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LANDSCAPES OF TRANSCENDENCE: THE ANICONIC SACRALITY OF MOUNTAIN GEOGRAPHIES

Sanjeeva Guneratne [1]
Upendra RMK Rajapaksha [2]
Faiz MMT Marikar [3]

[1] Department of Architecture, Southern Campus-General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University (KDU), Sewanagala, Sri Lanka, https://orcid.org/0009-0005-5399-4154
[2] Department of Architecture, University of Moratuwa, Katubedda, Sri Lanka https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8921-7027
[3] Staff Development Centre, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Kandawala, Ratmalana, Sri Lanka, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4579-7263

Abstract

This study presents a philosophical and theoretical overview of the process by which "geography and spiritual growth converge" in the construction of sacrality and experience of transcendence in the aniconic mountain sacredscapes of the world. Parallel concepts such as apophasis and archetypicality are explored in order to emphasise their points of convergence, it is supported by a literature review that explores the commonalities between Buddhist Insight Meditation, geo-phenomenology and major Western discourses on transcendence and the wilderness as a restorative landscape. In this fashion, common ontological and epistemological ground is sought against the backdrop of what is evidently a rapprochement between these traditions in the modern era. This paper, therefore, is an attempt at integrating South and Southeast Asian notions of sacrality with Western psychobiological perspectives. The outcome shows the challenges and possibilities for the resacralisation of mountain sacredscapes the world over.

Keywords: "sacredscape", mountain, transcendence, aniconic, archetypal; nature; phenomenology; apophatic

Introduction

1.1 Mountain as "sacredscape"

The notion of "external landscapes [functioning as] a projected map of internal states of consciousness" (Lane, p. 40) is one that is well established in pilgrimage studies (Sing, 1995, p. 97; Duque & Ribeiro, 2024). It carries the implication that "any landscape is a condition of the human spirit" (Boettcher, 1970) and that the world is "pan-semiotised" (Barroso, 2017, p. 355), an idea that gained currency in the Asia-Pacific region centuries before the rise of Christianity (Wijesuriya, 2001, p. 49) and much more recently in the West with the advent of Romanticism (Giacomoni, 1970, pp. 118-119) and disciplines such as humanistic geography (Tuan, 2013).

A pilgrimage, by virtue of this logic, becomes a metaphor for our search for the eternal verities of existence. In such instances, the outer pilgrimage becomes a vehicle for the inner pilgrimage (Navaratnam, 1973, p.15; Coleman and Elsner, 1995, as cited in Piasecki, 2019, p. 17), the goal of which is union with God or self-realisation. This twofold aspect of pilgrimage correlates, respectively, with the two types of sacredscapes as defined in ancient Indian sacred lore, in the form of the Bhauma Tirtha and Manasa Tirtha (Sing, 1995, p. 97). The former concerns itself with the physicality of the terrain and the latter with the purified mental space of the individual who has achieved some form of self-transcendence (Singh, p. 97). The mountain landscape corresponds to a Bhauma Tirtha, replete with sensory cues that could help engender

Manasa Tirtha, which is a heightened state of consciousness achievable at its summit or while summiting it (Bernbaum, 1990, p. xiii; Tuan, p. 44).

By virtue of this symbolism, mountain landscapes function as axes mundi (Guénon, 1931/1996, p.51; Harrigan, n.d.-a, para. 13-15), "cosmic centres" (Sing, 1995, p. 96) and contemplative settings for the transcendence of mundane existence (Nan Shephard, as cited in Jordan, 2009, p. 14), obviating the need for any religious structure on its summit or slopes (Kalyanasunderam, 1980, p.7). By the same token, to mar their sacredscapes by building would be tantamount to an act of sacrilege (Kalyanasunderam, 1980, p.7, Fontefrancesco et al., 2023), due to the overwhelming presence and scale of nature that supersedes any form of sacrality engenderable through human intervention mediated by the built environment (Fredrick & Anderson, 1999, as cited in Williams & Harvey, 2001). Mountain settings in this fashion function as aniconic sylvan sacredscapes. As such, a philosophical and theoretical overview of the process by which "geography and spiritual growth converge" (Lane, 1998/2007, p. 11; Tuan, 2013) in the construction of sacrality and experience of transcendence on mountain sacredscapes would be a phenomenon that merits investigation.

