

# At home in the secular

## A spatial analysis of everyday ritual

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### 1. Introduction

With ritual and sacred space in mind, this paper begins with an account of the spatial methodology that I have developed in recent years in engagement with socio-spatial theory, followed by a brief examination of the work of several scholars of religion writing on space and sacralisation.<sup>1</sup> In the final section I consider domestic dining practices, using a spatial approach both to provide a deep contextualisation of eating at home, and to distinguish mundane everyday practices from those set apart as ‘sacred’.

Having considered the relationship between religion, locality and community for several years in the late 1990s, in 2001 I embarked on a more theoretical project to develop the necessary scholarly tools to analyse the location of religion in contemporary western society. ‘Location’ is the key word here. Whilst it was self-evident that religion resided in its places of worship and organisations, in new movements and, arguably, in various ‘spiritual’ beliefs and practices, it was not clear to what extent religion inhered in other, ostensibly secular, places. Inspired by the work of de Certeau and Foucault on everyday spatial practice and the ideological nature of public institutions, I determined to consider whether, and in what ways, religion was located ‘in the very fabric of the secular’ by looking intently at various apparently non-religious places.<sup>2</sup> I had in mind specific places at several scales: body, object, community, locality, organisation. My first thought experiments involved thinking about the location of religion in the street corner by my house, my daughter’s school playground and the walk to my local park.

In thinking deeply about these places I realised that such an exercise of location would require two things: first, a theory and method of analysing the nature of place and the socio-spatial process of location, and, secondly, some form of operational conceptualisation of religion (the object to be located). The results

<sup>1</sup> This article was read as a paper at the expert meeting *Ritual at home*, May 7<sup>th</sup> 2007, organised by the Liturgical Institute, Tilburg.

<sup>2</sup> M. DE CERTEAU: *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley 1984); M. FOUCAULT: *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London 1977 [1975]); IDEM: *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (London 1993 [1963]); J.R. CARRETTE: *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality* (London / New York 2000) 152.

of the work that followed are described in Part I of my book, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis*.<sup>3</sup> In Part II they are then applied in the first of several case studies, the left hand. Since then the methodology has also been applied to the relationship between the religious and the secular in other cases – a medical centre, high school and urban landscapes – and in relations between the disciplines of theology and religious studies.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. A spatial methodology, with examples on ritual and sacred space

### 2.1. Introduction

It was from the work of Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau and several postmodern geographers (Doreen Massey, Rob Shields and Ed Soja) that I developed the elements of a spatial approach that could be applied to the problem of locating religion.<sup>5</sup> These elements are:

<sup>3</sup> K. KNOTT: *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (London / Oakville CT 2005); see also IDEM: 'Spatial theory and method for the study of religion', in *Temenos: Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 41,2 (2005) 143-184.

<sup>4</sup> K. KNOTT: 'Britain's changing religious landscape: Drowning or waving', in *Berichte zur deutschen Landeskunde* 78,2 (2004) 213-229; IDEM: 'Researching local and national pluralism: Britain's new religious landscape', in M. BAUMANN & S. BEHLOUL (eds.): *Religiöser Pluralismus: Empirische Studien und analytische Perspektiven* (Bielefeld 2005) 45-68; IDEM: 'Religion, values and knowledge-power in contemporary secular spaces: The case of an English medical centre', in T. AHLBÄCK & B. DAHLA (eds.): *Exercising Power. The role of religions in concord and conflict* (Åbo 2007) 160-181; IDEM: 'Religious Studies and its relationship with Theology: A spatial analysis', in *Temenos: Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 43,2 (in press, 2007); K. KNOTT & M. FRANKS: 'Secular values and the location of religion: A spatial analysis of an English medical centre', in *Health and Place* 13,1 (2007) 224-237.

<sup>5</sup> KNOTT: *The Location of Religion* Chapters 1, 2 and 5. An earlier version of sections 2 and 3 appeared in KNOTT: 'Spatial theory and method'; H. LEFEBVRE: *The Production of Space* (Oxford / Cambridge MA 1991 [1974]); M. FOUCAULT: 'Of Other Spaces (Des espaces autres)', in *Diacritics* 16,1 (1986 [1967]) 22-27; DE CERTEAU: *The Practice of Everyday Life*; D. MASSEY: 'Politics and space/time', in M. KEITH & S. PILE (eds.): *Place and the Politics of Identity* (London 1993) 141-161; IDEM: 'Power-geometry and a progressive sense of place', in J. BIRD, T. CURTIS, G. PUTNAM & L. TICKNER (eds.): *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change* (London / New York 1993) 59-69; R. SHIELDS: *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London / New York 1991); E.W. SOJA: *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge MA 1996).

- The body as the source of ‘space’;<sup>6</sup>
- The dimensions of space;
- The properties of space;
- The aspects of space;
- The dynamics of space.

In this section I examine each of these in the context of social and cultural theory and show their relevance for thinking about ritual and sacred space in religious and secular contexts.

