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ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF HIEROTOPY:  
ARCHAIC AND MODERN *SITES* OF THE NUMINOUS

We are separate now and move rapidly like tears.

*David Shapiro, Lateness*

By way of a preface, I wish to recall that Heidegger, reviewing Rudolf Otto's famous book on the sacred (*Das Heilige*, 1917), noted its relation to what he called "historical consciousness", as that of "personal existence and of the original, completed sphere of life [...]", and in "reference to the other worlds that press on". But Heidegger also saw the relation of the sacred to the "problem of the irrational", considered not just as "counterobject (*Gegenwurf*), or boundary" (as by Otto), but "in its *originary* [his word] and in the particularity of its constitution". He went on to criticize not only any "injection of the irrational on the rational", but also the idea that "the 'sacred' could be explained as a 'value category', because the primary and essential element in it is rather the constitution of an originary *thingness*" (emphasis mine: Heidegger used a lexical form for objectivity that appears to stress its 'objectness'). He then proceeded to consider the sacred as composed on the one hand of the "numinous", what constitutes its "'special element', and on the other, of "its moral and rational moment", and he wondered if their connection might not "belong in some way to the originary structure of the numinous". It would seem, then (if the transcripts and translations of this lecture are to be trusted), that for him the composition of the sacred and the structure of the numinous are interlocked in an aporetic way: the numinous being at the same time the essential component of the sacred (*pars pro toto*) distinct from the moral and the rational dimensions of sacredness and yet also in some way dependent on them. The complexity of this structural relationship may, or not, be partly clarified by Heidegger's

warning, in that same lecture, to keep in mind the “differences” between, on the one hand, the “pure sacred” (which earlier he had related to a “faith act”, though, again, not “irrationally theoretical”), and the “constituted sacred worlds and objects”, on the other<sup>1</sup>.

Previously, in his “Philosophical Foundations of Medieval Mysticism”, Heidegger had already chosen to quote from W. Windelband’s “strongly rational formulation” (in *Das Heilige. Skizze zur Religionsphilosophie*, Tübingen 1914) of the “naturally necessary character of what is contrary to norm in the empirical functions of reason”, leading to “the antinomy of the coexistence of the norm and of what is contrary to the norm within the same conscience” as an “originary given which can only be shown but never conceptually seized”<sup>2</sup>. I see Windelband’s as a penetrating intuition on the inner antinomy of the norm at the root of the sacred — and hence of *hierotopia* — an antinomy which for me is in turn constitutive of its symbolic essence, and perhaps of ‘symbolic thought’ in general.

One such basic antinomy — or *symbol* — concerning the originary coalescence of the sacred and of the ‘art thing’ in the constitution of the ‘dead body’, or corpse, is what I shall try to briefly describe here, in juxtaposition with one example of the body’s imagistic manipulation in a contemporary artistic (i. e., separate, or ‘sacred’) setting and with a few considerations on art’s modern ‘entombment’ (museums).

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In anthropological terms, the delimitation of “hierotopies” — both as separate places and as *emplacement* of the separate — appears to be a universal phaenomenon: *hierotopia* is an inescapable function of *oikologia* — the configuration of inhabiting the world. As in the case of other such human constants, their commonality and ubiquity can obfuscate their disparity, both

<sup>1</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Il sacro. (Appunti per la recensione di R. Otto, *Il Sacro*, 1917)”, in: *Heidegger M. Fenomenologia della Vita Religiosa*. Milano, 2003, p. 416–417. I cannot enter, here, into a discussion of the form of consciousness that corresponds to the notion of the sacred. This essay, presented here very much in the form in which it was delivered at the Moscow conference *Hierotopy: Studies in the Making of Sacred Spaces*, 2004, is not meant as an anthropological or, much less, art historical discussion of the vast scholarship on “sacred sites”. It is offered, rather, as free-flowing meditation on the possible origins of the sacred artifact, its ritual *placement*, and some of its (equally hypothetical) derivations in the modern world. I wish to extend my warmest thanks to Alexei Lidov, for inviting me to participate in this conference, and this book, Nicoletta Isar, for encouraging me to accept (despite my ignorance of Byzantine and Orthodox scholarship), and to Leonid and Ada Beliaev, the Research Center for Eastern Christian Culture, and to the Tretyakov Museum, for their most gracious hospitality in Moscow. I also wish to thank Gini Alhadeff for a most helpful revision of the English form of this essay.

<sup>2</sup> *Heidegger M.*, *ibid.*, p. 397–400.

in space and time, but it would not be possible to explore these differences and their contexts here. For instance, how does ‘sacred place’ manifest itself among semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers (e. g., Congolese Pygmies, Australian Aborigenes), as compared with proto-urban and urban agriculturalists, or among herders? Here, I shall limit myself to an attempt at tracing the relation between hierotopy and the human body, both in its possible archaic *origins* and in some of its present artistic manifestations. In so doing, I shall have to evade the limits of both the history of ‘art’ and of Christian devotional practices, the focus of this conference, though perhaps my general considerations may not lack relevance to some of their concerns.

