

City and Soul

It seems presumptuous for a psychologist — a depth psychologist who works with soul — to address the subject of city and in such expert company. Psychology's work, soul work, is notoriously so shut away, closeted in a consulting room, two persons in armchairs far above the street, not even the telephone interrupts. Yet, what walks into the consulting room is the street: the welfare mother in the confusion of urban blight, the depressed suburban matron, the delinquent, the runaway, the addict, and the success-driven office-and-airport man hell-bent on suicide. Our work is with city people and the city is in the soul of our clients, so, of course, you find us depth psychologists in the big cities. You won't find many of us in Cheyenne or Bismarck. The founders of our field had their schools named after their cities: Paris, Nancy, Vienna, Zurich as if to confirm that soul work belongs to city culture.

Because psychology belongs in cities, there have been arguments which blame psychic illness on city life. In the eighteenth century, it was gin mills and poverty or chocolate and luxury. In the nineteenth century, the fast locomotion of train travel, bad air and crowding, parasols and too much reading, in short what British psychiatry, in 1867, called 'the feverish activity of life' caused psychic distress. A French psychiatrist, in 1819, said: "Cities of four to five hundred thousand persons are deviations from nature." The soul ails from urban stress. One of human kind's favorite fantasies is that the soul is best off in nature and needs to slow down to nature's pace, for in cities the psyche becomes sophisticated and corrupted. The Yellow Emperor of China in 2600 B.C. was already bemoaning the intemperate and disorderly behaviors of his civilization as

compared with those of a more ancient era. Wrong habits of food, deep, sex, and drink already then, 4500 years ago at the dawn of history. Clearly, some part of the human soul continually imagines a better, truer life 'back in nature', away from the city. There is a statistical third in each of us that just wants out, a driving urge with no rational ground. If we must blame the ruin of downtown, the death at the heart of the city, upon someone, then let it be blamed on Jean-Jacques Rousseau, my Swiss compatriot, who evoked the feelings for the return to nature and took our heart out of the city.

I do not at all accept this anti-city view and warn you from being lured by its sentimental charm. It places city and soul in opposing camps, resulting in soulless cities and city-less souls, uncivilized souls, simple, romanticized animals, barbarians who abandon civilization for a hermit's cell or a hippie's dig in the wildwood. An ecology that restores the soul does not take place in the High Sierras only, out and away from it all; we restore the soul when we restore the city in our individual hearts, the courage, the imagination and love we bring to civilization.

Let's recall that the word "soul" itself returned into our popular vocabulary from the streets of the big and hurting cities, its soul music, its soul food and soul brothers.

I have understood my job today as one of re-affirming the soul-city connection. This I would like to do by showing in a few broad lines how and where soul exists in city. To do this we must rely on a few traditional ideas and images of soul.

The first one is the idea of reflection. The soul has always been associated with a reflective part in us or the reflective function. This is built into our cities as pools, ponds,

malls, shades, shadows, where reflections occur. Glass and mirrors, especially make reflection possible. But mirrors have always had another association in traditional symbolism, not only of reflection, but also of vanity and narcissus. There is a danger of empty vanity and superficiality in the use of mirror glass surfaces, that is, they only reflect themselves or if they only reflect each other. The glass would have to be used for soul; it would have to deepen and make more complicated or complex the sense of our city, by reflecting some deeper dimension, and not only dazzle, if it is to touch the soul.