Methodology

The aniconic, apophatic and archetypal

Before venturing any further, a few words of clarification regarding the above concepts might be in order. The words "aniconic" and "aniconism" have a long historiography, which harks back to ancient Greece by way of two 19th century German neologisms, anikonisch and aniconismus respectively. Both words are coinages of leading German classical archaeologist Adolph Overbeck (Overbeck 1864, as cited in Gaifman, 2017), who derived them from the ancient Greek aneikoniston, which simply designates "the quality of being not representable" (pp. 336-337). This definition also includes the rejection of figural representation by the three monotheistic Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, based on the "impossibility of representing the invisible God in visible form" (Gaifman, 2017, p. 346), which is referred to as "anti-iconism" (Gaifman, 2017, p. 349). The foregoing definitions bring us to the crux of the matter, problematizing the notion of the aniconic. Are elements of the landscape such as mountains, rivers and trees (Gaifman, 2017) "aniconic forms of deities that are originally anthropomorphic, or are the anthropomorphic forms the secondary forms of gods that are truly aniconic? What is the true form of a god?" (p. 348). I will attempt to provide an answer to this question in my validation of the use of the neologism "sacredscape" over the more commonly accepted "sacred landscape".

Throughout this paper, I have frequently opted to use the word "sacredscape" (Singh, 1995, p. 96), which is a neologism coined by Singh by combining the two words "sacred" and "landscape" in lieu of the phrase "sacred landscape", since it is an elegant and less cumbersome coinage equivalent in meaning to the latter. I also have resorted to using the terms alternately, one as a synonym for the other, to provide variation and nuance to the narrativity. Singh (1995) suggests that a sacredscape is more than a product of the mind and goes on to say that it is also the landscape of faith, belief system and a state of transcendental consciousness. He also goes on to explicate the process by which the "materialistic identity" of a place is transformed into a "cosmic integrity" where its "wholeness" is preserved" which, he avers, is what is meant by the word "holy" (p. 96). In the spiritual lexicon of Hindu India, this process is referred to as the transformation of mrinmaya, or matter, into chinmaya, or divine consciousness (Sri Sathya Sai, n.d.). The ensuing "faithscape" (Singh, 1995), yet another insightful neologism, "encompasses sacredness of place, sacred time, sacred meanings, and sacred rituals and embodies both symbolic and psyche elements" (p. 96). Here we have an answer to the conundrum, "What is the true form of a god?" (Gaifman, 2017, p. 348), provided by the Hindu ethos of ancient India. It is in the mind of the devotee that the materiality of nature, or mrinmaya, in the form of mountains, rivers, trees, is transformed into the spiritual stuff of divine consciousness, or chinmaya (Sri Sathya Sai, n.d.). Aniconism for the Hindu genius, which predates the Greek (Wijesuriya, 2001, p. 49), is a way of understanding the immanent spiritual reality of the illusory, visible universe of form, or Maya (Hanahan, 2002, p. 2; Coe & Houston, 2023). It is, therefore, a device and virtually a prerequisite for intuiting the reality that underlies the phenomenal world. This is the stance adopted throughout this paper with regard to the concept of aniconism and the aniconic sacrality of mountain geographies.

Closely tied up with the concept of aniconism is the notion of apophasis defined as "a discourse in which any single proposition is denied as falsifying, as reifying" (Sells, 1994, p. 12 as quoted in Hanahan, 2002, p. 1). Within the context of religion, this refers in particular to the universal ineffability of religious experiences

