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Land as Sacred Space: A Creative Synthesis of Environmental Hermeneutics and Painting

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Land as Sacred Space:

A Creative Synthesis of Environmental Hermeneutics and Painting

Joyce Fehlau

Mentors: Dr. Brad Stone and Dr. Paul Harris

Loyola Marymount University Honors Program

Spring 2017

Abstract

In this proposal, I am requesting funding to pursue research on the topic of land as sacred space through engaging environmental hermeneutics - interpreting our environments through philosophical and ethical standpoints - and the concept of 'pregnancy.' I intend to travel to five countries to interpret and explore the narrative of sacred space in order to glean a better understanding of the way in which the presence of myth, semiotics, and history of sacred landscapes exist today. Understanding environmentalism - "nature" - with sensitivity to history, culture, and narrative, is a fundamental hermeneutic task today. Therefore, reading the landscape as text, I seek to apply the philosophical and theological foundations of Mircea Eliade, Ernst Cassirer, and Paul Ricoeur to research the historical roots of symbolism that encapsulates the sacredness of land. My research will examine the interdisciplinary cornerstone of the work of the aforementioned philosophers, environmental hermeneutics, and sacred land characterized through the concept of *symbolic pregnancy* that articulates the pure union of physical and spiritual experience of space. I will connect with numerous local friends and family, artists and scholars, as well as site specific historians. My research will generate a creative synthesis of philosophical scholarship and fine art.

An Introduction to Related Work and Motivation

Last semester, alongside my co-mentors Dr. Brad Stone and Dr. Paul Harris in their course, The Values of Time, I researched in depth the leading philosopher and historian of religion and foremost interpreter of semiotics and myth, Mircea Eliade, whose founding work concerns the notion of *sacred* and *profane*. Eliade claims that hierophany - the manifestation of the sacred - is the basis of religion, through which he constructs an “primitive ontology” that examines archaic societies as they function through myths, rites, and symbols of the *sacred*.¹ Eliade’s poetics of sacred space are framed through archaic mythology and rituals which inform the hermeneutics of interpreting space and time as sacred.² Rituals, for Eliade, are repetitions of cosmogonic acts and rites that imitate celestial archetypes of cosmic myths. Rituals thereby cosmicize space from primordial chaos into a cosmos that acts as a symbolic center of the Cosmos in which time and creation began, thereby abolishing the profane present and becoming a sacred space.³ Furthermore, Eliade’s concepts of sacred space and time offer a touchstone to understand spatial and temporal sacrality. Additionally, my investigation sought to examine the intersection between Eliade’s philosophy and German philosopher, Ernst Cassirer, whose magnum opus on *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* focuses on the systems and signs of human expression and culture rooted in mythic narrative, gestures and rituals.⁴ That is, similar to Eliade, Cassirer’s notion of ritual based culture is grounded in our mythico-religious consciousness and mythic narratives.⁵ Notably, Cassirer presents a concept of

¹ Barth, “In illo tempore, at the Center of the World”: Mircea Eliade and Religious Studies’ Concepts of Sacred Time and Place,” in *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 38, no. 3 (145) (2013): 62.

² Thomas J. J. Altizer, “Mircea Eliade and the Recover of the Sacred,” *The Christian Scholar* 45, no. 4 (1962): 280; Mircea Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).
Eliade 1958.

³ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971): 18.

⁴ Donald Phillip Verene, “Metaphysics and the Origin of Culture,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 63, no. 2 (2009): 309.

⁵ Michael Friedman, “Ernst Cassirer,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2016), ed. Edward N. Zalta.; John Michael Krois, “The Priority of “Symbolism” Over Language in Cassirer’s Philosophy,” *Synthese* 179, no.1 (Springer: 2011): 16.

“*symbolische Prägung*” or “symbolic pregnancy,”⁶ that served as the linchpin for my interest in sacred time for its articulation of the phenomena of simultaneous “physical presence and spiritual presence of a symbol” in “pure symbolic relation” which, for Cassirer, holds the complete abundance of meaning for culture.⁷ The intersection between Eliade and Cassirer’s philosophies allows for a critical articulation of myths, temporal quality of sacred space, and deeper understanding of culture. My semester culminated in an extended research paper: “The Values of Time: Sacred Time and Symbolic Pregnancy.”