In philology, a *topos* is a ‘common place’; while generally *hieros* points to something whose value is segregated, or somehow distanced, from the realm of common experience. So, there are at least two distinct symbolical registers at play in hierotopy: the one investing the intrinsic and multilayered ambivalence of sacrality — such as the fact, for instance, that it can be both and not ‘human’ — and the way by which, in turn, sacrality becomes entwined with the *commonality*, or shared distinctiveness, of the *topos*. In both registers, this symbolic resonance of the sacred stems from a short-circuiting of heterogeneous realms, as when it brings, and binds together hieratic transcendence and the immanence of place (or ‘heaven’ and ‘earth’, in many traditions). *Topos*, moreover — as in the object of topography — is a place inhabited (at least potentially: even if *as a desert*, in its very emptiness, as in the anachoretic mode of occupying and experiencing wilderness), while *hieros* is a quality that tends to attach itself to tangible entities, ‘objects’, or at least to the objectification, and often visualization, of an impalpable presence. Even the ‘auditory sacred’ requires an objective correlative — agent of utterance or written word. So, for me, *hierotopy* is both the *sacralization* of space in the process of its inhabitation and the *localization* of experience as it is sacralized: originally, the *object* of the sacred — or its function — coincides with the *topicality* of the object — its absence-made-immanent. Now, it would seem that such a statute of intrinsic sacredness, in all its ambivalent conflation of presence (the corpse, the object) and absence (the memory, the soul) applies to nothing so much as to the condition of the dead<sup>3</sup>.

I shall return to this; but first I would like to observe that the *grounding* of the sacred is also manifested in the *originary* (in a sense close to Heidegger’s, as quoted above) double-relation of *hieros* and *oikos*, on the one hand, and of

<sup>3</sup> My thinking on the archaic cult of the dead has been influenced, early on, by the original work of Remo Guidieri, although it is likely that he would not agree with at least some of my interpretations and developments. See, for instance, *Guidieri R.* La route des morts. Paris, 1980, and also, *Guidieri R., Pellizzi F.* Shadows: Fourteen tableaux on the cult of the dead in Malekula // RES 2 Autumn 1981, p. 5–69. It is always useful to go back to Joan Jacob Bachofen’s, *Versuch über die Gräbersymbolik der Alten*, Basel, 1856.

*hieros* and *gea*, on the other. Oikos is defined by the fire and stones of the hearth, and from the domestic hearth to the Mount in Jerusalem, sacrality is rooted in the *inhabiting* of the earth, the tension, and contradiction, between the domesticated (fire) and the wild (rock, running water). And yet even these archetypal signs, in their *symbolic* concentration and extension, are double. Fire strikes and destroys at random sky and earth, home and wilderness, while water — often equally if not more destructive — is essential to lustral and sacrificial cleansing. And while the sacred may attach itself to the movement of life, can travel over great distances, and even be episodic and evanescent, it also carries the weight of stones: Lot's wife is turned into a salt statue (salt is the hydroptic agent of separation and preservation, and an emblem of cooking) because of her longing for her burning home (her hearth), while relics, these most sacred *things*, do travel, of course, but for the most part as fragmentary (a semiologist would say metonymic) 'messengers' of an originating entombment: the sacred relic is like a metastatic displacement of the hierotopical *site*. The *oiko-logia* of the sacred is made of such tensions and oppositions, as in its originary associations with blood sacrifice — an echo of which is still present in the mythological paradigm of Remus's murder — and in the relations of its two fundamental topical determinations: *home* and *wilderness*. Both are defined in relation to human presence versus the trace of its absence, and to forms, as I have said, of habitation — dis-habitation uniquely attached to specific features of the physical world<sup>4</sup>.

It is the aesthetic (in the etymological sense of 'sensational') and anthropological roots of this 'transcendent physicality' of the sacred that concern me here, as well as some of its possible contemporary derivations. The stage within which this dialectic of experience is played out, is that of the

<sup>4</sup> In archaic Greek, different forms of *ieréus* / *ieròs* denote the "sacrifier" ("the one who kills for the gods") and *ieréion* is "the victim of a sacrifice". *Agios*, on the other hand, derives from *azomai*, "to be respectfully fearful", and means "saint, consecrated". But here too there appears to be ambivalence in the notion of consecration, because it can shift to meanings such as "totally given over to the infernal gods", and hence, "damned". See: *Chantraine P.* Dictionnaire Etymologique de la Langue Grecque. Paris, 1968, p. 25–26 and 457–458. Emile Benveniste (*Benveniste E.* Le Vocabulaire des Institutions Européennes. Paris, 1969) has written: "...it is also in Latin that one discovers the ambiguous character of the 'sacred': consecrated to the gods and imbued of an unerasable pollution [*souillure*], august and cursed, worthy of veneration and inspiring horror. This double value is specific of *sacer*; it contributes to distinguish *sacer* and *sanctus*, because it does not affect in any degree the related adjective *sanctus*" (p. 188). There seems to be a strong connection between the two notions, however, as the great linguist observes: "One could say that *sanctum* is what is located at the periphery of *sacrum*, what serves to isolate it from all contact" (p. 190), and, "if we then try to define what distinguishes *sacer* from *sanctus*, one could say that it is the difference between implicit sacredness, *sacer*, and explicit sacredness, *sanctus*. By itself, *sacer* has a value of its own, mysterious. *Sanctus* is the state that results from an interdiction of which people are responsible, from a prescription sustained by a law" (p. 191).

person — as subject of both waking and oneiric perception and as what I would call an *object-of-transience* in the world: body and corpse. The latter, I see as constitutive of the register of sacrality as it pertains to the institution of the human artifact. The perception and memory of *things*, like that of people, is both lasting and impermanent; the sacred (and sacrificial) operates, symbolically, at the boundary and conjunction of these two realms of experience: sensation and recollection.

