



Prifysgol Cymru

Y Drindod Dewi Sant

University of Wales

Trinity Saint David

SACRED GEOGRAPHY: HIGH PLACES

Nick Campion

Falling Up

This presentation considers place and height

My concern is with the actual experience of being high.

Experiencing the phenomenon
i.e. Phenomenology.

Looking down. Looking up. Touching the sky.

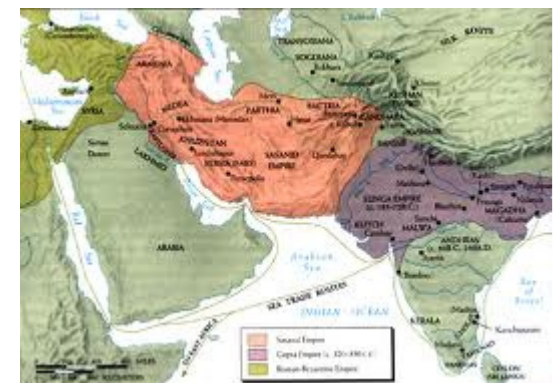
- *'Paul Virilio says that "This is the only era in which it is possible to fall up." Secondly, re: the architecture reflecting the sky, it reminds me of Liz Groz's feminist architecture which attempts to mirror rather than assert its presence in relation to its environment.'*
- (NB – I cannot find a source for this, but it's a provocative statement!)



High Places in the Hebrew Scripture

- **1 Kings 11:7-8** Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that *is* before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.
- **1 Samuel 9:12** And they answered them, and said, He is; behold, *he is* before you: make haste now, for he came to day to the city; for *there is* a sacrifice of the people to day in the high place:

Petra



Petra – climbing to the high place



Petra – climbing to the high place



- *'I walk up and up through the folds of rock shaped by thousands of years of running water into flowing forms. If I was hallucinating I would think it was alive. I would think I was enfolded in flesh. I would see it moving and breathing. If I touched it, it would give way. It is warm and protecting. Always ahead is the light.'*

Petra –the high place



Petra –the high place



Petra –the high place



- *'I feel the wind around me. It envelopes, ripped against me, like a serpent. Like Lord Wind – En Lil – one of the Babylonian creators. There is nothing above me but sky. No land is higher than me. If I reach up I can touch the sky. My hand is entirely surrounded by sky. My feet touch the ground, but I am in the sky'*

Petra –the high place



Petra – The ‘Treasury’



Mexico: Tepozteco



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

Mexico Tepozteco

The Tepozteco site was occupied, together with the Tepoztlan Valley, by the Xochimilcas in 1200 A.D. It was conquered by the Mexica lord Izcoatl in 1438 and forced to pay tribute to the Triple Alliance (formed by Mexica, Texcocano, and Tepaneca groups). The Tepozteco was built atop a steep rock formation; for that reason, the pre-Spanish architects had the summit cut and filled in so as to create stepped gradings. At the zone's east side these gradings become terraces for residential use, whereas to the west the loftiest grading is a platform nearly 40 feet high. A pyramid and a temple on top were erected upon this huge platform. This building functioned as a shrine dedicated to Tepoztecatl, patron god of the populace of the Tepoztlan Valley. The god's statue was destroyed by Dominican friar Domingo de la Anunciacion in the mid-sixteenth century. Tepoztecatl is one of the deities related to the maguey plant and pulque; his calendar name was Ome Tochtli, 2 Rabbit. The rabbit was a moon being in Meso-American cosmogony, so this made pulque gods moon beings. This connection with a heavenly body that dies and is reborn endlessly comes from the fact that pulque gods embodied nature's on-going cycle of birth and death, and this is why they were celebrated at the end of harvest time



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

Walking up to Tepozteco



- *Climbing through the hot, thick, wet, green, living vegetation. Alive, smothering, nurturing*

View from Tepozteco



- *Almost at the summit, the world below shrinks.*
- *I am exposed, the wind wraps around me*
- *Relief after the climb. Exhilaration.*

Tepozteco: sun stone



- *On top of the hill close to the sky, the mysteries of time and place could be contemplated.*
- *People stood here hundreds of years ago, in this same space in a different time*

Tepozteco: carvings



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

Tepozteco: the people are part of the place. On right a New Age lecture in progress



Places may have gatekeepers: My guide (Catalina Anton, TSD student)



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

The Path down from Tepozteco.



- *Walking down. The path is crowded. Local families are enjoying a popular day out. I have to watch carefully where I tread. Going down is a relief, because I am no longer going up, but sad, because I will never be at the summit again.*

Tepoztlan: at the base of Tepozteco: a New Age paradise. I am back with the modern world



Hanoi: the National Pagoda



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

Hue – the geomantic centre of Vietnam



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

Angkor



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

Angkor



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

Angkor



St David's Cathedral: A High Place in a Low Place



PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
UNIVERSITY OF WALES
Trinity Saint David

Silbury: A High Place in a Low Place



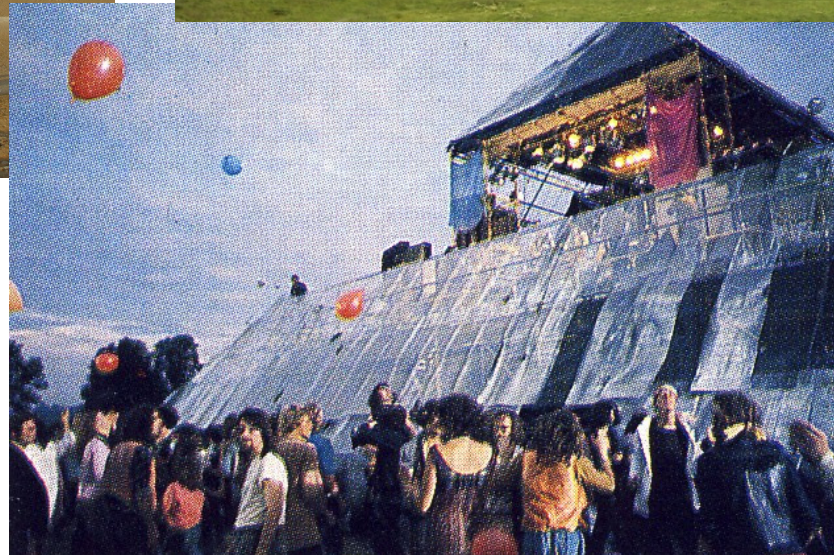
Is there something **inherently** impressive in high places?