Eliade and Cassirer offer a foundation in hermeneutics of myth, sacred time, and sacred space, their work is rooted in archaic ontology, however, and often no longer studied. Furthermore, contemporary philosophers addressing interpretation of human experience, hermeneutics, narratives of culture and land, offer methods by which to apply my previous articulated research to interpreting sacred space today. In particular, distinguished 20th century French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, whom I am currently critically researching in my independent study on Theological and Secular Perspectives of Time with Dr. Susan Abraham, has written prolifically on hermeneutics of human experience, metaphor, and his magnum opus of *Time and Narrative*⁸. Furthermore, Ricoeur offers an essential lens of contemporary philosophical anthropology through which to integrate Eliade and Cassirer’s philosophy of myth and semiotics to the cultural narrative of the *sacred time and space*. Additionally, in the field of interpreting space and land, contemporary scholars have recently stressed the importance of environmental hermeneutics, which, I argue, opens a nuanced attention to Eliade and Cassirer’s interpretation of sacred space and time. LMU Philosophy Professor, Dr. Brian Treanor, a Ricoeur scholar with whom I have been meeting with lately concerning Ricoeur, also specializes in environmental ethics and hermeneutics, providing an indispensable resource. Furthermore, the confluence of Eliade, Cassirer, Ricoeur, and

⁶ Ernst Cassirer, “Symbolic Pregnancy.” In *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume Three: The Phenomenology of Knowledge*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957): 191- 204.

⁷ Thora Ilin Bayer, “The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms as a Philosophy of Pluralism,” *The Pluralist* 3, no. 3 (2008):100; Krois, “The Priority of “Symbolism” Over Language in Cassirer’s Philosophy,” 11,16.

⁸ Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols., trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1985, 1988 (1983, 1984, 1985).

Environmental Hermeneutics offers a lens through which to investigate the presence and characteristics of sacred landscapes through the semantics of *pregnancy* within today's context.

Moreover, in his book *Interpreting Environments: Tradition, Deconstruction, Hermeneutics*, built environment scholar Robert Mugerauer states, "hermeneutics aim not so much to develop a new procedure as to clarify how understanding takes place."⁹ In the framework of my research at hand, hermeneutics aids in deconstructing aporia of phenomena of time and space and examining identity narratives, origin myths, cultural history, environmental ethics and treatment of land as sacred. This foundation allows one to approach complex interpretive terrain, topography and religious and historical narratives, and to read landscapes in different systematic ways. Mugerauer argues that interpretation of the arts and the built environments is vital because of the "relationships that humanly produced works have to their natural and cultural contexts," for culture and human art - *technē* and *poesis* - invokes a framework for interpreting space in light of origin or creation, form and material, ethics and values, content and sacred reality.¹⁰ Sacred landscapes therefore become "repositories of meaning, waiting for the right interpretation to unlock what they have to reveal about the times, places, and *conditions of their births*, and their subsequent histories."¹¹ The language and symbolism of 'pregnancy' is fundamentally operating within the hermeneutics of Mother Earth, rebirth rituals tied to land, ecology regeneration, aesthetics of space and nature, geological formations of caves, caverns, mountains, bodies of water or wells, stone circles or other rock structures. In the case of space and built environments, Mugerauer asserts that architecture - including cathedrals, cemeteries, wells, gardens, landscape art, and stone circles - "manifests the phases of the unity of spiritual meaning and material forms in such a way that the epochal changes of what we build provide the means for us to become conscious of the historical unfolding and

⁹ Robert Mugerauer, *Interpreting Environments: Tradition, Deconstruction, Hermeneutics*: (University of Texas Press: 2014): xxvi.

¹⁰ Mugerauer, xxi.

¹¹ Mugerauer, (xxiii - xxiv), emphasis added to stress language of pregnancy, birth and rebirth, within context of land and Mother Earth.

progress of the universe.”¹² Furthermore, this is a thread that runs through my previous research of sacred space, time, and symbolic pregnancy that is intrinsically correlated to environmental hermeneutics and Ricoeur's philosophy of narrative, offering a capacious investigation of contemporary sacred land.

Consequently, while philosophers - like David Hume, Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, and G. W. F. Hegel - have long analyzed human experience of environmental objects, architecture, built environments and cultural forms, the dialectic of sacred time and narrative of sacred space through a hermeneutical interpretation of land centered on the theme I identify as “pregnancy” are uncharted. Moreover, after a semester long period of research, and current continuing review of the literature, I have found that there is a niche within the convergence of classical interpretation of the “material-symbolic” dimensions of sacred space and application of contemporary environmental hermeneutics and philosophy of narrative to site specific land that is unexplored.