It is not by chance that for vast periods and areas of human history our knowledge of artifacts is largely limited to ‘funerary objects’ — things, for the most part man-made, buried and preserved in association with the bodies of the dead. Conversely, in many of the non-literate cultures that have been the preserve of anthropologists, artifacts were and often still are disposed of and destroyed at the death of their makers and / or owners. All this, and more, points to a close, primary but dialectical relation between the conception of the human corpse as a ‘funerary object’ — that is, as the decaying remnant of a mnemonic (*immortal*) essence — and that of the human artifact as a ‘figure of sacralized permanence’. I. e., the first artifact, the *weapon*, is like both the instrument and symbol of that first objectification of the person-as-body that is the *corpse*: bones and crafted spear-heads commixed? Paleolithic sediments.

A verse by the poet John Ashbery reads: “Only one thing exists, the fear of death”. This is a modern post-nihilist conception, but the *awareness* of death — of un-doing — to which so much early art seems associated, certainly is potentially destructive: a negative that cannot be ignored (that ‘no’ which animals cannot express, being, as they are, ‘purely affirmative’)<sup>5</sup>. The funerary rite would then be the first attempt at neutralizing the awareness of the negative, and in that sense, all rites may actually be seen as derivatives of funerary ones. Now rite is repetition of form, and in that sense, any ‘aesthetics’ is a derivative of that originating suspension of the matter-of-fact that is the *funeral*. The funeral marks both an end and a beginning: the end of an alien ‘presence’ and the beginning of an ‘absence’ that must be seized — that is, both channeled and *delayed*. This means that ‘presence’ and ‘absence’ only become ‘equivalent’ in the ‘*travail du deuil*’ — in the ‘work of mourning’ — which transposes it on a new experiential plane, *that of hierotopy*. It is here that we can look at the co-occurrence of this ‘beginning’ and this ‘end’: *the end is the present*. The inevitable paradox of this present, in traditional terms,

<sup>5</sup> “Let us keep it present in mind: It is humans who first reach the abysmal bottom, those who dwell in the hidden shade of death and hence can die. An animal cannot die, it stops living. From this might follow the fact that the animal cannot think. Thought lives of an elective affinity with death” (*Heidegger M. Principi del pensiero. Conferenze di Friburgo del 1957. Seconda conferenza e riepilogo della prima conferenza // Conferenze di Brema e di Friburgo. Milano, 2002, p. 148*).

is to contain, intrinsically, the ‘absence’ of the dead, which in the sacred time of the rite — since the time of ritual is *not* that of the present, *nor* of the past or the future, it is a *time-in-place*, a ‘hierochronia’. It becomes then a *presence / absence* of the *person-as-thing*, and of the *object-as-memory*.

In other words: the interruption of time — death — sets the rite into motion, which in turn ‘inaugurates’ an Other time. A time neither retro-spective nor pro-spective, but perhaps, though in a special sense, both at once (hence a *sym-bolic* time). I say inaugurates, which means: that it ‘introduces to the augury’ — the augural time of the site is its capacity, its power, to project itself forward while ‘glancing backwards’ (as well as upwards and downwards). The archaic funerary site (and in this sense, every funerary site is ‘archaic’) is like a platform which swings in all directions: a concretion of time — yet also blind to past and ‘future’. The site of prophesy is a multidimensional Cross. Traditional thought uses time to affirm its spatial continuity — to translate it into a focal point, a permanent place. In *hierotopy*, time is re-absorbed by the place.

Sacrality rests, in my view, in the tension between contiguity and distance, presence and absence, that results from the symbolization of death — and hence, by extension, from that of any collectively and individually sanctioned ‘end’, ‘beginning’, and ‘recurrence’. In other words, the *sym-bolic* nature of these tensions resides precisely in their capacity to sustain and mediate contradiction throughout the flow of time. It is here that the rite’s indispensable role in insuring the *efficacy* of symbols through time intervenes. Despite their archetypal substance, symbols are all too often unstable and precarious in their forms, and thus in need of constant and periodic (rhythmic) *renewal*. Ritual repetition guarantees that the space-temporal *hierotopos* is maintained — that place and socius are identified in time. This ‘time’, though, is not the quantifiable absolute of our post-Medieval reckoning — but objectual *duration* — that is, once more, the ‘concrete’ (hierotopical) point of conjunction between absence and presence<sup>6</sup>.

And yet, this codification-repetition also contains its own self-corroding element, which is its fatal rigidity, in and of itself antinomical to that symbolical oscillation between body and corpse, image and memory, that constitutes the transcendent knot of archaic sociality. That is why the ritual mode must generate as part of its operation an *anti-rite* (a Carnival, or something of that sort), often half-concealed in its behavioral forms. Without this re-

<sup>6</sup> The abstraction / reification of time corresponds, in the late Middle Ages, to its quantification — which is in itself quite interesting: why does the abstract become a ‘thing’, an object? Thus communal time — the sundial, already an incipient standardization and decontextualization — finally becomes, with the personal watch, portable individual time — which is (unspokenly) referred to an unknown and unknowable, absolute time (Chronos), that same Time, that once, in a mythical era, had had to be first castrated, then killed.

constituting play, which ever again re-enacts and unleashes the life-giving forces of chaos, the sacral-ritual entropy would end up exhausting the seeds of renewal within the ritual order itself. That is why the codified breaking of taboo is an intrinsic part of the sacred — and of its *site* (the killing of Remus, and so many other trans-gressors, again) — which is as if suspended between life and death, between “this world” and “the other world”.

