

Ekstasis: Displacement of perception and its connection to spatial understanding

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Summary statement

In this paper, I would like to put an emphasis on a conceptual and practical understanding of 'ekstasis' in human perception and its bond to spatial understanding. Ekstasis is an act of displacing one's own individuality to apprehend a reality as it is. This idea of displacement leads to the term called "Extrasensory perception", which is the perception out of sensory organs. The research on the kinesiological response from bodily muscles opens the door to its evidential clarity. Applying this mode to the ancient conceptions of the science of building, one comes to know the subtle picture that has been hidden under the ordinary consciousness. It is the extra-ordinary way of seeing that makes it possible to appreciate the ancient architecture in a proper sense. And this, in turn, can contribute a substantive potential to the architectural community for better comprehension and management of space as a whole.

Topic

1. What do we see? What can we see?
2. Ek-stasis (Ek[out of]+Stasis[to stand])
3. Extrasensory Perception as a way of seeing deeper reality
4. Ancient placement rediscovered
5. New perspective to New architecture

1. What do we see? What can we see?

Alain de Botton's claim 'we are, for better or for worse, different people in different places'¹ poses a critical concern on the nature of human dwelling. There is a strong belief, in many parts of the world, that the location one occupies influences one's life for better or for worse. Notable cases are found in the studies of Feng Shui², Vastu Shastra³ and Tajul muluk⁴ which are all various forms of doctrines that concentrate on the prosperity of human beings by locating proper placement. The question is how to identify it in reality. The problem of placement is what Thomas Huxley also tried to convey in his classic 'Man's place in Nature'⁵ by raising the query on the problem of ascertainment of the place, with his deep concern 'what are the limits of our power over nature?' The interesting accounts from over painted engravings at Lascaux⁶ and the peculiar place-finding attempt of Gotama right before his nirvana⁷ adds more curiosity. What was the distinctive ability that enabled people to find places that "seemed to speak of "something else"⁸, "the centers that brought heaven and earth together and where the divine potency seemed particularly effective"⁹?"

¹ Alain de Botton, *The architecture of happiness* (New York: Pantheon books, 2006), 13.

² Feng shui is a pseudoscience originating from China, which claims to use energy forces to harmonize individuals with their surrounding environment. Source: "Feng Shui," Wikipedia (accessed April 28, 2018), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feng_shui.

³ Vastu shastra is a traditional Hindu system of architecture which literally translates to "science of architecture. Source: "Vastu shastra," Wikipedia (accessed April 28, 2018), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vastu_shastra.

⁴ Tajul Muluk is the most commonly used name for the Malay system of geomancy, comprising metaphysical and geomantic principles considered when siting or designing buildings to improve and maintain well-being. Source: "Tajul Muluk," Wikipedia (accessed April 28, 2018), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tajul_muluk.

⁵ Thomas Huxley, *Man's place in nature and other essays*. London and Toronto: J. M. Dent&Sons, 1927.

⁶ Karen Armstrong's 'The case for god' poses the similar interest about the placement. In her investigation on the frescoes and engravings in the underground caverns of Lascaux in the Dordogne, she writes "*They often painted new pictures over old images, even though there was ample space nearby. It seems that location was crucial and that, for reasons we cannot fathom, some places were deemed more suitable than others.*" Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God* (New York: Anchor, 2010), 28.

⁷ "...First, he circled the tree, trying to find the place where all the previous Buddhas had sat when they had won through to Nibbana, but wherever he stood, "the broad earth heaved and sunk, as though it was a huge cartwheel lying on its hub, and somebody was treading on its rim." Eventually, Gotama approached the eastern side of the tree, and when he stood there, the ground remained still. Gotama decided that this must be the 'immovable spot' on which all the previous Buddhas had positioned themselves, so he sat down in the asana position facing the east, the region of the dawn, in the firm expectation that he was about to begin a new era in the history of humanity." The whole episode is eloquently described in the Nidana Katha, the scripture that captures the story of Gotama Buddha. Karen Armstrong, *Buddha* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 88-89.

⁸ Ibid, 41. Original references: Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 367-88.; Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1959), 50-54, 64; Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, trans. Philip Mairet (Princeton, N.J., 1991), 37-56.

⁹ Ibid, 47.