Therefore, in light of this framework, I propose my research question: *In what ways does an approach of Environmental Hermeneutics reveal how contemporary landscapes display function as sacred space, and how is this notion of sacrality understood through the concept of ‘pregnancy’?*

Through this inquiry, I intend to apply the hermeneutical philosophies of Eliade, Cassier, and Ricoeur to case studies of the sacred landscapes throughout England; Wales; Scotland; Munich, Germany; and Florence, Italy.

Methods

I will lay out my methods by way of the several ways environmental hermeneutics can be understood, as Brian Treanor and his co-authors outline in their introduction of *Groundworks: Ecological Issues in Philosophy and Theology: Interpreting Nature: The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics*:

¹² Mugerauer, xxii.

(1) *“The extension of principles of interaction to environments of any kind (natural, built, cultural, etc.):”*

Firstly, it is my task and opportunity as interpreter to travel to various sacred sites including natural (caves, land formations, wells), built (open-air monasteries, cathedrals), and cultural (gardens, stone circles, and art landscapes). Great Britain offers a distinct opportunity to study lands as sacred space: a land resonant with a history of mythology, legends, folklore; a land of a plural identities of British, Welsh, Celtic, Irish, and Scottish with their own cross religious iconography, narratives, use of space between Pagan and Christian traditions.

(2) *“The interpretation of actual encounters of or within environments:”*

First hand, on-site experience and interpretation is vital.¹³

(3) *“A form of nature writing: archetypal examples include Aldo Leopold, Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Annie Dillard, among others:”*

I will document my research through the creative synthesis of philosophical journal writing and in depth artistic concentration with painting, poetry, and photography as a form of research. I will meet with several artists to engage in concentrated painting and writing workshops: Alyson Hallett, Kitty Stein, and Nicoletta Salomon.

(4) *“The approach of various disciplines to environments:”*

Interdisciplinary application of philosophical and hermeneutical methods and techniques reading of land through the lens of myth and narrative, hermeneutics of pregnancy, and creative synthesis of painting and writing. Intersection of: Theology, English, Philosophy, and Fine Art.

(5) *“A philosophical stance which understand how the inevitability of what Gadamer called out “hermeneutical consciousness” informs our relationship with environments:”*¹⁴

¹³ See itinerary for site specific locations.

¹⁴ Clingerman, Forrest, Treanor, B., Drenthen, and M. *Groundworks: Ecological Issues in Philosophy and Theology : Interpreting Nature : The Emerging Field of Environmental Hermeneutics*. New York: Fordham University Press. 2013. (3,4), citing all five definitions of environmental hermeneutics as outlined.

Mugerauer imparts that “both intellectual and ethical interpretations of works explore the meaning of artifacts in terms of what we might learn from pondering or interpreting them ourselves...enriching one's awareness of human experience and of so rendering greater the possibility of intelligence in the course of future action.”¹⁵ The sacred environments I will encounter hold secrets of how such expansive lands are rooted in our self-consciousness. How will the land teach me about the ethics of understanding tolerance and difference; of our narrative configurations of past, present, and future; and how to better treat our Mother Earth in the future?

Expected Results

As a culmination of this research investigation at hand, I intend to generate a creative synthesis of philosophical and theological scholarship in the form of a publishable, academic research paper that I will be submitting to journals of applied hermeneutics and ecology. Additionally, I will generate an extensive creative portfolio of journal entries, poetry, photography, and a concentration of paintings and drawings to submit in a solo art exhibition, Spring 2018 at a local LA student art gallery to display the narrative of my research. Through this creative synthesis, I hope to showcase how contemporary sacred landscapes can be interpreted through classic archaic ontology, narrative, environmental hermeneutics, and fine art through the linchpin of philosophy of *symbolic pregnancy*.