Death is always the death of Others, and (as already hinted) it can be said to have two components: the body-object and the memory of the life-appearance. In death, the Other goes from ‘seeming alive’ to ‘seeming dead’. While alive, the person’s state or condition may be inferred by analogy to the states and conditions in our own consciousness, and the other person who is (still) alive similarly reacts to our presence. In the recognition of the Other, from the subjects we were we simultaneously become objects of this re-action — that is, we find a reflection of ourselves in the very perception of ourselves as other-than-ourselves. This is mysterious enough; but once dead, the Other becomes even more of a ‘mystery’ — as if split between matter and ‘internalized absence’ by an obsidian “smoking mirror” (to adopt the ancient Mexican figure). That is: the absence of life (or the ‘absent life’) of the dead person is only perceptible as a memory-consciousness of that very same absence. On the one hand, this memory is also a sort of second-degree absence (or double-absence, in as much as it is real and perceived as irreversible) and on the other hand its irreversible nature also becomes a new and different type of ‘presence’. The dead person’s *remains* are fixed in this new *topical* timelessness. And it is this that can turn him or her into a ‘ghost’. *All* ghosts are tied to a specific place — a trait, as we have seen, of the sacred-numinous — but most specters have died without, or with improper, funerary, i. e., ritual-aesthetic ‘treatment’.

While a ‘remembered’ physical identity vanishes in time — with the passing of those who can recall it — it is still subject, while being progressively de-personalized, to being more or less indissolubly bound to a *place* by ritual operations that assimilate the emplacement-of-death to that of *sacri-ficium*, where the body-corpse becomes the object-of-worship. This is how the sacrality of a *site* is gradually born (*hiero-topos*). To put it more generally: because of the death-awareness which originally constitutes our humanity, *every* death is, in some way, a sacrifice — so that, conversely, every sacrifice re-enacts our ‘impossible’ separation from the dead<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> I shall have to leave for another occasion further discussion of this sacrificial aspect of the question, and related issues; yet, let me cite, once more, Benveniste: “Why does ‘to sacrifice’ really mean ‘put to death’, when it properly means ‘to make sacred’ (cf. *sacri-ficium*). Why does sacrifice necessarily imply a ‘putting to death?’” (Op. cit., p. 188). See also: Douglas M. Purity and Danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo. London, 1966.

If ritual consciousness, or consciousness of the sacred, implies setting some form of memory *in motion* — it is not just a matter of remembering certain facts and certain acts that must be repeated in a certain order. Ritual, or sacred, memory is above all ‘memory-of-memory’: a second-degree, or meta-memory, so to speak. It recalls, while re-activating and re-evoking them, words and actions which are in turn the repetition-reconstruction of ‘original’ gestures and sayings; yet, it is invariably presumed that there is an origin of which the first rite is already a “memory”, and successive ones are therefore memories of that memory, or of that particular way of remembering the original and (originating) event. If it is so, why is it and how is it that this *originating* event has been constituted as a source of ritual double-memoried action-words? The question, once more, is perhaps unanswerable, as it bears on the very origin of our humanity. But one thing is certain: the ‘giving in’ to ritual flow — to its *alternative* time-place — is favored by the alteration consciousness brought on by substances that are in different ways inebriating; but the balance between the accurate, precise redefinition of the sacral limit that the ritual aims to bring about and this condition of suspension from being present to the daily time-place which ideally can favor the experience of it — and hence its effectiveness, not least as an offering — is very problematical and always difficult to sustain. At the end of a three day yearly ritual a Mexican native said: “This year the feast was not very jolly, nobody died in it!” And we may also recall the use of the French adjective *sacré*, in certain contexts, as equivalent to the English “bloody”, or “damn”.

If this is the root of our founding archaic consciousness, what can we say, more specifically (though still quite generally) about the corpse-as-artifact — that is, the corpse as something that *demand*s manipulation and transformation? It may be interesting to list certain key characteristics of the corpse-object while keeping in mind the way we deal with art objects in our Christian and modern ages:

*Corpse (the “dead person”):*

1. It belongs to the register of the ‘separate’, and of a unique sort of ‘instrumentation’.
2. It has an ‘ambiguous’ statute: the spirit both is and isn’t associated with the object.
3. Only pre-ordained and codified (‘ritual’) interventions are allowed on it.
4. The ‘value’ of the object transcends its ‘material’ make-up.
5. The ultimate destination of the object is that of being ‘treasured’ and / or becoming a *monument*.
6. A double-naming is associated to the object: a) pertaining to a category, and b) individually ‘unique’.

