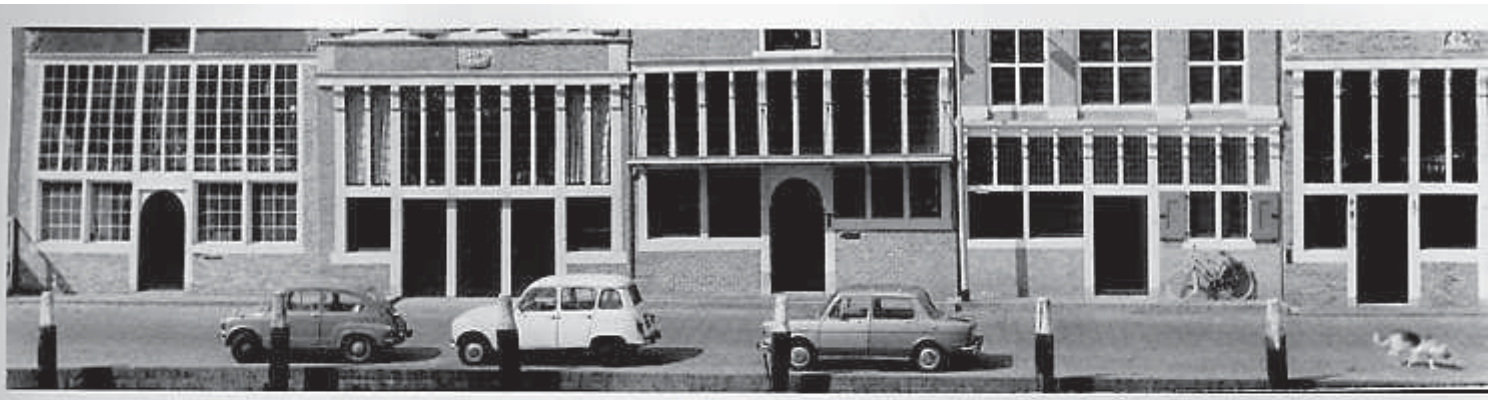
3. History

Our discussion of the identity of a place has already brought us close to the problem of constancy and change. How does a place preserve its identity under the pressure of historical forces? How can a place adapt to the changing needs of public and private life? The common *laissez faire* attitude of today implies a rejection of the first question and a blind acceptance of adaptation to change. We have tried to show, however, that human identity presupposes the identity of place, and that *stabilitas loci* therefore is a basic human need. The development of individual and social identity is a slow process, which cannot take place in a continuously changing environment. We have every reason to believe that the human alienation so common today, to a high extent is due to the scarce possibilities of orientation and identification offered by the modern environment. Piaget's researches in fact show that a mobile world would tie man to an egocentric stage of development, while a stabile and structured world frees his mental powers[33]. Our analysis of the cities of Prague, Khartoum and Rome have moreover shown that it *is* possible to preserve the *genius loci* over considerable periods of time without interfering with the needs of successive historical situations.

Let us sum up *what* ought to be preserved, before we embark up upon a discussion of the problem of change. The *genius loci* becomes manifest as location, spatial configuration and characterizing articulation. All these aspects to some extent have to be preserved, as they are the objects of man's orientation and indentification. What has to be respected are obviously their *primary* structural properties, such as the type of settlement and way of building ("massive", "skeletal" etc.) as well as characteristic motifs. Such properties are always capable of various interpretations if they are properly understood, and therefore do not hamper stylistic changes and individual creativity. If the primary structural properties are respected, the general atmosphere or *Stimmung* will not get lost. It is this *Stimmung* which first of all ties man to "his" place and strikes the visitor as a particular local quality[34]. The idea of preservation, however, also has another purpose. It implies that architectural history is understood as a collection of cultural experiences, which should not get lost but remain present as *possibilities* for human "use".

What kind of changes does history ask for? In general they may be grouped in three categories: practical changes, social changes, and cultural changes. All these changes have physical (environmental) implications. As the cultural and social changes become manifest through their physical implications, we may consider the problem of change in "functional" terms, and ask: How can the *genius loci* be preserved under the pressure of new functional demands? What happens for instance when new or larger streets become necessary? The example of Prague has taught us that a system of paths may develop during history in conformity with the structure of the natural place. We may also remind of Rome, where the breaking through of Corso Vittorio Emanuele (after 1886) fairly well respected the continuity and scale of the traditional Roman street, whereas the *sventramenti* carried out under Fascism introduced a new and "foreign" urban pattern, although the aim was to restore the "greatness" of the Imperial capital[35]. We understand, thus, that it makes sense to talk about "good" and "bad" changes.