## 2.2. The body as the source of space

The first principle of a spatial approach for the location of religion is the foundational role of the body for our experience and representation of space, and for talking about our environment, the nature of our society, time and progress, and the sacred.<sup>7</sup> It was Kant who first noted the way in which the intersection of the surfaces associated with the three spatial dimensions and their relation to the body generated ‘the concept of regions in space’, notably of ‘above and below’, ‘right and left’ and ‘front and back’.<sup>8</sup> First, the different positions, parts and regions of space are understood relationally by way of our bodies. And, secondly, the way we orient places physically and mentally derives from our asymmetrical bilaterality. In short, our bodies allow us to experience and conceptualise the relationships between things, places, persons, as well as regions, and to identify differences.<sup>9</sup> Our minds then make fruitful use of the body’s nature, internal and external relations, situatedness and movement in space to

<sup>6</sup> ‘Space’ is a concept which allows us to talk, write and share ideas about an aspect of human and social experience, in this case the experience of our situatedness vis-à-vis the body, others and the world about us. Like ‘religion’, it is a concept with a contested history. When I use the word ‘space’ – henceforth without quotation marks – I mean the concept or notion of space not the phenomenon of space.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the centrality of embodied spatial metaphors in cognition and representation, see G. LAKOFF & M. JOHNSON: *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago / London 1980); IDEM: *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York 1999).

<sup>8</sup> I. KANT: ‘Concerning the Ultimate Foundation of the Differentiation of Regions in Space’, in G.B. KERFERD & D.E. WALFORD (eds.): *Kant: Selected Pre-Critical Writings and Correspondence with Beck* (Manchester / New York 1968 [1768]) 36–43, p. 38. For further discussion of Kant’s essay for an examination of body, space and place, see M. JOHNSON: *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination and Reason* (Chicago / London 1987) xxvi–xxix; E.S. CASEY: *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical Enquiry* (Berkeley 1997) 205–209; J.Z. SMITH: *To Take Place: Toward a Theory of Ritual* (Chicago / London 1987) 27–28.

<sup>9</sup> KANT: ‘Concerning the Ultimate Foundation of the Differentiation of Regions in Space’ 43.

produce spatial metaphors that can be used to articulate differences and relationships between persons, things, places and values.<sup>10</sup>

The centrality of the body for social life and the cultural order which shapes us and with which we engage was recognised in different ways by Lefebvre and Foucault. In his conclusion to *The Production of Space* Lefebvre wrote that,<sup>11</sup>

The whole of (social) space proceeds from the body, even though it so metamorphoses the body that it may forget it altogether (...) The genesis of a far-away order can be accounted for only on the basis of the order that is nearest to us – namely the order of the body.

Whilst Lefebvre suggests that it is possible to be unaware or forgetful about the foundational nature of the body in the production of social space, Foucault implies that something similar takes place in thinking about the cultural and discursive production of the body. More than the sum of its physical parts and biological processes, it is ‘the place where the most minute and local social practices are linked up with the large scale organisation of power’.<sup>12</sup> The body is at times the place where a cultural order plays itself out; it may become a representation of that order, and will certainly be conditioned and disciplined by it; and, of course, this is of considerable relevance for ritual bodies, their production and meaning.

How do these ideas about the body as the source of spatial perception and conception, and as a spatial outcome of cultural and political practices relate to religion? As Mary Keller has suggested, the body ‘determines the conditions for the possibility of experience which prefigures the structures of knowledge’.<sup>13</sup> Religions, which must necessarily work within these parameters, must likewise be formed on the basis of this bio-spatial starting point. Many sacred places – Hindu temples, for example – take the human body, its dimensions and loca-

<sup>10</sup> LAKOFF & JOHNSON: *Metaphors We Live By*; IDEM: *Philosophy in the Flesh*; JOHNSON: *The Body in the Mind*; G. LAKOFF: *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind* (Chicago / London 1987). Their ideas have been taken up by Veikko Anttonen in his discussion of the role of body and territory for the conceptualisation of the sacred. See following section for references.

<sup>11</sup> LEFEBVRE: *The Production of Space* 405.

<sup>12</sup> H.L. DREYFUS & P. RABINOW: *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (New York / London 1983) xxvi. The way in which bodies are sacralised in conformity with religious symbols, values and theological ideas demonstrates Foucault’s point. Furthermore, bodies and their behaviour are disciplined by religions. Individual and collective strategies which challenge and resist the power wrought by religions are also worked on and through the body.

<sup>13</sup> M. KELLER: *The Hammer and the Flute: Women, Power and Spirit Possession* (Baltimore / London 2002) 67.

tion in space as a measure.<sup>14</sup> The actions that take place there are not only performed by bodies, but may themselves be representations of abstract ideas about body parts, embodiment, human relations and hierarchy. Furthermore, ritual bodies are trained and disciplined in accordance with the ideals, norms and values laid down in religious traditions.

### 2.3. Dimensions and properties of space

By referring to ‘dimensions of space’ I take a unified view of space in which, following Lefebvre, physical, mental and social space are brought together.<sup>15</sup> In a geographical study of consumption, Robert Sack illustrates this multidimensional characteristic. Looking at the space of a commodity, he states,<sup>16</sup>

[W]hether a dress or an automobile, [it] embodies social relations. It is produced and consumed under specific labor conditions and social contexts. A commodity contains elements of the natural world, because it is drawn from raw materials and becomes situated in physical space (...) [it] also contains elements from the realm of meaning, because cultures attach value or meaning to the objects they use or consume.