Secondly, the soul, ever since the early Greeks, was associated with the idea of depth. It's very hard for this city, I understand, to go concretely deep: the shale resists and the ground temperature changes are extreme. So we would have to imagine the creation of depth by means of levels, which can be experienced in different ways, such as levels of light, shadings of light which give the impressions of leveling and depth. Qualities of contrasting texture and materials also afford varieties of depth. Through narrowing as intensifying, going further into something, gives one a sense of deepening. The city alley as the place of depth, the heart, is the dark part of the city, the mystery of the city. I'm sure no one speaks in favor of alleys nowadays. I'm sure they all have to be lighted and opened but the alleyway and the narrow way, bending and twisting, one of the modes of intensifying and adding a depth dimension. Then, too, there is interiorizing: emphasizing the interiority of what is in front of you or where you are. The deeper meanings, the deeper complexities of something, so that each time you look at it or enter it, it takes on another level of significance. When one looks at a painting, at first it is only a flat surface; and yet there is depth within it. Each time one engages with it, it becomes

deeper and you become deeper. There's always a danger to soul if one goes up only, that is, if one emphasizes skylines, towers, and does not keep the heights relative to depths.

A third traditional idea of soul has to do with emotional memory. Emotional experiences: things that mattered to youth your own life; things that mattered to the community, the history of it. We have emotional memories in our cities through memorial parks, memorial statues, the war memorials, the lore of the founders. Old cities were built originally on the tumulus or burial mound of the founder of the family or the founder of the clan or the city. So we find the memories of local heroes in the place namings, which pay tribute to emotions that happened in the past and on which the city founded. The city, then, is a story that tells us of itself as we go through it. It signifies something, it echoes with depth from the past. There is a presence of history in the city. There is much less presence of history in the country side except a particular fork in the lane, a particular piece of woods, the name of a field, or this creek which changes its course.

We are further reminded of soul by the emotional experience of tragedy. The city as a *memento mori*, with places that remind of death. Remembrances of particular dark episodes remind of the mortality of life. So cities have cemeteries in them. They have altars, clinics, shrines, asylums, prisons,—even sites where fateful assassinations have occurred. This dark side of human life reminds us of the soul, so that the city that speaks to soul and of soul keeps nothing out. It isn't only that Thanksgiving Square would have to be open as was just suggested in Dallas, but the fact that nothing be shut out, that the city embraces all aspects of the human soul — its red light areas and sad cafes. Then we

are reminded, as when you were a child, of those places in us each that we now call ‘handicapped’ but once were called crippled, insane, blind, or deaf and dumb — much more vivid and soul-searing words. Tragedy belongs with soul life, the *memento mori*.

Fourth, the soul tends to animate, to imagine by means of images and symbols. The words *Bild* (image) and *Building* (culture or moral education) in German are closely related as are the words *cult* and *culture*; and our word animate derives directly from the Latin word for soul, *anima*. A city that would have culture does need to be animated by images. We would have to begin by taking stock of just what images have already become cult objects in our city for they are an inherent part of its culture.

Without images, we tend to lose our way. This happens, for example, on freeways. Rectangular signs, uniform in size and all painted green (or all painted brown at the airport) with numbers and letters, are not images, but magnified verbal concepts. We don’t know where we are except by means of an abstract process of reading and thinking, remembering and translating. All eyeballs and head. Lost is the bodily sense of orientation- we might even consume less gasoline—all those wrong turns — if our way through the city were land-marked by images like those of the old crossroads, the hangman’s tree, the sign of the red ox, the fountain.

The soul wants its images, and when it doesn’t find them, it makes substitutes; billboards and graffiti, for instance. Even in countries where ads are not allowed, slogans still are written large on walls and placards posted. Spontaneously, the human hand makes its mark, insisting on personalized messages, as human nature everywhere immediately chalks its initials on monuments.

These marks made in public places, called the defacing of monuments, actually puts a face on an impersonal wall or oversized statue. The human hand seems to want to touch and leave its touch, even if by only obscene smears and ugly scrawls. So, let us make sure that the hand has its place in the city, not only by means of shops for artisans and displaying crafts, but also by animating and bringing culture to the walls and stones and spaces left bleakly untouched by the human hand. Surely, a city is a masterpiece of engineering form and architectural inspiration would not be despoiled by the presence of images that reflect the “soul” through the hand.