One might object, however, that our three main examples are not suitable for illustrating the problem of change. When Prague and Rome started to feel the full impact of modern life, their old centres were already under protection, and Khartoum is still waiting for becoming a modern metropolis. But the problem of change is not basically different if



311. Sears Tower, Chicago by SOM (Khan, Graham).

312. Boston across the Charles river.

313. Copley Square, Boston with new John Hancock Tower by Pei.

we consider a great and truly modern city such as Chicago. Even here the *genius loci* is of decisive importance, and changes have to obey to certain "rules". The infinite extension of the great plains and Lake Michigan is thus reflected in an "open", orthogonal urban structure, which is concretized in each single building. Enclosed, round or "freely" shaped buildings are "meaningless" in Chicago; the place demands a regular grid. The *genius loci* was understood by the early pioneers, and was set-into-work in the famous "Chicago-construction" which was invented by Jenney about 1880. The local tradition was carried on after 1937 by Mies van der Rohe, whose personal idiom fitted Chicago perfectly. The last and most impressive interpretation of the spirit of Chicago has been given in the 420 metres tall Sears Tower by SOM[36]. Today there is hardly any place where architects are so conscious of the need for adapting to the given environment, and this happens in a city which is among the most dynamic in the world! It would of course have been *possible* to interpret Chicago differently. The interpretation chosen, however, evidently suited the economic, social, political and cultural intentions of the pioneers. They wanted to concretize the image of an open and dynamic world of opportunities, and chose an appropriate spatial system.

This does not mean, however, that Chicago architecture may be used whenever similar intentions have to be set-into-work. Other places have a different relationship to "open" form, and have to be treated accordingly. Boston may serve as an interesting example. Until quite recently Boston appeared as a dense cluster of relatively small houses on the peninsula between the harbour and the Charles River[37]. The architectural quality was generally very high, and the environment characterized by significant local motifs. During the last decade large parts of the urban tissue have been erased, and scattered "superbuildings" erected instead. The development culminated with the John Hancock Tower by I.M. Pei, which completely destroys the scale of a major urban focus, Copley Square[38]. As a result, Boston today appears a hybrid city; the old remains, such as Beacon Hill, make the new buildings look inhuman and ridiculous, and the new structure have a crushing effect on the old environment, not only because of the scale, but because of their total lack of architectural character. Thus the place has lost its meaningful relationship to earth and sky.

Our examples show that economic, social, political and cultural intentions have to be concretized in a way which respects the *genius loci*. If not, the place loses its identity. In Boston the *genius loci* was for a long time understood; recently, however, a way of building has been introduced which is foreign to the place, and which deprives man of the satisfaction of one of his most fundamental needs: a meaningful environment. Whereas Chicago possesses the capacity for absorbing this kind of buildings, Boston does not. Thus we learn that cities have to be treated as *individual places*, rather than abstract spaces where the "blind" forces of economy and politics may have free play[39]. To respect the *genius loci* does not mean to copy old models. It means to determine the identity of the place and to interpret it in ever new ways. Only then we may talk about a *living tradition* which makes change meaningful by relating it to a set of locally founded parametres. We may again remind of Alfred North Whitehead's dictum: "The art of progress is to preserve order amid change, and change amid order"[40]. A living tradition serves life because it satisfies these words. It does not understand "freedom" as an arbitrary play, but as creative participation.

In our context "creative participation" means two things: firstly the realization of a *private* "inside" which concretizes the identity of the individual by gathering the meanings which constitute his personal existential content, and secondly the creation of a *public* "outside" which gathers the institutions of communal life and makes the meanings (values) manifest on which this life is based. The private domain is the home of man, in the narrower sense of the word. It is personal, but not singular. Personal "foothold" implies an understanding of *a shared environment* (a common place), and therefore has to be concretized as a *variation on a theme*. The theme consists in a typical spatial relationship between inside and outside, and in certain locally meaningful motifs. In the Nordic countries, for instance, the house has to give man physical protection by being enclosed. At the same time he wants it to be *symbolically open* to bring nature near. Thus we find, for instance, a characteristic tendency to use "natural" materials inside[41]. In the desert the house is enclosed both in a pratical and a symbolic sense; it represents a different "paradisical" world which forms a complement to the outside. In the "classical" countries a favourable climate and a trustworthy, imageable nature makes the outside become an inside; the boundary between private and public domains is weakened, and if it is maintained, it is to make the inside a place of representation rather than a home.