Religion, which is social, practical and ideological, must also exist in and express itself through the dimensions of space. Moreover, it plays its part in the production and reproduction of space. Taking the example of transnational religious communities, they cross borders and root themselves in a variety of national contexts and local places.<sup>17</sup> They reproduce and express themselves through the mobility of their adherents, their interrelationships, in the printed word and in cyberspace, and through their spatial acts, whether mundane, ritual, performative, or even terrorist. They also generate novel spaces: new places in the landscape; the discursive arena of multiculturalism; diasporic spaces – at once real and imagined, physical and social.

This kind of multidimensional configuration, along with simultaneity, extension and power, are what I refer to as ‘properties of space’. These terms are drawn from Foucault’s reflection on the current ‘epoch of space’ in his 1967 lecture *Des espaces autres*,<sup>18</sup> and the idea of contemporary space as constituted by syn-

<sup>14</sup> D. ECK: *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Chambersburg PA 1981); G. MICHELL: *The Hindu Temple: An Introduction to its Meaning and Forms* (Chicago / London 1988).

<sup>15</sup> LEFEBVRE: *The Production of Space* 11.

<sup>16</sup> R.D. SACK: *Place, Modernity and the Consumer’s World: A Relational Framework for Geographical Analysis* (Baltimore 1992) 105.

<sup>17</sup> The study of the religion of transnational communities has been theorised by T.A. TWEED: *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge MA 2006).

<sup>18</sup> FOUCAULT: ‘Of Other Spaces’.

chronic relations, diachronic extensions and power was further explored by Doreen Massey.<sup>19</sup> She illustrated the idea of spatial simultaneity superbly with her account of the everyday space of London's Kilburn High Road in its internal complexity and diversity and its dynamic interconnection with other current global sites.<sup>20</sup> But Kilburn High Road, as well as being formed in part by the network of contemporary relations that constitutes it – global economic markets, the transnational links of its residents and visitors, the languages, religions and cultures of consumption that pass along it with their global connections – also contains its history within itself. This is place as palimpsest, as Michel de Certeau describes it:<sup>21</sup>

The revolutions of history, economic mutations, demographic mixtures lie in layers within it, and remain there, hidden in customs, rites, and spatial practices. The legible discourses that formerly articulated them have disappeared, or left only fragments in language. This place, on its surface, seems to be a collage. In reality, in its depth, it is ubiquitous. A piling up of heterogeneous places. Each one, like a deteriorating page of a book, refers to a different mode of territorial unity, of socio-economic distribution, of political conflicts, and of identifying symbolism.

A particular place – a French Romanesque cathedral, for instance, or a British Sikh *gurdwara* in what was once a factory or school – enfolds its social, physical and cultural history within it, the various phases in its development layering through it and sometimes engaging instrumentally with one another along the way.

From none of these spatial properties – of configuration, simultaneity and extension – is power absent. Without an arena of struggle, a space to produce and to shape, ideas and beliefs, principles and values remain ephemeral and ungrounded. They lack 'an appropriate morphology', as Lefebvre suggests.<sup>22</sup> He draws on a religious example:<sup>23</sup>

What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies? What would remain of a religious ideology – the Judaeo-Christian one, say – If it were not based on places and their names: church, confessional, altar, sanctuary, tabernacle? What would remain of the Church if there were no churches? The Christian ideology, carrier of a recognisable if disregarded Judaism (...), has created the spaces which guarantee that it endures.

<sup>19</sup> MASSEY: 'Politics and space/time' 155-156.

<sup>20</sup> MASSEY: 'Power-geometry and a progressive sense of place' 64-66; D. MASSEY: *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge 1994) 152-154.

<sup>21</sup> DE CERTEAU: *The Practice of Everyday Life* 201.

<sup>22</sup> LEFEBVRE: *The Production of Space* 417.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem* 44.

Churches and other places of worship, as symbolic places, are one means by which religious ideas about the divine, the human community, and the ritual process of producing sacred space are given a material presence. Secular ideology, however, on freedom, equality and diversity, no less than religious ideology, is embodied in state institutions and the ceremonies associated with them, in legislation and new civic celebrations.

The force of dominant ideology is not the only way in which power is exercised in space, however, as the performance of resistance and subversion also has spatial consequences. Demonstrations in London early in 2003 against the war in Iraq, for example, in which religious as well as secular political organisations were in evidence, not only temporarily transformed the streets down which they passed and the bodies of their participants but reproduced themselves in countless cities, in the pages of the world's press, and electronically on numerous websites. Furthermore, they entered the space of consciousness, not only of the demonstrators, but of those who supported the war, as a reminder of the force of resistance.