2. Ek-stasis (Ek[out of]+Stasis[to stand])

The questions concerning the ascertainment of the place and the conceptions of a certain type of perceptive ability can be associatively linked to one general postulation. That is, for acquiring a proper and correct awareness of a subject, the observer needs to abandon conventional and self-oriented outlook and attentively surrender all sensory-based perceptions¹⁰. The ancient Greek word 'Ekstasis' captures this mental operation with its meaning "stepping out" from a habitual, self-bound consciousness that enabled man to apprehend a reality that is called "god"¹¹. The prefix 'ek (extra)' distinctively implies 'a conscious effort of erasing or annihilating', which is the core exertion in the whole procedure that is closely correlated to the history of religious practices. Extending from this basis, in any attempts for acquiring a deeper awareness of a subject, the perception that is successfully detached from sensory inputs is what is called for. The extra-sensorial engagement is what needs to be operated¹². Extrasensory perception (ESP)¹³ is a reception of information not gained through the recognized physical senses. It is a form of direct perception, an immediate apprehension independent of any reasoning process. However, is there any proof that this particular type of perception is palpable? And most of all, can we facilitate this perception in everyday lives?

3. Extrasensory Perception as a way of seeing deeper reality

In the late 1970s, Dr. G. Goodheart published the results of his research on the application of applied kinesiology. He argued that the food with harmful ingredients decreases the strength of muscle whereas with healthy ingredients causes the opposite. Refined research on the relationship between muscle strength and emotional stimuli was conducted by Dr. J. Diamond¹⁴. From these observations, the significance has been drawn that human body is always in a certain cognitive state. What is compelling is that this particular cognition is something that humane intelligible fails to apprehend. The conclusive evidence is body knows something at a level far below conceptual consciousness and it was able to signal through muscle strength¹⁵.

Among other body-awareness mechanisms, a technique called 'dowsing'¹⁶ is a relatively easy way to detect such non-ordinary awareness. Numerous tests indicate that when engaged, the tools¹⁷ give a clear response(s) at certain spots across the field. Such signals disclosed through the body are certainly things that are not in line with the rationale. What these phenomenal evidence capture is the confirmation of 'other' perceptive system that is at work. This system is able to cognize something the ordinary mind ignores. Like involuntary muscles that contract without conscious control or the respiratory system that provides oxygen to the body at its own self-regulation, this is the system of perception that is 'profoundly natural' but somehow veiled in oblivion. How does this system of knowing relate to the understanding of space?



¹⁰ The author classifies the perception into three categories. 1. 'Sensory perception' involves, in a traditional sense, reception of information gained through the physical senses such as sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. 2. 'Higher sensory perception' concerns a dealing of a larger amount of information acquired by senses. Well known examples are the manifestations of psychic abilities such as telepathy, clairaudience, trans-temporal operations involving pre or retro-cognition and etc. Due to such restraints, it still relies on the sensory organs, and the processing of organization, identification and interpretation of the brain. 3. See above for Extrasensory perception.

¹¹ Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions* (New York: Anchor, 2007), 467.

¹² Other related notions such as 'noetic quality' driven by altered states of consciousness(W. James), 'Numinous'(R. Otto), 'de-automatization' (A. Deikman), and diverse 'mystical practices' in world religious order share the same primacy of dropping 'discursive intellect' over 'ready-to-be-revealed truth'.

¹³ The term was adopted by Duke University psychologist J. B. Rhine to denote psychic abilities such as intuition, telepathy, psychometry, clairaudience, and clairvoyance, and their trans-temporal operation as precognition or retrocognition. However, I argue for the different definition of ESP. Noel Sheehy; Antony J. Chapman; Wendy A. Conroy, *Biographical Dictionary of Psychology* (Taylor & Francis, 2002), 409.

¹⁴ D. Hawkins, *Power Vs Force* (Carlsbad: Hay House Inc., 2005), 3.

¹⁵ Ibid, 3.

¹⁶ Dowsing is a 'type of divination employed in attempts to locate ground water, buried metals or ores, gemstones, oil, grave sites, and many other objects and materials, as well as so-called currents of earth radiation (Ley lines), without the use of scientific apparatus'. "Dowsing," Wikipedia (accessed April 28, 2018), <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dowsing>. Similar applications such as BPE-Method, radiesthesia, rhabdomancy, bio-location and others may have different names but shares the same principles of operation.

¹⁷ Tools for dowsing can be several. Mostly L-shaped and Y-shaped rod is used and in some cases a pendulum is also employed.