The last of these ideas of soul reflected in a city is the notion of human relations. That is probably what comes first to your mind when you think of soul — the relations between human beings, at eye level in particular. When we think of the cities, our contact with them (with New York, for instance) is craning the neck upwards. The rube tourist goes to New York sightseeing its wonders, and ends his vacation with a stiff neck. Yet, the eye level relation between human beings is a fundamental part of soul cities. The faces of things —their surfaces, their facings —is how we read what meets us at eye level. How we see into each other, look at each others’ faces, read each other — that is how soul contact takes place. So a city would need places for these eye level human contacts. Places, for meeting. A meeting is not only public meeting, it is meeting in public; people meeting each other. Pausing where it’s possible to have a moment of eyelevel touching. If the city doesn’t have places for pausing, how is it possible to meet? Strolling, eating, talking, gossiping. Terribly important in city life are those places where gossip can take place. People stand by the water cooler and tell about what’s happening and that gossip is the very life of the city. We speak differently from behind a desk than

we do in the coffee alcove. Who saw whom where, what, what's new, what's happening — here is some of the psychological life of the city. That grapevine of gossip.

We also need body places. Places where bodies see each other, meet each other, are in touch with each other, like the people who leave their offices in Paris and swim in the Seine river or have a lunch break in Zurich and swim in the lake, or skate. This emphasizes the relationship of body to the daily life of the city, bringing one's physical body into the town. In other words, I am emphasizing the place of intimacy within a city, for intimacy is crucial to the soul. When we think of soul and soul connections, we think of intimacy and this has nothing to do with how big the city is or how tall the buildings are. There is always the possibility for corners, for pauses, for being together in broken-up interiors where intimacy is possible.

Let's use, as an image of this aspect of soul in city, one of the main streets of Dallas: Lovers Lane. If you imagine a city as a place for lovers, then you may understand the idea I'm trying to express. I don't believe love interferes with business or efficiency or the tax base or retail sales or any of the rest — at all. I think a city is built on human relations, of people coming together, and it would increase, if anything, the very things that are desirable in a city. So, it is not a matter of splitting again into two things, that is, work and pleasure, city and soul, public daytime and private night-time, because that cuts soul off from city. There have always been places built within the city where there is a break with the seeming purpose of the city. It is only recently, of course, that we think the purpose of cities is economical or political. The purpose of the city from the beginning was something instinctual in human beings wanting to build them: to want to be together,

to imagine, talk, make, and exchange. One needs those, so-called market places, places where the break can take place. The coffee break, or the pub, the cafe, beer-hall, the morning coffee or the sandwich shop, or the locker-room, the skating rink, or just the bench in the sun where it is possible to have a break within our daily duties and strivings.

My job today has been to speak for the psyche. So I must sound one caution in its behalf. A city of the magnificent spirit is not enough. Not enough, palaces and monuments, museums, cathedrals, and halls that tend toward heaven. A city that neglects the soul's welfare makes the soul search for its welfare in a degrading and concrete way, in the shadow of those same gleaming towers. Welfare, mainly an inner city phenomenon, is not only an economic and social problem, it predominantly a psychological problem. The soul that is uncared for — whether in personal or in community life — turns into an angry child. It assaults the city which has depersonalized it with a depersonalized rage, a violence against the very objects — store fronts, park monuments, public buildings — which stand for uniform soullessness. What city-dwellers in their rage have in recent years chosen to attack, and chosen to defend (trees, old houses, and neighborhoods), is significant.

Once the barbarians who attacked civilization came from outside the walls. Today they spring from our own laps, raised in our own homes. The barbarian is that part of us to whom the city does not speak, that soul in us who has not found a home in its surroundings. The frustration of this soul in face of the uniformity and impersonality of great walls and towers, destroys like a barbarian what it cannot comprehend: structures which represent the achievement of mind, the power of will, and the magnificence of

spirit, but do not reflect the needs of soul, For our psychic health and the weft-being of our city, let us continue to find ways to make place for soul.

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