#### 2.4. The aspects of space

What about the 'aspects of space'? Here I turn again to the work of Lefebvre, this time to the spatial triad of which he wrote in *The Production of Space*, three interconnected aspects which distinguish spaces as perceived, conceived and lived by people.<sup>24</sup> His first aspect, the way in which space is generated, used and perceived by people in everyday life, Lefebvre called 'spatial practice'.<sup>25</sup> It is taken-for-granted, a matter of common sense, not reflected upon (even if, at times, it rubs up against the conceived spatial order). Spatial practice has its own logic, at the generative centre of which lies the body. It incorporates a repertoire of gestures, bodily movements and behaviours which may take account of the physical and social spaces in which they occur, but which are only partially dis-

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem* 33 and 38-40. This triad has been extensively treated by social and cultural geographers: SHIELDS: *Places on the Margin*; R. SHIELDS: *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics* (London and New York 1999); A. MERRIFIELD: 'Place and space: A Lefebvrian reconciliation', in *Transactions of the British Institute of Geographers NS* 18 (1993) 516-531; L. STEWART: 'Bodies, visions and spatial politics: A review essay on Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*', in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13 (1995) 609-618; SOJA: *Thirdspace*. Two scholars who have used it to discuss religion are C. CHIVALLON: 'Religion as space for the expression of Caribbean identity in the United Kingdom', in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 19 (2001) 461-483; T. GORRINGE: *A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption* (Cambridge 2002). I consider it in detail in KNOTT: *The Location of Religion* Chapter 2.

<sup>25</sup> This behavioural aspect was also treated in different ways by de Certeau and Bourdieu: DE CERTEAU: *The Practice of Everyday Life*, P. BOURDIEU: *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge 1990).

ciplined by them. In taking the shortest walk from one place to another, for example, we may deviate from the footpaths provided for us by planners. The repertoire of spatial practice may be co-opted in ritual or liturgy, in possession or procession, but the same repertoire also informs the activities of the health club, the army training barracks and youth subcultures. It is a question of spatial practice made sacred.<sup>26</sup> Religion, in its physical presence, social orderings, and cultural forms, is a consequence of spatial practice, though it is the attribution of meaning that gives such practice its character as ‘religious’.

With Lefebvre’s second and third aspects we move from the way space is perceived to the ways in which it is represented and then apprehended. Lefebvre distinguished what some of his English-speaking commentators have referred to as ‘representations of space’ from ‘spaces of representation’. By the former he meant conceived space, those dominant, theoretical, often technical representations of space that are produced by planners, architects, engineers and scholars.<sup>27</sup> Such spaces are expressions of ideology, in particular, of the dominant order, Lefebvre’s principal example being the ‘abstract space’ of modernism with its geometric, visual and phallic ‘formants’.<sup>28</sup> As if to illustrate the historical transition from Lefebvre’s ‘absolute space’ of medieval Europe to that of abstract modernism, the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner wrote:<sup>29</sup>

Yet the character of the new buildings is entirely un-Gothic, anti-Gothic. While in the thirteenth century all lines, functional though they were, served the one artistic purpose of pointing heavenwards to a goal beyond this world, and walls were made translucent to carry the transcendental magic of saintly figures rendered in coloured glass, the glass walls are now clear and without mystery, the steel frame is hard, and its expression discourages all other-worldly speculation. It is the creative energy of this world in which we live and work and which we want to master, a world of science and technology, of speed and danger, of hard struggles and no personal security.

Yet even this secular age of modernism, with its this-worldly orientation, continued to contain the religious traces of earlier periods. In Britain, medieval gothic, and, far more numerous, nineteenth century neo-gothic buildings (both religious and non-religious in character) dwelt amongst the glass, steel and con-

<sup>26</sup> See Catherine Bell on practice made sacred in ritual, and J.Z. Smith on the sacralisation – through ritual practice – of place: C. BELL: *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York / Oxford 1992); SMITH: *To Take Place*.

<sup>27</sup> LEFEBVRE: *The Production of Space* 38. Lefebvre tended to equate the act of representation with the work of the dominant order, arguably giving insufficient consideration and weight to active, demotic acts of representation.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem* 282-291.

<sup>29</sup> N. PEVSNER: *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius* (Harmondsworth 1960 [1936]) 216-217.

crete, the tower blocks. More recently, however, as a contemporary architect of mosques has noted,<sup>30</sup>

as the design canons of modernist minimality and pure composition have come under attack, there has been a new air of respectability for the study of ornament, craft, tradition, form, symbol, text, inscriptions.

Room has been made once again for theological codes to impress themselves on the landscape, particularly in those cities where new mosques, *mandirs* and *gurdwaras* are taking shape.

And what of Lefebvre's third aspect? What Lefebvre referred to as a 'space of representation', as distinct from those we have just considered, is 'directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols'.<sup>31</sup> It is experienced by those (such as artists, writers, performers, and indeed innovators of ritual and religious symbol) who seek to live in opposition to that which is normative and dominant, and may be a site of symbolic resistance which offers the possibility – albeit temporary – of gathering people and enabling them to escape or transcend their oppressive, routine or meaningless existence. As 'moments of presence', such spaces puncture the banality of everyday life.<sup>32</sup> Lefebvre's contemporary examples of lived space were associated with underground movements and politically-inspired carnival and performance. I would suggest that spiritually-inspired acts of resistance – for example, in relation to anti-globalisation, third world debt relief, anti-nuclear campaigning and conscientious objection to war – may serve as relevant examples, as well as those 'moments of presence' experienced from time to time in collective worship and festival.

These three aspects, which were not seen by Lefebvre as historical stages but as ever-present spatial possibilities, are themselves an illustration of the dynamism of space. Indeed, at times spaces may reproduce themselves, a successful space becoming the model for other such spaces, for example in the case of some religious buildings, commercial outlets, commodities, even rituals and laws. They may also produce new but different spaces: a ritual gathering in a sacred space may, for example, spawn new social groups or cultural products.