4. Ancient placement rediscovered

Identification of ESP in human cognition has ignited critical search for its proper application. Throughout the years of concentrating and deepening the conscious experience of it in diverse fields, what is known as 'space' has come to be apprehended from a fresh perspective. Numerous field researches have been executed in the ancient heritages around the world and the existence of certain forces have been discovered and classified in terms of their subtle coherency to the built manifestation. Diverse mounds, dolmens, stone circles, statues, temples, and churches have emerged as coordinately positioned entities within proper resonance with the forces. It is well known that throughout the history people have taken great interests in inquiring ways to harmonize the human dwelling with the surrounding environment. They all implicate the belief that there are flows of forces¹⁸ at play on the surface of the earth that affect the condition of human life. What ESP has brought forth was the 'fitting' verification that such forces do exist in nature.

From the years of observation carried out by 'Self-realization Institute' in Korea which has been expertizing in the field of ESP and other contemplative practices over 30 years, a total of 14 force types have been compiled as the effective forces to built environment and human condition. What follows next is the description of one particular force¹⁹ that has been measured on the ancient heritages of spiritual significance.

- Cylindrical force from above -

This is a type of force that falls perpendicularly from above in the shape of 'cylinder'. 'Above' refers to the celestial domain which suggests that it is some kind of 'interaction' point between the earth and the celestial. It might be seen as 'cosmic pillar' or 'axis mundi'²⁰ as some of the myths briefly address. The force has a configural duality that every positive force has a corresponding force of negativity.

Interestingly, almost every known 'sacred'²¹ places and buildings were measured to be under the influence of this force type. The cause for this distinctive correlation is not explicitly apprehended but if the purpose of the religion is to lead the devotees to resemble 'cosmos' or be 'Nature', the spatial quality that holds for such premise must be in line with it, by placing its architecture at the very same quality²² so that people could encounter the ultimate subsequently. This leads to a probable interpretation of why people in the ancient talked about the notion of 'positive spot' or 'divine site' where their god or spiritual leader must sit.

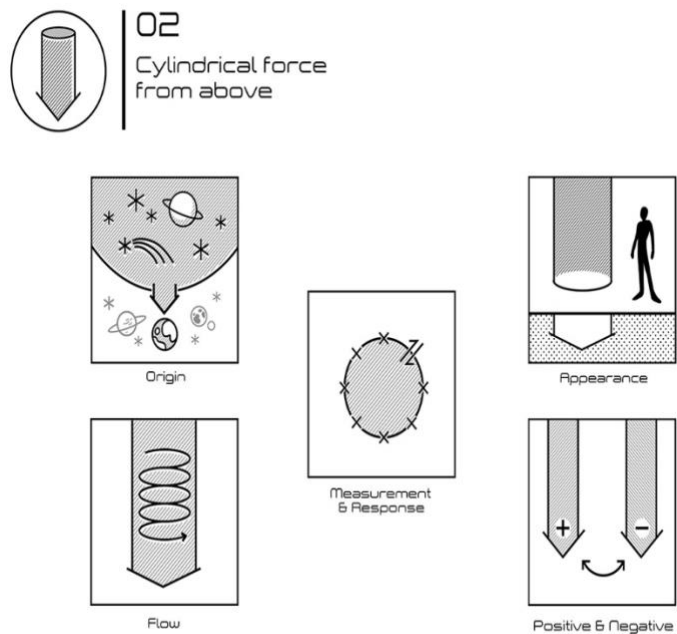


Fig 1. Features of 'Cylindrical force from above'. Illustration by H.S Suh

¹⁸ Well known terms are 'qi' from Feng shui, 'prana' from Vastu Shastra and the modern conceptions on the similar conviction include terms like 'Ley line' and diverse energetic grid patterns that run across the field.

¹⁹ The study has been carried out by 'Self-realization Institute' in Korea led by Master Sirl, who has been expertizing in the field of ESP and other contemplative practices over 30 years.

²⁰ In certain beliefs and philosophies, it is the still point of calm, the world center where Heaven and Earth are connected, and the spot on which human beings encounter the Real and the Unconditioned. Karen Armstrong, Buddha (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 89.

²¹ Sacred places refer to the places that are known to have functioned as religious or spiritual worship such as temples, sanctuaries, mosques, churches, and shrines.