7. The constituting moment of the object (the ‘time-date’ of its death-origin) is crucial.
8. There is an identified *ideal place* for the object: the site as an object of pilgrimage and the final identification of place and object (the object becomes the ‘place’).
9. The eminently (paradigmatic) *individuality* of the object vs. its eminently collective and public re-constitution (there can be no corpse without a ‘cult’).
10. The object’s *factura*: the given-remembered object is re-made (or re-made) in order to become *what-it-will be*.
11. The object is sacralized by *subtraction*.

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It would appear, even just from the schematic list above, that echoes of the archaic, sacri-ficial corpse may resonate in our modern work of art. In all its intrinsically reductive quality, it is added on to the inanimate world — as a sort of corpse-object, in its fixity and inevitable, if slow, decay — but also in that it takes away something essential from the flux of things, from ‘life’. Like the corpse, our ‘aesthetic object’ is as much a subtraction as an addition. Our object of art, though, is ‘separated’ — i. e., in some way, ‘sacralized’ — independently of the eventual death of those who made it and those who received it. It is born separate, so to speak, just as any ‘birth’, and any creation, as we know, results invariably from a *separation* that must be ‘healed’<sup>8</sup>.

Yet, in a highly quantified world, the qualitatively distinct is precarious at best, so that we might wonder, at this point, what may be the refuge of the sacred in a supposedly secularized society, such as the modern one, in which the subversion of all values and the dialectic of the negative, have in a manner of speech reversed the roles of rule and infraction in the traditional sacral relationship. If it is correct to see the symbolic origin of the latter in the paradoxical knot that connects — dis-connects the presence-absence of the dead person with the ambivalent power of the body-corpse (*pharmakon* / poison / pollution), what has all that come to in a world deprived of its dead-ones (and ancestors), and in which the corpse has lost most of its original connotations — and in which, incidentally, it is not *resurrected*? The taboo once attached to death, and desire — *eros* and *thanatos* — no longer carries the stigma of an absolute interdiction, and hence its infraction, reduced, at most, to the level of a moral and social blunder, cannot induce that

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<sup>8</sup> Perhaps significantly (but I cannot get into this here), some of the determinations above also apply to the newborn-as-object.

ritualized reversal of the experiential order which is the condition of its preservation and reinforcement, as I have mentioned. As a consequence, rituals have themselves become just ‘ceremonies’, aimed at propagating implicit and explicit agendas. While the archaic rite has no ‘content’, and thus no explanation, *per se* — it is an action of absolute significance, which can be described and even interpreted, yet remains ultimately as *inscrutable* as death itself — our ceremonies are all too often aimed at sanctioning power structures which they mask more than reveal. Guy Debord has famously spoken of these ceremonial patterns as a function of what he called *la société du spectacle*, but beyond such characterizations what interests me here is to see if in the disappearance of the old ritual order there is still something that can be posited, in some way, as a sacred-aesthetic substitute for the archaic corpse and its symbolic conundrums. More specifically in relation to our theme, we can ask ourselves whether it is still possible to speak of a non- or post-religious sacrality of place in the modern world.

Museums, of course, immediately come to mind in this respect, and I shall try to say a few words about them below, but first I wish to take my cue from one specific and in some way already ‘historical’ example of a particular semi-private / semi-public artistic project, which in its origin and its later display and publication combined some of those elements of body-image fixation, separate (and even secluded) locality, quasi-ritual settings and procedures, and taboo. A gallery in Cologne recently published, in conjunction with an exhibition, ‘all’ of the ‘polaroids’ made by Andy Warhol at his Factory — every night, over a brief period of time — ‘documenting’ the ‘staged’ erotic activities of professional male (and in rare cases, female) prostitutes, hired as models for this purpose<sup>9</sup>. Their subject matter is still to a certain extent marked by interdiction, in spite of the widespread current accessibility of pornography on so much media (and especially the ubiquitous “web”), so that their display and reproduction constitutes an infraction of taboo (Warhol himself had not shown these images other than to his close circle of collaborators). Their ‘historical’ character, given the post-mortem consecration of the artist — who in the common public’s eye went from being a self-promoting and self-staged “celebrity” to being perhaps the most ‘consecrated’ artist of the past forty years (not least, in *museums* all over the world) — mutes the taboo and its infraction but does not do away with it altogether. While excess, including sacrifice, could mark the evocation of the archaic dead ancestor (in some cases, even the unearthing of his body-corpse), the dead-artist, the artist-ancestor, can himself become the icon of excess and transgression — whether or not he himself might have ‘practiced’ it. What used to be symbolic, codified, and rit-

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<sup>9</sup> Warhol A. Polaroids. Köln, 2003.

ual ‘contradictions’, have now become personal and biographical ones, which are assimilated, manipulated and diffused in turn by the mass media. (As it happens, and for whatever it may be worth, it is known that Warhol, a Catholic by birth, attended Holy Mass every morning before going to “The Factory”, his studio, at least in the last years of his life.)