Conclusion

Upon receiving the Honors Summer Research Grant, I will investigate the creative synthesis of philosophical, theological, and environmental research. Within the study of phenomenology, hermeneutics, landscape interpretation, and narrative, there is a missing niche of research on religious or sacred landscapes as they are interpreted today, that I intend to tackle. Additionally, my hermeneutical

¹⁵ Mugerauer, xxv.

lens of ‘pregnance’ as well my generating a creative synthesis of scholarship and fine art, offers a unique flavor to philosophical conversation. I would like to recognize the philosophical, theological, and artistic scholars with whom I will be working: my Dr. Brad Stone and Dr. Paul Harris, professors Dr. Brian Treanor and Dr. Susan Abraham, poet Alyson Hallett, artist and family Kitty Stein, and scholar, writer, and artist Nicoletta Salmon, as well as several other local friends and family, artists and scholars, and site specific historians I will meet along the way. Given this research endeavor, I intend to pursue theological and philosophical research on these notions of sacred space and symbolic pregnancy throughout the rest of my undergraduate studies thesis and propel further research into graduate school.

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Present. Edinburgh Press, 2001.

Budget and Itinerary

Honors Summer Research Budget for Field Research on Sacred Space

Travel	\$3,290
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- Airfare: \$1,250
 - Los Angeles (LAX) - London-Gatwick (LGW) : \$450
 - Stornoway (SYY) -- Munich (MUC) : \$300
 - Pisa, Italy (PSA) - Los Angeles (LAX) : \$500
- Transportation, Bus or Train fares: \$690
- Living expenses: \$1,350
 - Meals: \$500
 - Lodging: \$850

Other Direct Costs	\$1,305
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Materials and Supplies	\$730
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- Sketchbooks - three set of Moleskine Watercolor Sketchbooks \$60
- Large format paper and canvas materials (canvas stretchers) \$200
- Paints, Inks, art supplies
 - Watercolor (travel set, Winsor and Newton) \$30
 - Fountain pen inks \$20
 - Liquitex BASICS Acrylic Paint tubes \$50
 - Paint materials in Florence with Nicoletta: \$100
 - Brushes \$ 20
 - Other carrying/travel materials for art work \$50

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post-research funds for printing and exhibition presentation \$ 200 	
Location site costs	\$50
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiverse, Scotland \$20 (two day 7£ admission) • Various Gardens and Churches in Florence \$30 (various admission prices) 	
Research Literature	\$225
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Books \$150 • Notebooks/ Journals \$75 	
Travel Gear	\$300
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lightweight Traveling/Backpacking Backpack \$200 • Lightweight travel gear \$100 	
Total Direct Costs	\$4,595

Given the **\$5,000** budget for Honors funding, I anticipate indirect and unanticipated costs for taxes, shipping, exchange rates for money, and particularly for location and transportation costs that arise with more discussions with my local contacts and opportunities that reveal themselves during travel research.

Itinerary

This is a tentative itinerary, subject to change due to rendezvousing and staying with friends and family that I have anticipated, as well as other contacts not listed. Once my project is approved then I will contact and make more definite plans with my connections in London, Cornwall, Munich, and Florence. I expect costs to be relatively the same, however, change in cost is anticipated in the grant.

Day	Itinerary Details	Expected Costs
7 -9 May	<p><u>Part 1: Great Britian</u></p> <p>Flight: Los Angeles (LAX) -- London-Gatwick (LGW)</p> <p>London: (3 days, 3 nights)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family friend, Ann Ratcliff picks me up from the airport and go to her house - Local tour around London with Ann - Westminster Abbey 	<p>Flight Norwegian Air LowFare+: \$450 with baggage and taxes</p> <p>Lodging with Ann</p>
10 -11 May	<p>Avebury, England: (1 night)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bus from London to Swindon (Paddington) to Avebury - Stone ring and numerous nearby megalithic sites - West Kennet Long Barrow <p>Salisbury, England: (1 night)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bus from Avebury to Salisbury - Stonehenge, Wiltshire - Cathedral and Old Sarum 	<p>Transportation: \$80</p> <p>Lodging: Hostels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avebury \$100 - Salisbury \$100
12-14 May	<p>Cornwall, England (3 days, 3 nights)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Connect with local poet and founder of <i>The Stone Library Project</i>, Alyson Hallett, who I met when she came to LMU as a visiting lecturer for the Bellarmine Forum on The Values of Time and Art Festival last fall. - Together we will visit various stone circles: Men-an-Tol, Boscawen-Un Bronze age stone circle, 	<p>Transportation: \$120</p> <p>Lodging with Alyson</p>