due to their transcendental nature (Hanahan, 2002, p. 2). Consequently, any attempt at communicating the reality of such experiences (as opposed to understanding their logocentric doctrinal and scriptural aspects), is bound to end in failure on account of the limitations that inhere in any form of verbalization of an experience. What is required, according to Sells (1994, p. 12, as quoted in Hanahan, 2002) is a "mystical language of unsaying" (p. 1) popularly known as the via negativa (Lane, 1998/2007), that would be capable of deconstructing the overconfidence placed in the very use of imagery and the written word (p. 4). This brings us to the antithesis of the apophatic mode, known as the cataphatic, which relies solely on imagery and the written word to affirm the presence of the spiritual and divine. The pilgrimatic function of sacred landscapes such as rivers, forests, mountains and natural elements such as trees, stones (Mountain Institute, as cited in Wijesuriya, 2001, p. 49) and land formations, on account of their archetypal and aniconic resonances, resists all attempts at being explained away verbally due to their mystique of inexpressibility. As such they fall under the category of apophatic "lean imagery". Lane (1998/2007) suggests that "landscape images derive their energy from the archetypal experience of Moses in the desert of Sinai" (p. 4), a statement that implies the archetypal nature of lean landscape imagery in sacred traditions the world over (Wijesuriya, 2001, p. 49). Landscape imagery, in this fashion, falls broadly under the category of landscape archetypes as well.

This brings us to the final variable we shall be considering in this section namely, the archetype. Jung (as cited in Nash, 1997) posited the existence of a collective unconscious common to humanity in its entirety, the contents of which he referred to as archetypes. It is believed that their formation harks back to our dim and distant past when human consciousness was incapable of thinking and could only perceive (P. 59). Archetypes, due to this anomaly, stand outside the sphere of ratiocination and analysis; any encounter with such deep structures, containing perhaps a record of the impact of primordial imagery in prehistoric landscapes on the human psyche, would only result in certain embedded retentions associated with them being released, giving rise to the original emotions felt by our progenitors in those primeval times. I will go on to show elsewhere in this study how the aniconic, apophatic and archetypal dimensions of mountain sacredscapes begin to coalesce and resonate, when the individual attains to self-transcendence while traversing such landscapes.

Challenges for resacralisation

In recent times, however, sacred landscapes the world over have come under threat due to rampant globalisation (Lane, p. 136). The consumerist culture that has come into being in its wake has resulted in the deconsecration of the world's sacredscapes with the concomitant "erosion of many religiously informed traditional practices" (Agbiji & Swart, 2015, p. 10). Mountain sacredscapes too have not escaped the depredations of the contemporary globalized consumerist culture, as evidenced by the motorable roadways that mar their slopes (Wijesinghe, 2018) and the meaningless construction work that already exists and have been proposed for their summits ((Lane, 1998/2007, p. 136)), degrading them into secular holiday destinations. These developments militate against the very tenets of sacrality, especially the notion of a mountain as a sylvan, or nature, shrine. The fact that the climb to the summit has to be undertaken on foot as a form of walking meditation and an act of "penance and pain" (Navaratnam, 1973, p. 217; Weibel, 2012, p. 175)), presenting less attraction to the senses (Kalyanasunderam, 1980, p. 7), seems to have escaped those responsible for these acts of iconoclasm. We are now facing the dire consequences of timeless notions such as sacrality and pilgrimage, being conflated with that of recreational tourism and holidaying (Ando as cited in Goozner, 2018; Lane, 1998/2007, p. 136).

The foregoing developments unequivocally imply a disappearance from our society of a genuinely religious consciousness, capable of attainment to heightened levels of awareness or self-transcendence. In response to the prevailing profanation of our sacred realm, therefore, this literature review seeks answers to the following question. "How does one resacralise the once pristine sylvan mountain sacredscapes, when knowledge of conservation principles derived from people's intimate experience of self-transcendence, (which is the fruit of any religious endeavour), has all but disappeared from our society?" A secondary and, perhaps, an even more important question which arises from the former would be, "What natural elements are we really trying to conserve in such sacredscapes?" Rapoport (1990), in his now classic Meaning of the built environment, refers to how the collective psyche of a nation manifests itself as people's "cognitive schemata" (p. 98), a process that could provide answers to the foregoing questions. He proposes that, since

cultural settings may be understood as “cognitive domains made visible” (Rapoport, 1990, p. 64), it might be possible to approach the question of resacralisation through an understanding of the images of sacrality that are collectively held by society (Rosch & Lloyd, 2024).