The polaroid camera was first devised to take ‘family snapshots’ and be able to right away comment on them and play with them. The slight delay of resolution makes the appearance of the image more suspenseful than in today’s digital cameras. By forgoing having to be processed by a professional laboratory, the Polaroid broke the last ‘taboo’ concerning the reproduction of semblance, making of everybody an image-maker (a ‘magician’). The last separation (read, ‘sacredness’) attached to the production of the image was thus removed. In addition, with his sexually explicit polaroid shots, Warhol not only exposed the fact that the new machine allowed *anybody* to become ‘creative’ as a secret pornographer, but he stripped any residual shame that might still be attached to the reproduction of a resemblant image. Thus, also in this respect, the de-sacralization of the human image — that very image that had begun in immemorial time with the funerary ‘treatment’ of the dead body, as I have proposed — could not be more complete. And yet, when one recalls that certain temples and cults in antiquity, for instance, had sacred prostitutes attached to them and saw their sexual mingling with strangers, and one considers that Warhol’s staging of sexual acts by prostitutes, night after night, was similarly secluded, one may see the reemergence in the modern aesthetic-artistic mode of the paradoxical (para-symbolic?) charge of the *hiero-topos*<sup>10</sup>.

Ever since the ancient Greeks, if not before, Western artists have made *indecent* images for more or less private use (and Chinese, Indian, and Japanese instances are also well-known), but in Warhol’s case, it is no longer possible to speak in terms of a realm of the ‘private’, as distinct from that of a public persona: deviance, even when not ‘displayed’, is implicit to the entire ‘figure’ and work of the artist, it is in fact a defining aspect of it — making it in this sense the true American counterpart to the Western European one of Josef Beuys (as Warhol seemed to know, since he insisted on meeting the German artist and made a whole series of portraits of him). This also and primarily in the mechanization of the medium which ‘pretends’ to deny the uniqueness and ‘inspiration’ of traditional *factura*, just as it promotes the role of the maker-manufacturer and his “factory”. The tension-contradiction between the exclu-

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<sup>10</sup> It is perhaps not by chance that this ‘work’ was conceived of and executed in America, but could only be shown and published in Germany. This additional contradiction would appear to belong to what I have had occasion to call (at the time of the Clinton sex scandals) the ‘porno-puritan’ complex in the media-culture of the United States of America.

sive, almost sectarian character of the Factory and its open-to-all *facies*, the transgressive nature of the activities which — certainly in the case discussed here — took place there, and the ‘instant iconicity’ of the works that emerged from there towards the homes of contemporary art’s collectors and the halls of museums, echoes something of the ambivalence and of the trans-historicity of archaic sacrality, at least in the way that the latter handles the meta-physicality of death and its relation to the present-impermanent sense of life — one that constantly oscillates between devout separation and mystical-ecstatic contiguity (to the point of irreverence), as we said. Not by chance, throughout all his life, Warhol often depicted himself in close association with images of death. It is as though, in late modernity, that trans-position of life in death, prefigured by Christianity (as the Resurrection), had been achieved in the definitive transfiguration of the object-of-death, the ‘corpse’, into the object of art, first, then finally into its *image*<sup>11</sup>. We went from sacred-separate, to saintly-radiating, to metastatic image.

But what ‘image’ is this? There is the reproduced image *of* the work of art and there is the image reproduced *in* it. Warhol’s “polaroids” are infinitely reproducible, but the ‘poses’ they reproduce are unique, of *that* place, (the “Factory”), *that* time, and the object-image especially selected by the artist in this case (unlike in other instances: famously, Warhol was given to taking pictures incessantly, particularly in public places), the polaroid, is an ‘original’ positive for which there is no negative — and so, while it might be reproducible (like all images today) it, too, is *unique*. In this work, this uniqueness is contradicted by the great number of more or less similar ‘shots’ and ‘poses’, as well as by their mechanical reproduction, but lingers nonetheless. It is my provisional contention, here, that our late-modern art work is still in some way *sym-bolically* perched between the quasi-sacrality of its unique hierotopia-hierochronia and the de-sacralized modalities of its consumption of unlimited reproducibility.

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There are all-too-obvious analogies between the accumulations of personal objects and paraphernalia in so many tomb complexes of early urban civilizations and those in the myriad museums of our late-urban and suburban ‘global’ one. In both instances, there is the creation of an enclosed, separate place for the harboring of rare and precious items, natural and artificial, which often had begun as an individual’s personal ‘collections’, of one sort or another. These latter day treasure-houses are also marked by numerous

<sup>11</sup> Hans Belting has memorably dealt with many aspects of this transition and transformation. See, for instance, *Belting H. Bild und Kult — Eine Geschichte des Bildes von dem Zeitalter der Kunst*. Munich, 1990.

taboos, relating to both their spaces and their contents. In this sense, they are also sacred-separate sites that have become in themselves monuments and landmarks. But it is as if in moving from their early prevalently hypogean locations to the high-rising castles of today these ‘*hierotopical* assemblages’ have undergone profound transformations. First of all, of course, from semi-publicly-originated semi-private recesses to semi-privately-originated public settings. Yet, their access is still restricted and governed by many regulations, boundaries and interdictions: in the museum one is constantly aware of being watched — not just by guards, but as if by immaterial and material presences (the objects themselves, and their separate abodes) — and of special rules of behavior by which one should abide: every single visit — always delimited, as in archaic ceremonies, by a certain time-frame — has a ritual character of sorts, and the sum of all visits by the public, cumulatively and at any given time, might look to an extra-planetary observer as a curious amalgam of many private rituals joined into some sort of collective ceremonial kaleidoscope.