²² It is the place where the divine energies pour into the world, where humanity encounters the Absolute and becomes more fully itself. Ibid, 90.

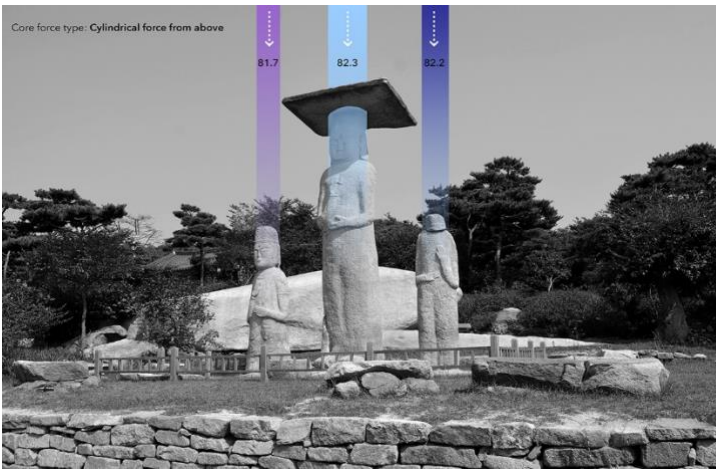


Fig 2. Buddha statues in Korea with the 'Cylindrical force from above'. Photograph and drawing by H.S Suh

5. New perspective to New architecture

"Why is it," Jonathan puzzled,
 "that the hardest thing in the world is
 to convince a bird that he is free, and
 that he can prove it for himself
 if he'd just spend a little time practicing?
 Why should that be so hard?"²³

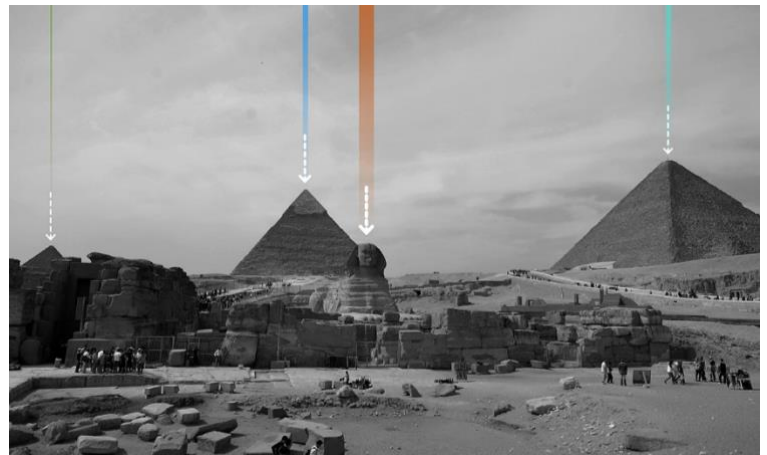


Fig 3. Great Pyramids and Great Sphinx in Giza with the influencing forces of 'Cylindrical force from above'. Photograph and drawing by H.S Suh

The lines from Jonathan Livingston Seagull encapsulate a central aim of this paper: to locate conceptual and practical knowledge whereby people understand the world in more comprehensive ways. The evidence of 'Extrasensory perception' through a body is explicitly palpable. Advancing this mode of perception to the sacred architecture from the ancient, it acutely shows the direct bond between the placement and force figuration. From this picture, it is understood that the quality of sacredness is something that is manifested in association with the forces in nature.

It is probably the most essential that the mode of extra-sensorial looking should be applied and practiced in the domain of architecture. The very basic placement can be located based on the forces at work. Design can also be executed based on the same basis. Since the act of 'measuring' based on ESP can be applied to any field, not only the placement but also shape and dimension of the building can be proportioned which would make it resonate with the forces in proper coherency.

ESP should not be underestimated due to the lack of reliable accuracy. The essence lies in the fact that this non-ordinary perception exists and can be disclosed through a body. The matter of accuracy lies in the contemplative effort to recede subjective inclinations and predetermined conceptions. It is about making oneself 'extra', and going into 'tabular rasa' where one would find a sacred picture of man's relation to the universe. It is the task of human beings to realize this 'given-ness' and prove it by actual exercise. I hope the contents of this paper offers an indication of what is possible in the search for the architecture that is sacred and timeless.

²³ Richard Bach, Jonathan Livingston Seagull (London: Element, 2003), 88.