<sup>30</sup> G. HAIDER: 'Muslim space and the practice of architecture: A personal odyssey', in B.D. METCALF (ed.): *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe* (Berkeley 1996) 31-45, p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> LEFEBVRE: *The Production of Space* 39.

<sup>32</sup> SHIELDS: *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle* 60. It was in the context of discussing lived space that Lefebvre used the word 'moments', by which he meant those brief experiences of presence that 'are revelatory of the totality of possibilities contained in daily existence' (p. 58).

As we have seen in this section, social and cultural theory has reconceived 'space' as dynamic, in terms of its relationship to power, history and time, its condition of simultaneity and the various ways in which it is experienced and represented. No longer is it seen as the passive container or backdrop for human activity. It is thoroughly enmeshed in embodiment and everyday practice, knowledge and discourse, and in processes of production and reproduction, and consequently it is enmeshed in religion and ritual no less than in other areas of social and cultural life.

### 3. Scholars of religion on space and sacralisation

I turn now to several scholars of religion for whom body, place and space have been central to their theorizing of ritual and the sacred.<sup>33</sup> It was J.Z. Smith who, in his work in the 1970s and 1980s, dislodged theory on sacred space from its previous base in a phenomenological conception of both the sacred and space/place and re-engaged it with social and cultural constructionist approaches from anthropology and sociology.<sup>34</sup> At the heart of his 1987 book, *To Take Place*, was his consideration of the questions<sup>35</sup>

What if space were not the recipient but rather the creation of the human project?  
What if place were an active product of intellection rather than its passive receptacle?

'Human beings are not placed, they bring place into being', he wrote, and they do this – at least in the case of sacred places – through ritual.<sup>36</sup> Ritual, that creative process whereby people make a meaningful world that they can inhabit, 'is not... a response to "the sacred"; rather, something or someone is made sacred by ritual'.<sup>37</sup> This has, of course, been taken up by later scholars, Catherine Bell for example, but also scholars whose focus has been space rather than ritual *per se*.<sup>38</sup> Barbara Daly Metcalf, in her introduction to the edited collection *Making Muslim Space*, notes 'that it is ritual and sanctioned practice that is prior and that

<sup>33</sup> I recognise that there is significant body on ritual studies in general, but confine myself to examining the work of several scholars who combine an interest in ritual and space and whose ideas have particular implications for studying the 'secular'.

<sup>34</sup> For his critique of phenomenology and preference for social constructionism, see J.Z. SMITH: 'The influence of symbols upon social change: A place on which to stand', in J.Z. SMITH: *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago / London 1978) 129-146; IDEM: *To Take Place* 1-46.

<sup>35</sup> SMITH: *To Take Place* 26.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem* 28.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem* 105.

<sup>38</sup> BELL: *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*.

creates “Muslim space”, not *vice versa*, and Chidester and Linenthal, in their book on *American Sacred Space*, refer to the sacred as ‘situational, relational, and frequently, if not inherently, contested... a bi-product of this work of sacralisation’.<sup>39</sup>

This spatial engagement with sacred-making activities is most fully explored by the neo-Durkheimian scholar, Veikko Anttonen, for whom space – specifically body and territory – is more than just the product of sacralisation.<sup>40</sup> As he sees it, space is central to the generation of the ‘sacred’ as a categorical boundary. ‘Human body’ and ‘territory’ are denoted as fundamental pre-conceptual structures for the generation of discourse and practice pertaining to the ‘sacred’. The value of body and territory for investing boundaries with ‘sacred’ significance derives from their inter-relationship, or what Anttonen calls their ‘co-extensiveness as bounded entities’.<sup>41</sup> The human body has both an inside and an outside, the latter being co-extensive with the inside of the territory which it inhabits. The boundaries between body, territory and beyond – that separate both the inside of the body from the territory and that which is outside the territory from those within it – become culturally-dependent cognitive markers for distinguishing between entities on the basis of their value and for establishing rules for their engagement and transformation:<sup>42</sup>

Human beings have the dispositional property to invest the boundary – points of categories of for instance time, space and the human body with special referential value and inferential potential. This capacity is activated in places set apart as sacred.

The ‘sacred’ as a category boundary separates different domains, such as body from territory, male from female, person from animal, and yet binds them together: ‘It is generated as a boundary in situations when the focus of a commu-

<sup>39</sup> B.D. METCALF (ed.): *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe* (Berkeley 1996) 3; D. CHIDESTER & E.T. LINENTHAL (eds.): *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington / Indianapolis 1995) 6.

<sup>40</sup> V. ANTTONEN: *Ihmisen ja maan rajat. “Pyhä” kulttuurisena kategoriana* (Helsinki 1996), with a summary in English ‘The Making of Corporeal and Territorial Boundaries: The Sacred as a Cultural Category’; IDEM: ‘Rethinking the sacred: The notions of “human body” and “territory” in conceptualizing religion’, in T.A. IDINOPULOS & E.A. YONAN (eds.): *The Sacred and its Scholars: Comparative Religious Methodologies for the Study of Primary Religious Data* (Leiden 1996) 36-64; IDEM: ‘Sacred sites as markers of difference: Exploring cognitive foundations of territoriality’, in L. TARKKA (ed.): *Dynamics of Tradition: Perspectives on Oral Poetry and Folk Belief* (Helsinki 2003) 291-305; IDEM: ‘Space, body, and the notion of boundary: A category-theoretical approach to religion’, in *Temenos: Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* 41,2 (2005) 185-202.