A thousand things have changed, of course: we go to museums to confront what we call “history” — natural or otherwise — documents of past or quasi-present existence; but it is still death and disappearance, in many different forms, that we confront within their quasi-sacred walls. And if we look at my avowedly rather arbitrary comparison in reverse, isn’t the museum that space where we also aim to ‘stop’ time, where time is visualized and experienced not just as sequence, but *simultaneously*, as a *site-of presence*, and as a *space-of-immortality*? Then perhaps, in this sense at least, the great Tretyakov Gallery, with all its glowing icons, is not that different, after all, from the Great Pyramids at Giza, and all their vivid mummies and polychromous corpses...

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Summing up what I have been trying to say. In approaching the issue of the ‘sacred’ *in art* it is impossible not to take into consideration, anthropologically, that of *art in the ‘sacred’*. Obviously, they are not the same thing. The first can make do with seeing how these expressive configurations which by convention and tradition we call ‘art’ were nourished by religious contents — more or less manifest and transparent to us, through centuries and millennia — giving rise to “sacred art”. The second is more problematical, in that it aims to uncover the ‘artistic’ as an irreducible element of sacredness itself. This implies clearly delicate defining questions: what ‘art’ is one referring to and what ‘sacredness’? About the latter: if we recall that basic to the sacred is its connotation of *taboo*, that the sacred is, before all other qualifications, that-which-cannot-be-touched, we may have to recognize at

the root of sacrality something essentially ‘non-artistic’. But if the sacred is also that-which-must-be-touched-and situated but only in certain (ritual) ways, then one must also acknowledge a con-naturality of the sacred and art — that is, of *sacred doing*, both in the sense of ‘generating the sacred *object*’ (making separate something that wasn’t) and of ‘de-sacralizing the sacred *object*’ (re-integrating the separate).

Everything appears to revolve around the determination of the statute and placement of the object *at any given time*: does it or doesn’t it *belong* in the *flux* of life? Through it all, it would appear that the category of separation underlies any sacral dimension. And yet this is not a separation as distance: it is both a special sort of ‘closeness’ and a ‘going beyond’. The sacred entity is both right *there*, in that *topos*, yet also separate (*hieros*). Because, as I mentioned, there is always a connotation of *inter-diction*: something *said-in-between*, that interrupts dis-course, the connection between “things and words” that we call “action”. Recognition of the discontinuity in things is what makes repetition necessary in word-actions, and it is this consciousness of ‘repeated action’ that we call ‘ritual’. What is its origin? I think it lies in the symbolic knot that derives from the sustainable-unsustainable consciousness of that continuity-discontinuity we call death. This implies the necessary integration of Non-being within Being (and of the non-existent within the existent), leading in turn to that of the in-visible within the visible (and vice versa). This Invisible may then become that which, again and again, must be re-visualized. In late modernity such re-visualization has become essentially mediatic — it has lost its body-corpse, but not the image of it.

Remembering, again, that Andy Warhol’s innumerable serigraphed and painted skulls — *memento mori* — many of which were actually self-portraits, I would like to close these provisional notes on the Ur-aesthetics of the corpse by quoting a “skull fragment”, from Osip Mandelstam’s famous *55 Lines about the Unknown Soldier* (here in David McDuff’s translation):

Must the skull be unwound entirely  
 from temple to temple,  
 so that the troops cannot but pour  
 into its dear eye socket?  
 The skull is unwound from life  
 entirely — from temple to temple —  
 it teases itself with the purity of its seams,  
 gleams like an understanding cupola,  
 foams with thought, dreams of itself —  
 cap of caps and motherland to motherlands —  
 a cap sewn like a starry scar —  
 cap of happiness — Shakespeare's father.

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АНТРОПОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ ИЕРОТОПИИ:  
АРХАИЧЕСКИЕ И СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ МЕСТА СВЯЩЕННОГО

С антропологической точки зрения *иеротопия* является неизбежным продолжением *ойкологии* — описания священных мест, определяющих структуру обитаемого мира. Как и в случае с другими подобными человеческими константами, их всеобщность и повсеместность способны замаскировать существующие между ними различия, как временные, так и пространственные. Исследовать эти различия и их контексты (например, сравнить «священные места» у полукочевых охотников-собирателей, скажем, у конголезских пигмеев или австралийских аборигенов и в протогородских и городских сообществах) здесь не представляется возможным. Я ограничусь попыткой проследить отношения между иеротопией и культом мертвого тела, которые, по-видимому, являются весьма древними, а также их связь с некоторыми явлениями современной художественной культуры.

В филологии *топосом* называют «общее место», в то время как термин *иерос* указывает на нечто, обладающее особой ценностью, или на нечто, отделенное от остального, выведенное из сферы общего опыта. Итак, перед нами по крайней мере два четко обозначенных символических уровня иеротопии. Один указывает на важную и многослойную амбивалентность сакрального, которое, например, может быть или не быть «человеческим». На другом уровне сакральное переплетается со *всеобщим*, или разделяет характеристики *топоса*. На обоих уровнях эта символика находится под воздействием сакральных моделей, относящихся к разнородным сферам. Она связывает воедино иератическую трансцендентность и имманентность места («небеса» и «землю»). Более того, *топос* представляет собой обитаемое место, по крайней мере потенциально (даже если он предстает как *пустыня*, в ее предельной пустоте, что мы видим в модели анахоретов, выбирающих для себя и осваивающих дикие места), в то время как *иерос* — это качество, которому свойственна привязка к осязаемым «объектам» или, как минимум, к объективации и, часто, визуализации неощутимого присутствия. Даже «слышимое сакральное» требует объективных коррелятов — произнесения вслух или письменной фиксации.

