

II. Settlement

To settle in the landscape means to delimit an area, a place. We stop our wandering and say: *Here!* Then we create an "inside" within the encompassing "outside." The settlement is therefore a point of arrival.³⁵ Still we may somewhere have the fine experience of approaching a settlement which waits for us like a "thing." First we grasp the main outline and perhaps a dominant element, such as a steeple. Getting closer, the shape becomes more articulate, and begins to suggest something about what is hidden inside. Depending on where we come from, the experience varies. If we come through the forest it is different from coming across the fields or over the sea; but always we have the sense of having reached a goal. Like a magnet it attracts us, and arouses our expectations.

How, then, does a settlement become a goal? The very experience of arrival implies a relationship to what is left behind. A goal does not exist in a vacuum; it is only a goal in relation to its environment. We have already suggested that this relation consists in its "gathering" the surrounding world. Thus the settlement acts as a *center* and invites man to dwell. At a center we shall not feel that we are in a *different* place, but where the environment is "explained." Somebody who has his personal dwelling out in the countryside should not feel a foreigner when visiting the center, but rather experience that his own place becomes part of a larger whole.

A settlement may gather a more or less comprehensive world. The farm and the village are related to their immediate surroundings (although these usually belong to a larger region), whereas the town has a wider frame of reference. The capital city, finally, ought to function as a gathering center

to a whole country. In general, the problem is to settle in such a way that a "friendly" relationship with the site is established. Such a friendship implies that man respects and takes *care* of the given place. Taking care, however, does not mean to leave things as they are; rather they ought to be revealed and cultivated. Thus the settlement interprets the site and transforms it into a place where human life may take place.

Every landscape has a certain character and spatial structure which are denoted by names. Thus we say: "valley," "basin" and "plain"; that is, spaces which vary with the topography and the presence of rocks, vegetation and water. The orientation is also important, as it relates the site to natural light and to a particular microclimate. Landscapes possess a varying degree of complexity, comprising subordinate localities with a distinct character. In the past such differences determined the localization of sanctuaries which represented the natural "forces."³⁶ Particularly significant are the centers suggested by the landscape itself, that is, those places where the world so to speak gathers itself. Natural centers obviously play a decisive role in determining the choice of a "here" for human settlement, and therefore ought to be given some attention.

What properties, then, distinguish a natural center? In general we may say that the natural center is a place where earth and sky are interrelated to form a conspicuous totality. This happens in three characteristic ways. First, the earth may rise up towards the sky to form a peak or ridge. The "high place," thus, has always been preferred by man, not only because it gives a sense of being closer to heaven, but because it offers the possibility to overlook the surrounding world. Thus it gives a con-

vincing sense of being at the center. Second, the earth may "receive" the sky by receding to form a basin or valley. Such depressions are usually more fertile than the surrounding land and therefore indicate the presence of the sky as a fertilizing agent. A basin is furthermore surrounded by an elevated horizon which endows the sky with the quality of a regular dome. Finally, the earth may reflect the sky and blend with it. This happens when the ground contains a circumscribed water surface, such as a pond, lake or bay. The lake gathers the world in a catoptric image, which, since it stands upside-down, reveals the general atmosphere of the place rather than its constituent things. The image, however, is not flat, but comprises the height of the sky as well as the depth of the earth. The explanation it offers is therefore unfathomable, and the world appears as a place of simultaneous revelation and concealment. No wonder, hence, that man always experienced lakes and bays as significant goals, where he could find rest from his wandering.

When a natural center is used for the localization of a settlement, architecture serves to reveal and emphasize qualities that are already present. We call this process *visualization*.³⁷ Buildings, thus, may give emphasis to a peak or a ridge, as is illustrated by innumerable Italian hill-towns. Or they may form a center to a basin, or a point of arrest to the movement of a valley (often together with a bridge which connects its two sides). Or, finally, buildings may follow the delimitation of a lake or a bay and offer points of observation, from where the mirror-play of earth and sky may be experienced.

When a natural center is not present, as in the desert or on an extended

plain, architecture has to add what is lacking. We call this process *complementation*. That is, buildings are used to define an area, and establish a relationship between earth and sky. Desert architecture in fact consists of two conspicuous elements: the perimetral wall which gives halt to infinite extension, and the slender vertical (e.g. the minaret) which is simultaneously center and *axis mundi*. In both cases the transformation of the site into a place for dwelling is achieved by means of built form and organized space, and we have to consider both aspects in some detail in order to understand the nature of the settlement. As a point of departure for the discussion, we shall take the experience of *arrival*.

To serve as a goal, a settlement has to possess *figural* quality in relation to the surrounding landscape. It is this quality that makes it possible to call the settlement a "place." A group of buildings only appears as a figure if it is relatively dense, or has a clear delimitation. The city walls of the past therefore did not only serve fortificatory purposes, but contributed essentially to the identity of the place. If buildings are scattered around, this identity is lost, at the same time as the continuous ground of the landscape is destroyed. Figural quality, however, changes somewhat according to the local topographical conditions. In a grand landscape large units of buildings are more natural than where the environment possesses a varied "microstructure." In general, figural quality depends on built form *and* organized space.

Morphology

When we approach a settlement, the skyline is usually of decisive importance. What we perceive is a figure