Congruent with this theoretical stance, the primary objective of this study would be to review the extant theoretical and empirical studies of people’s phenomenological experiences of self-transcendence in mountain landscapes where nature predominates. This would pave the way for the secondary objective of identifying the cues that give rise to experiences of transcendence in such settings. The final objective of this study would be to ensure the preservation of such cues as integral features of mountain sacredscapes, for the purpose of precipitating states of self-transcendence in pilgrims and even casual visitors. It is hoped that such interventions would, in the final analysis, help conservators ensure the continuity of mountain sacredscapes as aniconic contemplative landscapes, wilderness settings in other words, where pilgrims would be able to attain to heightened levels of awareness and achieve self-transcendence as a matter of course. Mountains happen to be the biggest and most significant subset in the greater category of the world’s sacredscapes. Due to this reason the phenomenological experiences of people traversing the sacredscapes of the world and the principles that generally govern their attainment to self-transcendence in such loci, would be equally (if not more) valid for mountain sacredscapes. Hence, the terms “sacredscape” and “mountain sacredscape” are used more or less interchangeably throughout this study, since that which is relevant to the former would most definitely be applicable to the latter.

Findings

The mountain as multiverse

The aniconic mountain sacredscape

When one considers the necessity for the continuity of mountain sacredscapes in their pristine state and their potential for the engenderment of transcendental experience, the enormity of what humankind stands to lose through their desacralisation is thrown into sharp relief. “As the highest and most dramatic features of the natural landscape, mountains have an extraordinary power to evoke the sacred” (Wijesuriya, 2001, p. 52). Hence, mountains function as the last bastions of the world’s aniconic sacredscapes. Apart from their significance as sacredscapes, it is worthwhile noting that mountains (Wijesuriya, 2001) are home to 10% of the world’s population, found in 75% of the world’s countries, cover 20% of the earth’s surface and, more importantly, are the source of origin for half the world’s freshwater (p. 52).

As should be evident by now, mountains hold an inexplicable fascination for humankind and continue to evoke intense emotions in us as evinced in the aniconic traditions of nearly all the major religions of the world. Myths and legends woven around mountains such as Kailas in Tibet, Sinai and Zion in the Middle East, Olympus in Greece, T'ai Shan in China, Fuji in Japan and Sri Pada or Adam’s Peak in Sri Lanka (Wijesuriya, 2001, pp. 53-56) give credence to this fact. In the mind of wonder, therefore, the mountain is a cosmic centre, always archetypal and oneiric, imbued with what Otto (as cited in Sonntag, 2014) refers to as the mysterium tremendum and fascinans (p. 25; Kakalis, 2024). Before the ineffable presence and otherworldly presentiment that Otto conjures up through the foregoing phrase, the poverty of imagery and the written word becomes evident. Yet, with equally awe-inspiring force and the compelling brevity of a koan Ryōkan Taigu, an 18th century Zen Buddhist monk from Japan, gives life and form to Otto’s phrase and succeeds in evoking the indescribable spirit of the mountain terrain through his immortal lines.

A lonely hermitage on a mountain peak,
Towering above a thousand others–
One half is occupied by an old monk,
The other by a cloud!
Last night it was stormy
And the cloud was blown away.
After all a cloud is not equal
To the old man's quiet way. (Ryōkan, as cited in Govinda, 1970, p. 7)

In the eyes of Ryōkan, both monk and hermitage are extensions and, hence, representations of the mountain peak “towering above a thousand others”, metaphors of its kenotic power to strip bare the human soul of its mundane trappings. It is this voidness of iconographic imagery attributive of the sacrality of a mountain setting’s natural terrain that is referred to as aniconic. Such stark minimalist landscapes,

characteristic of wilderness settings devoid of material evidence of sacrality, are constitutive of what Lane (1998/2007) refers to as "lean" or "spare" apophatic imagery (p. 4). Such imagery tends to subvert the power of the more explicit and logocentric cataphatic imagery that drives cultural and doctrinal religion. At the very onset it must be stated, therefore, that this literature review concerns itself solely with apophatic imagery comprising the matrices of meaning, or cues, which trigger the experience of transcendence in sacred wilderness settings. Apophatic religious imagery in this fashion becomes a clarion call and inspiration for a corresponding kenosis, or an emptying of the inconsequential in our inner being, which prepares us for the experience of self-transcendence.