<sup>41</sup> ANTTONEN: ‘Rethinking the sacred’ 41.

<sup>42</sup> ANTTONEN: ‘Sacred sites as markers of difference’ 31.

nity or a person shifts from the inside to the outside' or vice versa.<sup>43</sup> Ritual is the principal cultural process for managing it.

Having considered many vernacular uses and instances of the concept of the 'sacred' (*pyhä* in Finnish) in a variety of ethnographic settings, Anttonen suggests that,<sup>44</sup>

[Such] attributions of sacrality become more open to empirical verification when they are theorized on the basis of [the] actions, events and intentions of cultural agents in specific contexts as they make distinctions between spaces, mark them for specific uses, create visible and invisible boundaries, and establish cultural conventions of behaviour to deal with those boundaries.

It is just such spatial and cultural practices that we shall witness in the example of sacred dining below.

Before turning to that example I conclude this section with the work of several scholars who have considered ambiguous as well as conventional sacred spaces. In her consideration of the sacralisation of sacred space in hospitals and London's Millennium Dome, Gilliat-Ray notes that, whilst the attribution of sacrality or 'sacredness' in conventional places of worship arises as a consequence of shared rituals and acts of prayer, it<sup>45</sup>

cannot so easily occur in sacred spaces in public institutions because there is no on-going consensus that the meaning of the actions performed within them [has] some generally shared long-term significance.

Gilliat-Ray offers some suggestions about what sacred spaces in public institutions can provide for the people who use them, many of whom have not been nurtured in religious communities and have no formal religious affiliation.<sup>46</sup>

Sites of spiritual activity that are in some senses generic or universal and where there is an absence of explicit religious symbols or architecture associated with one single faith community, allow space for people to explore their own sometimes muddled beliefs (or lack of them) (...) People can undertake their own private interpretive work (...) Such spaces are thus perfectly suited to the needs of an in-

<sup>43</sup> ANTTONEN: 'Rethinking the sacred' 43.

<sup>44</sup> ANTTONEN: 'Space, body and the notion of boundary' 198.

<sup>45</sup> S. GILLIAT-RAY: "'Sacralising" sacred space in public institutions: A case study of the prayer space at the Millennium Dome', in *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 20,3 (2005) 357-372, p. 364. See also IDEM: 'From "chapel" to "prayer room": The production, use, and politics of sacred space in public institutions', in *Culture and Religion* 6,2 (2005) 281-302.

<sup>46</sup> GILLIAT-RAY: "'Sacralising" sacred space in public institutions' 364-365.

creasing number of people who have forgotten (or who may have never known) the protocols of visiting religious buildings.

Gilliat-Ray's examination of the affinity between such unconventional sacred spaces and the needs of the people who may pass through them raises questions about both the nature and function of secular sacred space and the process of sacralisation in late-modernity that together form a new context for the old debate in the study of religions on sacred space.

Scholars at Tilburg University have considered various aspects of secular sacred space, both newly permanent, as in the case of Queen Wilhelmina Forest, the site of 'Trees for Life Day', an annual ritual commemorating Dutch victims of cancer, and temporary, as in the case of those events and processions held, sometimes spontaneously, to mourn victims and come to terms with national disasters.<sup>47</sup> The ambiguity of such rituals is endorsed by the role that established religious leaders continue to have on such occasions, often called on to in the absence of non-religiously affiliated specialists. The 'location-specific' nature of such new sites is noted, as well as the importance of the journey to them and of the silent procession or ritual that often takes place there. Paul Post suggests that, within contemporary culture, it will be necessary,<sup>48</sup>

to reclaim, recapture, and conquer places for ritual in all sorts of different ways, in care organizations, at schools, in public areas ... a new ritual landscape with open spaces as platforms for ritual.

The identification and use of appropriate sites – at times of local or national disaster or for acts of secular commemoration or celebration – is part of the development of location-specific ritual repertoires which include socio-spatial elements such as the demarcation of the disaster zone, the creation of a spontaneous memorial site, the composition of a procession and the reading of the names of victims.<sup>49</sup> Places find themselves brought into being through their association with disasters and the ritual performances that are held there. What were once 'only' residential neighbourhoods, schools, nightclubs or forests are sacralised, set apart by events and their associations.

<sup>47</sup> P. POST: 'The "Trees for Life" Day: A new ritual for memorial and reconciliation: some ritual-liturgical observations on an emerging ritual to commemorate victims of cancer in the Netherlands', in *Studia Liturgica: An International Ecumenical Review for Liturgical Research and Renewal* 36,1 (2006) 94-108; P. POST, R.L. GRIMES, A. NUGTEREN, P. PETERSSON & H. ZONDAG: *Disaster Ritual: Explorations of an Emerging Ritual Repertoire* (Leuven etc. 2003 = Liturgia condenda 15).

<sup>48</sup> POST: 'The "Trees for Life" Day', 102.