	<p>Glastonbury Abbey, Hurlers Stone Circles, Merry Maidens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poetry workshop with Alyson. 	
15-18 May	<p>Bath, England (1 night)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CWR Train: Truro-Taunton-Bath - Bath Abbey and Roman hot springs <p>Tintern Abbey, Wales (3 nights)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Train: Bath - Tintern - Tintern Abbey 	<p>Transportation: \$100</p> <p>Lodging:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hostel in Bath: \$50 - Tintern AirB&B: \$150
19- 27 May	<p>Crawick, Scotland (2 nights)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Train: Tintern Abbey - Crawick \$100 - Crawick Multiverse: 55-acre cosmic site, an ecological and art landscape that recalls themes of ancient sacred landscapes and cosmology.¹⁶ Possibility of rendezvous with Dr. Paul Harris for his interview with the landscape artist Charles Jencks. <p>Clava Cairns, Scotland (1 night)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Train: Sanquhar - Inverness \$75 - One of Scotland's most evocative prehistoric sites - exceptional remains of an ancient cemetery, set on a terrace above the River Nairn <p>Orkney Isles, Scotland (3 nights)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Train from Inverness(INV) to Thurso (THS) \$30 from <i>Scotrail</i> - Ferry from Scrabster to Stromness \$26 - Skara Brae Prehistoric Village, Ring of Brodgar, and other megalithic sites - Stones of Stennes <p>Isles of Lewis, Scotland (2 nights)</p>	<p>Transportation: ~ \$320</p> <p>Lodging: ~ \$450</p> <p>(These expenses are the most tentative of my budget and itinerary because there the routes are much more complicated)</p>

¹⁶Dumfries and Galloway Organization, "Crawick Multiverse," accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.crawickmultiverse.co.uk/>.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ferry/Bus: \$80 - Callanish Standing Stones 	
28 May - 4 June	<p>Part Two: Processing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part two of my travel in Germany and Munich is critical for connecting with my connections with local artist and scholars to participate in concentrated workshop studies and to generate large format artworks. <p>Munich, Germany</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flight: Stornoway (SYU) -- Munich (MUC) - Meet up with my second-cousin, Kitty Stein - Visit various sacred sites: Frauenkirche, Gothic church; Cy Twombly exhibition; Englischer Garden; Asamkirche, Baroque and Rococo church <p>Evenhausen, Amerang, Germany</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concentrated art study in her house studio while also traveling around local sacred sites together: Mountain and lake district 	<p>Flight: \$250 with baggage Lodging: Kitty's flat in Munich and house in Evenhausen</p>
5 -13 June	<p>Florence, Italy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Train from Munich to Florence: Deutsche Bahn AG: München Hbf -- Firenze S.M.N. - Walk from Santa Maria Novella Train Station to Nicoletta's house <p>This last part of my trip is holds culminating importance. I will reunite with my previous art professor, Nicoletta Salmon, with whom I studied with last spring and orchestrated my initial concentration on <i>pregnancy</i> and art exhibition entitled: <i>in//birth</i>. The sense of deep history and sacred spaces of Florence informed my personal artistic meditation. Through visual artwork - painting and writing - I sought to perceive my</p>	<p>Train: \$55 Lodging with Nicoletta</p>

	<p>genealogical history and identity as an artist and as a woman, through notions of <i>pregnancy</i>: that which is full of meaning, before birth (Lat. <i>praegnantem</i>). This swelled into understanding a state of pregnancy woven within disease (cancer), within genetics, within an intellectual mind, and returned towards my notions of spirituality, holiness, and sacredness. This energy is a vital to the conception and continuation of my research. Additionally, Nicoletta's philosophical and artistic scholarship and personal poetic as a writer, painter, and professor will be invaluable to my research of creative synthesis. With Nicoletta, I will partake in a concentrated art study and writing workshop while staying with her and visit sacred sites in Florence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basilica di Santa Croce, Basilica di Santa Maria Novella, Basilica di Santos Spirito, Chiesa di Santa Maria del Carmine, Abbazia di San Miniato al Monte - famous gardens - Giardino Boboli and Bardini - Connect with Italian philosopher and my Italian professor Martina Ghiandelli to tour Florentine gardens 	
14 June	<p>Train: Florence - Pisa (Trenitalia) Fight: Pisa-LAX</p>	<p>Train:\$15 Flight: \$500 Norwegian Air LowFare+ with a checked bag after collected and large format art materials</p>
15 June	<p>Start Training at LMU for Youth Theological Institute Need to be back at LMU on this date.</p>	