As the largest formations on the face of the earth (Wijesuriya, 2001, p. 52), however, mountains are much more than harbingers of Otto's mysterium tremendum and fascinans. They are defined variously (Wijesuriya, 2001) as cosmic centres, homes of the gods, gods themselves, mystical forbidden places, gardens of paradise, centres of pilgrimage, places of inspiration, revelation and transformation, places sanctified by the presence of holy men, homes of ancestral spirits, sites of sacred monuments, sources of fertility, places associated with communal identity and nationally important legends (pp. 54-56) and so on. On account of the foregoing myriad ontological functions attributed to them mountains may be considered as multiverses on the face of this earth.

The many dimensions of transcendence

The concise literature survey that follows will demonstrate how the sentient individual stands at the intersection of multiple disciplinary frameworks (Scriven, 2019, P. 3), which could be triangulated to provide a facetted understanding of the transcendental experience of pilgrims traversing the world's mountain sacredscapes. Self-transcendence is defined variously in empirical research, so much so that it runs the gamut of ontologies pertaining to heightened states of consciousness. Some of these states of being characterised as being transcendent are James' mysticism; Laski's ecstasy; Maslow's peak experience; and Csikszentmihalyi's flow (as cited in Williams & Harvery, 2001, p. 249), all of which have in common key traits such as feelings of strong positivity, going beyond the bounds of quotidian existence, the sense of being as one with a greater reality and total immersion in a tenseless present (as cited in Williams & Harvery, p. 249).

Etymologically speaking, this sense of "going beyond" is in keeping with the Hindu word for sacredscape, which is tirtha, meaning "crossing the ford" (Singh, 1995, p. 97). The word tirtha itself is derived from the Sanskrit taras (Thorley & Gunn, 2007, p. 33), which is cognate with the Indo-European ter. It is from the root ter that the English words transcend and transport, through and thoroughfare are derived via the Latin preposition "trans" and German "durch" respectively. In this fashion "transcendence" and tirtha become cognate words that convey a similar meaning, that of an existential crossing or a place of spiritual going beyond. Singh (1995) expands further on this theme in order to explain how a tirtha serves to connect the 03 cosmic spheres of the macrocosmos (the heavenly abodes and realms of the gods), mesocosmos (its physical "earthly representation") and microcosmos (the human psyche and emotions) (p. 97). In reality, each sphere may be considered a metaphor that affirms the existence of the other two: each sphere implies the existence of the others (Sinha, 1995, p. 3). The unification of all three spheres is achieved through the human being's attainment to divinity through the mediation of its earthly representation, which is the sacredscape.

In addition to the etymology and aforementioned discourses on transcendence, research into the salutogenic effects of Vipassana, or Buddhist insight meditation, has shown that self-reflexive monitoring of our embodied interactions in the world, subverts discursive thought to generate a unified consciousness (Pagis, 2009, p. 266). Schattschneider (2000), in a similar vein, suggests that a worshipper's self-identification with the physicality of a mountain sacredscape helps wean him away from his everyday sensibility, enabling him to attain to a unified consciousness (p. 148). In both situations, the individual's subjective awareness of an objective external world collapses and coalesces into a dynamic unity where, according to Mead; Rosenberg; Gecas and Burke (as cited in Pagis, 2009), the individual simultaneously becomes the "observing subject and the observed object" (p. 266). The commonalities that exist between the mindsets of the meditator and pilgrim traversing a mountain sacredscape are foregrounded in this fashion. We encounter similar states of unified consciousness spontaneously arising in the wilderness experiences of people who have been profoundly moved by the dissolution of their subjectivity: in the overwhelming stillness of desert landscapes (Lane, 1998/2007, p. 37), in the pregnant silence of the forest (Hempton, as cited in Emergence

Magazine [EM], 2018) and rarefied atmosphere of mountainscapes (Lane, 1998/2007, p. 37; Csikszentmihalyi's notion of flow, as cited in Williams & Harvey, p. 250). Such holistic perspectives also constitute the basis of major western discourses such as medical geography, environmental psychology, ecological psychology and horticultural therapy (as cited in Jiang, 2014, p. 142), which pertain to our understanding of nature as a therapeutic landscape and healing garden.