Итак, для меня *иеротопия* является и *сакрализацией* пространства в процессе его освоения людьми, и *локализацией* опыта сакрализации. Изначально *объект* сакрального представляет собой его отсутствие-через-неотъемлемое-бытие. Теперь можно сказать, что такой статус внутренней сакральности, при всем ее амбивалентном слиянии присут-

ствия (тело, объект) и отсутствия (память, душа), имеет отношение прежде всего к состоянию смерти.

Хотелось бы заметить, что основание сакрального также выражается в «изначально» двойственном отношении между *иерос* и *ойкос*, с одной стороны, и *иерос* и *геа* — с другой. *Ойкос* определен огнем и камнями очага — от домашнего очага до Горы в Иерусалиме сакральность укоренена в обитании на земле, в напряжении и противоречиях между одомашненным (огонь) и диким (скала, проточная вода). И все же даже эти архетипические знаки в своей *символической* концентрации и протяженности являются двойными: огонь беспорядочно и внезапно поражает и разрушает небо и землю, дом и дикое пространство, в то время как вода, зачастую обладая той же сокрушительной силой, является необходимой частью очистительного и священного омовения.

Сакральное может быть привязано к движению жизни, может перемещаться на огромные расстояния и даже быть эпизодическим и мимолетным, однако в то же время оно несет в себе вес камней. Реликвии, эти наиболее сакральные *вещи*, путешествуют, однако по большей части как фрагментарные (семиотики сказали бы: метонимические) «посланники» порождающего их захоронения: священная реликвия предполагает перемещение священного *места*. *Ойкология* сакрального соткана из подобного напряжения и противоречий, как в ее изначальном ассоциировании с кровавой жертвой, отзвук которого присутствует в мифологической парадигме убийства Рема, так и в отношениях между двумя фундаментальными определениями топоса: *дом* и пустынное *пространство*. Оба описываются в отношении к присутствию человека или к следам его отсутствия, к формам обитания-необитания, уникальным в специфических чертах физического мира.

Меня интересуют в данном случае эстетические (в этимологическом смысле «чувственные») и антропологические корни такой «трансцендентной физической реальности» сакрального, равно как и некоторые возможные современные проявления. Сцена, на которой разыгрывается этот диалектический опыт, — это личность как таковая, субъект восприятия как в момент бодрствования, так и в момент дремоты, а также в роли, которую я называю *объект-мимолетности* в мире: тело и труп. Последнее я рассматриваю как конституирующий элемент на уровне сакрального, поскольку оно относится к созданию человеческих артефактов. Восприятие и память о *вещах*, как и о людях, являются и долгосрочными, и краткосрочными. Сакральное (относящееся к богослужбной, жертвенной практике) символически действует на границе и в точке пересечения этих двух сфер опыта: ощущений и воспоминаний.

Не случайно в течение длительных периодов и на широких просторах человеческой истории наши знания об артефактах в значительной

степени ограничены «погребальными объектами» — вещами, в основном, сделанными руками человека, которые были захоронены и сохранены в связи с телом умершего. И наоборот, во многих бесписьменных культурах, сохраненных усилиями антропологов, артефакты были и зачастую раздаются или разрушаются после смерти их создателя и/или владельца. Все это, и многое другое, указывает на тесные, изначальные, но диалектические, отношения между понятием человеческого тела (трупа) как «погребального объекта» — то есть разлагающихся останков мнемонической (*бессмертной*) сущности — и понятием человеческого артефакта как «фигуры сакральной неизменности».

Наши художественные музеи подобны своего рода *иеро-домам* — они размещают, хранят и передают для вечного воспоминания широчайшее собрание «эстетических трупов» (нечто вроде *cadavres exquis* в их фрагментированном хранении и выставочных подборках и композициях), составленных из возможно большего числа продуктов и осколков мировых ремесел, в значительной мере религиозного, в том числе и погребального, происхождения.

Бесчисленные ритуалы, от неолитических времен до наших дней, свидетельствуют о трупе как культовом инструменте, с которым связана прото-метафизика Смерти, предполагающая фокусирование внимания на преобразении жизни и смерти. Даже беглое сравнение мертвой-персоны-как-объекта с художественно-историческими предметами западной культуры раскроет очевидное сходство, позволяющее предположить, что могут быть установлены широчайшие квази-сакральные коннотации между тем, что мы называем *эстетическими вещами*. В данном контексте следует особенно подчеркнуть, насколько важным ключом к пониманию отношений между трупом и художественным объектом является их связь с *табу*, т. е. системой топических и топологических запретов, выраженных самым разным образом (например, идеологией многих модернистских движений или нашими музеями).

Настоящее исследование исходит из гипотезы, что ключевой элемент «иеротопического» или «изначального» (в хайдеггеровском смысле слова) размещения священного может быть найден в сакрализации и эстетизации мертвого тела как локализованного субъекта чувств и памяти. Этот элемент заключается в погребальном пересечении «отсутствующего» с «живущим», который играл существенную роль в культе предков и прото-историческом сознании, — и именно здесь мы можем обнаружить первые попытки эстетического осмысления сакральных пространств.