- *Hindus of the past and present have always been attracted by the Himalayas. Its snow-clad peaks, beckoning with undiscovered mysteries and overwhelmingly awe-inspiring height and grandeur, held the Hindu spellbound. The innate humility one experiences in front of such a massive phenomenon develops into the kind of veneration that Hindus feel for this mountain.*
- Anuradha Roma Choudhury, 'Hinduism', in Jean Holm and John Bowker (eds.), *Sacred Place*, (London, Continuum, 2003) pp. 62-87 (p. 63).

●



Pyramids: Giza; Glastonbury Fayre 1971, the pyramid stage;
the Pyramid of the Sun, Teotihuacan, Mexico.



The Eiffel Tower: symbol of French modernity; The
Empire State Building: the most iconic of 20th c
skyscrapers



World Trade Towers: symbols of American economic might – and of attacks on that might



Is there something **inherently** impressive in high places? (Office rents in sky-scrapers are highest at the top.

- ‘Once, when you went up one of the few isolated towers [London skyscrapers]...you left the solid, dependable pavements of the City of London to look down on the capital as if you were a mountaineer. Emerge from the lift doors and you are suddenly transported into the Doctor Evil’s lair. The view, from Windsor to the Thames estuary, is magnificent, fit for a master of the universe; the place radiates a sense of power over the human ants below’.
- Deyan Sudjic. *The Edifice Complex* (London Allen Lane, 2005), p. 322.
- Right: Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, Hong Kong



Socially aware business responds to the perceived elitism of High Places

- All this is too much for a Swiss insurance company so dedicated to egalitarianism that it has not a single corporate parking space in the basement. Even senior executives are expected to travel by public transport...There is no way that the chairman of such an organization could have his desk up here. As a result this is a communal dining facility...And its also a place to reflect on the paradox of a structure that seems so ordinary at street level, so out of the ordinary up here in the clouds.
- Deyan Sudjic. *The Edifice Complex* (London Allen Lane, 2005), p. 322.
- Right: The 'Gherkin', London



But not forgetting the ‘spiritual’

- ‘Two other mystical [Persian] tales give a name to that "beyond the mountain of Qaf and it is this name itself that marks the transformation from **cosmic mountain** to ***psychocosmic mountain***, that is, the transition of the physical cosmos to what constitutes the first level of the spiritual universe’

- Corbin, Henri, [Mundus Imaginalis, the Imaginary and the Imaginal](#). Spring, 1972 pp. 1–19.
- <http://hermetic.com/moorish/mundus-imaginalis.html>



Tim Jordan and Steve Pile, *Social Change (Sociology and Society)*, 2001, p 2.



ACTIVITY I

To break the ice on thinking about social change and city life, let us begin with a quick exercise. First, imagine an ancient city – it could be anywhere: it could be Greek, Roman, Mayan, Incan, Moghul, Arabian, African, Asian, Chinese. Hold that image in your mind. Now, imagine a contemporary city – it could be anywhere: it could be in Europe, Central America, South America, India, China, Africa. Hold these two images in your head.

- Think of the differences you see between the places that you imagined. Make a list, if you like.
- Now, think of the different kinds of societies that built those cities: for example, are they ruled by Kings and Queens, Priests, democratically elected leaders, the military? What difference do you think this makes to city life?

And finally – very high: The Overview Effect

Named by Frank White in 1987 in order to describe the experiences reported by some astronauts when seeing Earth from space for the first time.

- Frank White, *The Overview Effect—Space Exploration and Human Evolution* (Boston, Houghton-Mifflin, 1987).



The Overview Effect: a personal testimony

- Geoff Hoffman described his own experience beginning with the launch, in which for the first time on a solo mission, he waited in the capsule completely alone, without the army of technicians who had been present on previous days, the shaking produced by the temperature fluctuations in super-cooled fuel, a lurch to left and right at ignition, and then an awesome shaking at lift-off. **The vehicle, he said, 'is alive'. A period of transition followed as noise and blue sky gave way to silence and black sky. Hoffman described the shocking beauty of the sun set in a black sky, a black unlike any black he had witnessed before, the profound sense of dislocation from the body that results from weightlessness, and the strange sensation of looking down at the earth, watching the terrestrial sky from above instead of from below, witnessing the flash of lightning storms and meteors plunging into the atmosphere. He saw the world as one, drawing salutary ecological lessons from the visible deforestation of tropical areas. Inspired by the ethereal nature of the earth's halo, Hoffman hesitated to use the word 'spiritual', put to him in a leading question, but was happy to describe the condition that he experienced on his mission as being a 'state of grace', words which he said had been suggested to him by a Jesuit priest.**
- Geoff Hoffman, BBC Radio 4, IPM, 25 May 2013,



Final Thoughts

Pilgrimage sites – ancient and modern

The personal experience

The politics/ metaphysics/ psychology of height?

Climbing hills

Ascending Stairs

Connections between earth and sky

High places in low places?

Skyscrapers; penthouse apartments.

Mountains; sacred mountains.