The "phenomenological walk"

What may be inferred from extant literature, then, is an understanding of aniconic mountain sacrality that is centred and dependent on the overwhelming presence of the wilderness and controlled human intervention resulting in a bare minimum of built areas. However, we need to come to grips with the micro-settings of the forest-covered mountain sacredscapes in order to understand the nature of the cues in such natural environments that help trigger these heightened states of awareness or self-transcendence. Since what is true of sacredscapes in general would definitely be true of mountain sacredscapes as well reference is made, very specifically, to the matrices in sacredscapes that encapsulate meaning, with the potentiality to engender such numinous moments when encountered by the self-aware and place-aware pilgrim. In order to isolate such cues archaeologist Christopher Tilley (as cited in Ljunge, 2014) proposes the "phenomenological walk", which is a manner of experiencing the landscape directly through our sensory apparatus without being encumbered by preconceived notions, theories or pre-understanding of what is being experienced (P. 4). During the "phenomenological walk" Tilley and Bennett (2008, as cited in Koussoulakou et al., 2015) propose that one immerses oneself in the landscape being traversed whilst self-reflexively monitoring one's experiences by writing them down. Pagis (2009) differentiates between two types of reflexivity: discursive self-reflexivity which occurs as verbalisation through practices such as talking to oneself or others; and embodied self-reflexivity which is a process based on awareness of the body through the senses in its act of experiencing the environment. In fact, what is experienced is a merging of self-awareness and place-awareness (Lund, 2012, p.225) in a self-reflexive and "omnijective" (Talbot, 1993, p. 166) awareness involving embodied consciousness. "Omnijective" refers to the dissolution of one's subjectivity and objectivity where the external world and one's subjectivity come together in a holistic awareness of oneness, a spiritual state that is attainable through practices such as Buddhist walking meditation. This differs from the casual and banal act of walking during which the mind remains unfocussed on the action of walking. The non-reflexive and discursive thought processes that arise in random fashion in the mind during such moments, preclude awareness of the terrain being traversed. In such mundane everyday situations, there is a disjunct between one's thought processes and the physical activity that is taking place resulting in a distracted and, hence, profane mundane awareness. Pallasmaa (2015), referring to the experience of "powerful architecture", draws our attention to the manner in which impressive spaces bring about a state of quiescence in our being, where we become aware only of our heartbeat (P. 29). Once again, this too is a state of self-reflexivity involuntarily brought on through poignant embodied awareness of the external world. In the final analysis, and as mentioned previously, this is also what the pilgrim and meditator experience during the self-reflexive monitoring of their embodied consciousness during pilgrimage and Buddhist insight meditation respectively. However, for these two spiritual categories, self-reflexivity is a process where the individual's mind turns toward itself in order to experience embodied consciousness. This differs diametrically from the self-reflexive embodied consciousness that culminates in the verbalisation and writing down of experiences during the phenomenological walk. I am drawing attention here to the manner in which the phenomenological walk could, for the self-reflexive individual, function as a form of walking meditation through the awareness of the environment via the body and the body via the environment. This is a serene unification of subject and object steeped in the immediacy of the moment and is, therefore, a spiritual state and an instance of self-transcendence.

Whilst traversing a sacredscape during the phenomenological walk, one could expect a pilgrim's self-awareness to be triggered by aniconic "placial" experiences (Pallasmaa, 2015, p. 29), especially where the "natural patterns embedded in the landscape" (Conforti, 1999, p. 13, as cited in Perluss, 2004, p. 8) create timeless earthbound imagery. For Conforti (1999, p. 13, as cited in Perluss, 2004, p. 8) such imagery (as mentioned earlier) is directly related to archetypes, which Jung (1931/1970, p. 31 as cited in Perluss, 2004) defines as constituting "the chthonic portion of the psyche…that portion through which the psyche is attached to nature, or in which its link with earth and the world appears at its most tangible". He goes on to

