

The Living Bridge: A Sacred Secular Space on the Appalachian Trail

The study of archetypes and universal mythology provides insight on the way in which myth has informed sacred religious architecture since the dawn of humanity. Research on Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, and Mircea Eliade reveals that myths are stories which provide original, foundational accounts of the world and man's place within it. From Egyptian mortuary tombs to Gothic cathedrals, sacred architecture is built myth that symbolizes cultural beliefs and facilitates the enactment of shared rituals. The Hero's Journey, one of the most powerful archetypal themes found in myths around the world, is the basis for a pilgrimage to a sacred space, such as the Way of St. James to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Spain. In a more secular vein, a thru-hike on the Appalachian Trail running along the east coast of the United States is a six-month retreat from society during which the hiker experiences many of the same aspects of the Hero's Journey.

This thesis explores the relationship between myth and architecture in the formation of sacred secular space. Like the refugio or albergue rest stops along the Way of St. James, a habitable bridge on the Appalachian Trail at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, provides a backdrop for exploring the transformative path of the Hero's Journey in a secular environment. The architectural setting of this bridge provides a gathering space for the Appalachian Trail hikers engaged in a common spiritual journey. A critical feature of the bridge is the integration of the paths for public and private use. Additionally, the interplay of opposites (light and shadow, solid and void, spatial continuity and discontinuity) creates an environment conducive to both reclusiveness and communal gathering.

The outcome of this exploration reveals a critical necessity for incorporating myth in the spaces we inhabit. By analyzing the connection between archetypal themes and places created in response to them, one may observe how a structure contributes to ritual observances – the physical reenactments of myth – that bring meaning to life.