<sup>49</sup> POST et al.: *Disaster Ritual* 247.

#### 4. Dining at home: A spatial analysis of domestic sacralisation

I turn now to my example, the contemporary secular case of dining at home, and shall use the spatial approach I outlined earlier to examine the difference between routine, mundane eating practises and sacralised ritual occasions focused around dining. My aim is *not* to go looking for religion as such in this case study, but to reveal some of the continuities between religious and secular practices, not least of all on the basis of the operation of what is referred to, by Anttonen and indeed many ordinary people, as the ‘sacred’.<sup>50</sup> I suggest that the notion of the ‘sacred’ can be meaningfully applied in both religious and secular contexts to denote that which is valued as inviolable and non-negotiable. Events, places, persons and objects are made ‘sacred’; they are ‘sacralised’ through ritual, including the dining rituals to which I shall now refer.

Following Anttonen, I suggest that it is the recognition and performance of boundaries that produces spaces. How does that work in the case of dining at home? What are the relevant boundaries in operation here? In many homes a key physical threshold is between kitchen and dining room or dining space, sometimes marked by a change of floor covering (hard, plain to soft or polished surface), the former being the place of food preparation, the latter of dining – of eating prepared food. Of course, eating also takes place in the kitchen, and, as Joe Moran suggests, kitchens have been enlarged and developed as lifestyle spaces since the 1960s, sometimes becoming the social hub of the home.<sup>51</sup> Breakfast is a case in point: individual family members pass through, eating hurriedly and transacting daily arrangements with one another, often absorbed in newspapers or their own thoughts.<sup>52</sup> Whilst this same space may be transformed for social dining, where space allows, a separate room or area is preferred for such occasions.

Although the dining room, or dining area in more open plan dwellings, could certainly not be said to constitute a place of permanent sacrality, I would contend that the erection and crossing of temporal boundaries can make it such. The domestic dining space can be produced as a sacred space on certain occa-

<sup>50</sup> I have written elsewhere about the relationship between the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’, and have used a spatial approach to discuss secular space and values. KNOTT: *The Location of Religion* 59-93 and 215-228 (on the notion of the ‘sacred’ in relation to the boundary between the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’); IDEM: ‘Religion, values and knowledge-power’; KNOTT & FRANKS: ‘Secular values and the location of religion’.

<sup>51</sup> J. MORAN: *Reading the Everyday* (London / New York 2005) 131.

<sup>52</sup> Eating may also take place in the living room in front of the television and around the barbecue in the garden or on the patio.

sions set apart from everyday routine, such as children's birthdays, wedding anniversaries, Christmas meals and when special guests are invited to join the family.<sup>53</sup> A spatial analysis reveals how deep this goes.

Thinking about the physical and social dimensions of a dining room, we see that the object upon which activity is focused is the table, with its attendant chairs, the measure of which is the human body. Around the table family members and guests will sit, not in line or haphazardly, but facing one another across the table's centre, which, on special occasions, may be marked with a decorative object such as flowers or candles. Special tableware is dusted off and brought to the table.<sup>54</sup> The ambience may be enhanced with low lighting, music and other forms of decoration which contribute to the transformation of what is otherwise an ordinary space. Bodies, too, are worked on for such an occasion. An unspoken code prohibits unclean bodies and working clothes. There may be a 'seating plan'; a key figure might sit at 'the head of the table', reminding us that hierarchical arrangements are still in force though the person honoured may be a guest or child.<sup>55</sup> If guests are present, their arrival will probably be marked by gift-giving (of flowers, wine or special delicacies).

A remarkable number of norms and rules apply and these are revealed by reflecting on both the social and ideological nature of the space and the way it has developed historically.<sup>56</sup> Such a dining occasion reproduces in adapted form many of the practices of the leisured classes of earlier times. The 'place setting' is a good example of this. Norbert Elias, in his illustrations from humanist manuals from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, noted how the positioning of implements and the various behaviours for civilised eating developed and were internalised.<sup>57</sup> The basic pattern, of lowly bread and napkin to the left and privileged knife and goblet to the right, was elaborated in later centuries and courtly circles to accommodate multiple courses of both food and drink, and this is replicated, though less lavishly, in contemporary place settings and courses. Eating with one's fingers is rarely endorsed on such occasions, and we

<sup>53</sup> By 'family' I mean any domestic social unit, with or without children and other dependents, composed of different or same sex couples.

<sup>54</sup> An examination of the dining section of the household and furniture store Ikea (and its catalogue) arguably reflects the symbolic nature of the table, its dressing and decoration, as well its development as a space of consumption (for the UK Ikea website, see [www.ikea.com/gb/en/catalog/categories/rooms/dining/](http://www.ikea.com/gb/en/catalog/categories/rooms/dining/), accessed 10 July 2007).

<sup>55</sup> I have used various English expressions to illustrate the etiquette and norms of formal dining. I am sure that there are similar examples in other languages.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. K. FOX: *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (London 2004) 295-324.