add that the "psychic influence of the earth and its laws is seen most clearly in these primordial images" (p. 8). What is relevant to this study, therefore, are the mountain landscape archetypes (ERIFLA, 2015, pp. 10-12) and their micro-settings (Barroso, 2017, p. 355) such as valleys, ravines, piedmonts, pathways, cliffs, bluffs, caves, ridges, summits along with their climate and fauna and flora. Barroso (2017) refers to these micro-settings as nooks, to which an inner compulsion, perhaps, prompts devotees to respond by providing them with names of saints, deities and erecting symbolic marks and structures of worship (p. 355). As stated before, it is probably their archetypal attributes that make them familiar to the human psyche, allowing us to recognise them as cues, which are then humanised to create culturally meaningful sacred loci in the wilderness. The devout would most certainly encounter these elements spread out across the terrain or silhouetted against the sky during a walking pilgrimage, which we could now define as a spiritualised phenomenological walk. This is the individual's experience of self-reflexive embodied awareness facilitated by the convergence of the natural environment's lean imagery (apophatic), aniconism and archetypicality. At such times, the individual simultaneously becomes the "observing subject and the observed object". I would like to propose that when this unification occurs, phenomenology and archetypicality become subsumed in the greater context of walking meditation, in a climactic experience of spirituality and transcendence.

The massing of such elements also creates interesting proportions. Le Corbusier, one of the fathers of modern architecture, has this to say about proportions in architecture, which by extension include land formations as well. Corbusier queries rhetorically: "Are we sufficiently aware that it's all here, that our capacity to perceive proportions and they alone, determine our spiritual values?" (Guiton, 1981, pp.18-19). One could indeed anticipate such features, which we may now refer to as archetypes (Conforti,1999, p. 13, as cited in Perluss, 2004, p. 8)), functioning as trigger factors, cues, matrices of meaning or nooks, in bringing about moments of self-transcendence through the merging of place-awareness with self-awareness during the phenomenological walk.

Sacredscape to faithscape

However, a locus, simply because it is designated as being sacred, provides no guaranty that our engagement with it will precipitate self-transcendence each time we traverse it. Lane (2002) makes the very important distinction between "being bodily present" in a designated sacred setting and the experience of "fullness of being" where one is fully present to it (29). The latter scenario is akin to experiencing it for the first time and this is a feeling of "jamais vu", of never having experienced something before, which is diametrically opposed to that of having become habituated to it. Our sudden strangerhood to a setting (Lane, 2002) to which we have become accustomed, that is the sense of entering it anew and experiencing it for the first time, is what provides us with a fresh perspective that triggers the experience of transcendence (p. 30). Lane (2002) affirms that this is the "most important manner by which meaning is continually renewed in any community" (p. 30).

In this regard, Rana Singh's insight into the manner in which sacredscapes are transformed into faithscapes has tremendous significance. According to Sing (1995) "the overall wholeness of landscape creates a faithscape that encompasses sacred place, sacred time, sacred meaning, sacred rituals and embodies both symbolic and tangible psyche elements in an attempt to realize man's identity in the cosmos" (p. 96). It might not be farfetched, therefore, to hypothesise (Jung, 1968, as cited in Nash, 1997,) that landscape archetypes with their significant proportions awaken dormant primordial memories and activate cognitive structures buried deep in our collective unconscious, which conduce to the unification of our being (p. 59). Perhaps, this may be the reason that prompted Eliade (as cited in Walker, 2010, pp. 5-6) to observe that sacrality inheres in place and that it cannot be created by human beings. By the same logic therefore "the sanctity of a sacred mountain is largely derived from its special natural and physical attributes rather than its stature" (Sherpa, 2001, p. 223). Bernbaum (2001) cites Mt. Kailas in Tibet which, despite being 2000 meters lower than Mt. Everest, remains the most sanctified and venerated peak in all of the Himalayas, if not the whole world, as a prime example of this paradox (p. 70). As Sherpa (2001) avers, "shrines and temples are only a result rather than cause for the sacredness" (p. 223). Hence, of all landscape archetypes, the mountain remains the most evocative of the sublime, that which is most relevant to the transcendence of the human condition of finitude and being bounded in space and time. The reason for this is the fact that every mountain is considered an earthly representation of the cosmic mountain archetype, or axis mundi, which connects earth to heaven, and since it is also the "highest point on earth" (Eliade as cited in Walker,