In general the conception of the private inside becomes manifest in the "threshold" or boundary which separates it from *and* unifies it with the outside. At

314. *Norwegian cottage, Telemark.*
315. *African house from Sudan.*

316. *Street in old Naples.*
317. *Street "of agreement" in Einbeck, Germany.*
318. *From the agora of Priene.*

the same time the boundary gives the public outside its particular presence. Thus Louis Kahn says: "The street is a room of agreement. The street is dedicate by each house owner to the city..."[42]. But the public outside is something more than an "agreement" of individual homes. The agreement it represents is focused in public buildings which concretize the shared understanding which makes communal life possible and meaningful. These public buildings ought to appear as particularly complete and articulate variations on the themes which are already intoned in the single home. This was the case in the Greek *polis*, where the public buildings *expose* those meaningful forms which in a more modest way were used inside the dwellings (such as the anthropomorphous column), and especially in the Mediaeval town where the exteriors of houses, churches and town halls are variations on themes which express an integrated form of life. To fullfil its purpose, the public domain obviously has to be spatially integrated; scattered institutions do not form any true urban place.

We have introduced the concept of "theme and variation" as an answer to the problem of constancy and change. The concept does not contain anything new, it only expresses in a clearer way what it means to respect the *genius loci*. A theme is a symbolic form which embodies existential meanings. As such it has to be circumstantial *and* general. It has to concretize the local circumstances, but at the same time it should present these as a particular manifestation of a general universe of meanings. The relationship between the local and the general has been discussed in terms of "romantic", "cosmic" and "classical" environments. The "romantic", "cosmic" and "classical" modes grasp the dominant character of a particular place, at the same time as

they are general categories of understanding, which directs attention towards certain types of meanings. The three categories cover objective environmental properties as well as human attitudes, and therefore grasp the correspondence (*Übereinstimmung*) which ought to form the basis of our being-in-the-world. It helps our understanding to relate the architectural themes to these categories, although it has to be repeated that any concrete situation comprises elements from all of them. The categories have been introduced because human identity consists in a particular kind of correspondence.

As one gets to know different countries; talking with people, eating with people, feeling with people, reading their literature, listening to their music and using their places, one beings to realize that the correspondence of man and place has not changed much throughout history[43]. The local human attitude is surprisingly constant, and we must agree with Hegel when he says that it determines the people's "place in world history". We can therefore repeat that the basic existential contents are not produced by changing economical, social and political conditions. The existential contents have deeper roots, and the changing conditions only ask for ever new interpretations. The crucial question therefore is: "How is it possible to remain an Italian, a Russian, or a German under *this* regime?" Regimes come and go, the place persists, and with it a particular kind of human identity. When we have realized this fact, we should start to improve the world by taking care of our places, rather than by abstract planning and anonymous building[44]. Thus we may leave utopia behind and return to the things of our everyday life-world.

Creative participation means to concretize the basic meanings under ever new historical circumstances. Participation, however, can only be obtained "by great labor"[45]. The "threshold" which is the symbol of participation, is in fact "turned to stone" by "pain". Participation presupposes *sympathy* with things, to repeat the word of Goethe, and sympathy necessarily implies suffering. In our context sympathy with things means that we *learn to see*. We have to be able to "see" the meanings of the things that surround us; be they natural or man-made. Things always tell several stories; they tell about their own making, they tell about the historical circumstances under which they were made, and if they are real things, they also reveal truth. The ability of a thing to reveal truth depends upon *how* it is made, and the next thing to learn is therefore *making*. Seeing and making are united in inspiration and concretization. Thus Louis Kahn said: "Inspiration is the moment of possibility when what to do meets the means of doing it"[46]. Seing and making constitute the basis of *dwelling*.

The results of creative participation constitute man's existential foothold, his *culture*. They make manifest what he has managed to make out of his existence. Some of the results illuminate a wider range of phenomena than others, and deserve the name "work of art". In the work of art man *praises existence*. In his *Ninth Elegy* and his *Sonnets to Orpheus*, Rilke develops the image of man as a praising singer. We remember his question: "Are we perhaps *here* to say: house, bridge, fountain, gate, jug, fruit tree, window, at best: column, tower...", and hear his answer:

"Praise to the Angel our world, not the untellable:
you can't impress *him* with grand emotion. In the cosmos
where he so powerfully feels, you're only a newcomer.

319. House.
320. Bridge.

Then show his some simple thing, grown up through generations
till it became ours, and lives near our hands and in our eyes.
Tell him of things and he'll stand astonished, as you stood
beside the rope-maker in Rome, or with the Nile potter.
Show his how joyful a thing can be, how innocent and ours,
how even lamenting sorrow can take purely its own form,
serve as a thing, or die as a thing – and in ecstacy
escape beyond the violin. And these things,
that live only in passing, understand that you praise them;
fugitive, they look to us, the most fugitive, for rescue.
They want us entirely to transform them in our invisible hearts
into – oh, infinitely – into us! Whoever we finally are"[47].