<sup>57</sup> N. ELIAS: *The Civilising Process: Sociogenetic and psychogenetic investigations* (Oxford 2000 [1939]) 76-77, 160.

would be surprised to be served with commonplace or 'fast' foods such as spaghetti bolognese or burger and French fries. 'The rituals of eating – its preparation, rules over ingredients and combinations of foods, and the organisation of shared consumption', as David Chaney suggests, 'all provide a powerful exemplification of the moral order of the household'.<sup>58</sup>

Other unspoken rules and norms can be observed, and such meals may also be the occasion for training children in dining etiquette. Normally, diners remain seated throughout the meal and children must ask to leave the table ('Can I be excused?'). The hosts put themselves in the position of servants tending the needs of their social superiors, and normally it is only they who cross the boundary between the inside of this dining space and the outside – the kitchen.<sup>59</sup> Polite conversation is the norm, family arguments are taboo, and guests are expected to compliment the food or décor (at least until sufficient alcohol has been drunk for rules to be transgressed with good humour). Hosts and guests alike are on their 'best behaviour'.

But such meals are not marked exclusively by formality and normative behaviour. With social intensification and celebration, and the confirmation of new status or stages of life as their purpose, they may include key moments and ritual transgressions. Blowing out candles and making wishes on birthdays and anniversaries, kissing one another and exchanging gifts. Christmas crackers are more than a mere distraction for restless children: they contain jokes (usually poor ones) designed to overturn the formality of the occasion, and hats (not normally worn at table).<sup>60</sup> The toast is a moment of social equality when eye-contact is made and good wishes are shared, and when individuals or couples may be honoured for their age, achievements or the duration of their marriages.

From time to time social conformity may be broken by 'moments of presence' marking the move from what Lefebvre called conceived space to lived space,

<sup>58</sup> D. CHANEY: *Cultural Change and Everyday Life* (Houndmills Basingstoke / New York 2002) 71.

<sup>59</sup> This is underscored in Britain by TV dramas and documentaries which illustrate the social relationships between domestic servants and upper class families in late nineteenth and early twentieth century society: *Upstairs, Downstairs* (London Weekend Television 1970); *The Edwardian Country House* (Channel 4 1999).

<sup>60</sup> Christmas crackers are reinforced paper cylinders with twisted ends which typically contain a joke, hat and small toy. The cracker is 'pulled' by two diners: each grasps one end and they pull in opposite directions. A small explosion is heard as the two halves separate (hence the name). The contents belong to the diner still holding the main body of the cracker; s/he must read the joke aloud and put on the hat. The history of the British 'cracker' dates back to 1847, see [www.absolutelycrackers.com/historynew.html](http://www.absolutelycrackers.com/historynew.html) (accessed 9 July 2007).

for example when cultures meet across the table and a third space of encounter opens up. Notwithstanding such unusual moments, dining rituals are generally enacted to celebrate the special nature of those relationships – with those of one’s own kind – that we normally take for granted. We set apart such times from the banality of everyday life. Although such occasions may commonly be rendered as part of our everyday ‘quotidian’ experiences – in TV comedy or as consumer culture – they are not.

The many small things I have mentioned here may seem trivial, but the point is that together they produce an effect of difference, an occasion that is not mundane, that is designed to produce community, whether by reinforcing family ties or bringing new members temporarily within the body of the family. As Chaney notes of occasions such as Thanksgiving and Christmas:<sup>61</sup>

What is to count as a home will be constituted through certain symbols and rituals – thus times of family reunions at “the old home” will usually be celebrated as a ritualised meal.

## 5. Conclusion

Why is a case like this important? As scholars of religion working within disciplines which reify ‘religion’ and the ‘religious’ (whether as theological or cultural constructions), we have a tendency to separate the space of religion from that of non-religion. We are not alone in doing so. With other members of western society we have inherited the idea that religion is distinguishable from that which is ‘secular’, including the habits and routines of daily life (rather than recognising that the religious and the secular are ‘two sides of a coin’).<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, in theorizing ‘the everyday’ or ‘quotidian’, late-modern scholars (notably in Cultural Studies) who were educated in the secular humanities and social sciences, have tended to represent it as ‘secular’. They have reproduced it as the sphere of the mundane,<sup>63</sup> though those who inspired them, like Lefebvre, de Certeau and Bourdieu, were eager to trouble the bland surface of the ‘everyday’ and to leave space within it for people to resist the deadening effects of

<sup>61</sup> CHANEY: *Cultural Change and Everyday Life* 59.

<sup>62</sup> G. JANTZEN: *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (Manchester 1998) 8.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, the book covers of Moran (*Reading the Everyday*) and Chaney (*Cultural Change and Everyday Life*) showing formica tabletops, cheap tableware and mass-produced bottled sauces.

capitalism.<sup>64</sup> I would suggest that what a spatial methodology offers, when combined with a neo-Durkheimian perspective on the 'sacred', is a way of crossing the boundaries between religion and non-religion, and the religious and the secular. People continue to set things, events and places apart as 'sacred' even in the domestic sphere. A spatial analysis of the boundary constructed around the dining space and what lies inside and outside it helps us to see how spatial and temporal difference is marked by changes in physical, social and cultural arrangements, and how the nature of the ritual process of civilised dining on such an occasion can be illuminated by considering its spatial dimensions, properties and aspects.

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<sup>64</sup> H. LEFEBVRE: *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday* (London / New York 2002 [1961]); DE CERTEAU: *The Practice of Everyday Life*; BOURDIEU: *The Logic of Practice*.