2010) it becomes "the closest physical place to heaven" (pp. 5-6). Consequently, mountain sacredscapes relieve the human being of his burden of mortality by helping him touch that which is boundless in him.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this literature review multiple theoretical perspectives have been used to provide an understanding of the concept of transcendence. In order to obtain insight into people's experience of the phenomenon, however, one needs to understand its fundamental associations with place, since the phenomenon cannot be examined in vacuo: "Religious experience is [therefore] 'placed' experience" (Lane, 2002, 32). Lane cites three frameworks for the purpose of defining what constitutes a sacred place with its place-based experience of transcendence, which in turn leads us to the philosophies and research methodologies associated with these approaches. They are namely: the ontological approach where a sacred place is considered as being consecrated and completely cut off from profane interactions, the cultural where sacrality is considered as a social construction of reality and the phenomenological with its emphasis on harking back to the place itself with its topography and materiality suggesting the manner in which it could be interacted with (Lane, 2002, pp. 42-44). However, as Lane (2002) points out, any analytical framework possesses both advantages and disadvantages. The ontological approach, for instance, possesses the advantage of a sacred place being comprehensible from within, although it fails to take into account the fact that the sacred and transcendental are invariably enmeshed in cultural associations. On the other hand, the cultural approach functions on the basis of sacrality and transcendence being social constructions bereft of any intrinsic meaning, while the phenomenological fails to take into account the theological and social aspects of the convergence of transcendence and culture (pp. 43-44). In order to obtain a comprehensive and holistic understanding of transcendence as placed experience, Lane believes that sacrality and transcendence needs to be viewed through these three frameworks in order to obtain a more facetted view of the phenomenon. However, when the findings in this study regarding the commonalities between phenomenology, Buddhist walking meditation and insight meditation are taken into consideration, it would seem that a phenomenological enquiry that unifies within its fold the essences of both the above categories of mediation, on account of the irrelevance of non-apophatic theological and sociological attributes, might be more than adequate as a mode of enquiry into the nature of mountain sacrality and self-transcendence in such settings. `

Despite the "placed" nature of religious experience Miller (as cited in Lane, 2002) observes that "our destination is never a place but a new way of looking at things" (p. 12). This is a profound statement indeed since this means that place and time become, in the final analysis, subservient to a manner of "seeing" or being in the world. This is similar to what happens during the "phenomenological walk" (Tilley as cited in Lund, 2012, p. 236), where what matters is not so much the noting of the details of the landscape as the awareness of the self as it engages with the landscape. In this fashion, as mentioned previously, the phenomenological walk ties up with the age-old practices of pilgrimage as Vipassana walking meditation (Smith, 2018, para. 9).

Miller's insight may be further clarified through a proper understanding of the Greek words for place and time, respectively topos and chora and chronos and kairos (Lane, 2002, pp. 39-41). "Topos", a coinage of Aristotel, refers to a mere point in space without any distinct character whereas "chora", coined by Plato, is the exact opposite in that it refers to the character and ambience of a specific place. In similar fashion, "chronos" refers to time as a physical entity in the form of the evenly measured out units of a ticking clock, whereas "kairos" refers to time as a significant and momentous occasion that would remain forever etched in the memory of the person who experiences it. However, when both "chora" and "kairos" converge momentarily during rare occasions, we encounter a singularity that is transcendental, numinous in nature (Lane, 2002, p. 41). Mann (as cited in Sonntag, 2014) explicates: "There are many sacred landscapes in the world, but our experience of them is out of this world. Although such places exist in time, our experience of them is outside time" (p. 01). It is this quality of being beyond place and time, in other words the ineffable convergence of "chora" and "kairos" engenderable through the mediation of cues embedded in aniconic sacredscapes such as mountain settings, that conservators should try to preserve as our religio-cultural heritage for the generations yet to come.

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