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## Places

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For Those Who Spend Time in a Place [Light in Place]

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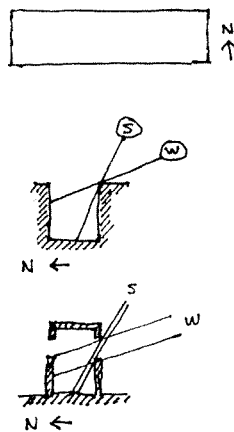
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# For Those Who Spend Time in a Place

*Ralph Knowles*

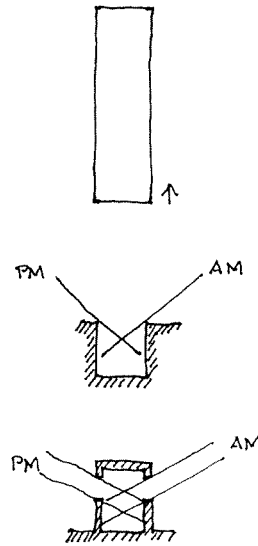
Whether we occupy an inside or an outside space, two scales of the passage of time can be noted. One measures a day of experiences and actions; the other, a year. People must remain a while. They cannot really know their possibilities, or the possibilities of a place, by passing through just once.



Any space that is oriented from east to west strengthens our experience of the seasons. One main wall is nearly always dark; on the other side of the space, a shadow line moves gradually up the wall then down again. To experience the complete cycle takes exactly one year. The basic

Drawings by Ralph Knowles.

movement is always the same. As the sun's path drops lower in the sky during the summer and fall, the shadow moves up. As the sun's path rises in the sky during the winter and spring, the shadow moves down.

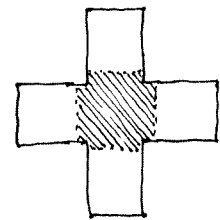
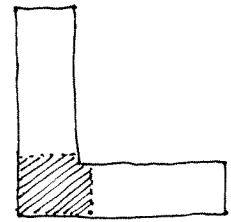


Any space that is oriented from north to south sharpens our experience of a day. Both main walls are lighted, but at different hours. Every morning, light from the east will cast a shadow that moves quickly down the opposite wall and across the floor. Every afternoon, light from the west will cast a shadow that crosses the floor and climbs the opposing wall. To experience the whole cycle takes from before sunrise until after sundown.

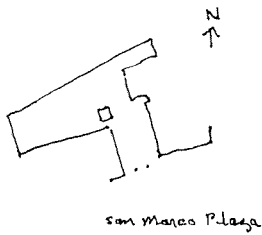
Where east-west and north-south spaces pierce each other, we can experience both time scales. The common volume intensifies both a seasonal and a daily cycle. It combines them, laying one over the other. The result is a crossing in space that proportions

time. Its celebration has often lifted architecture out of the region of fact into the realm of art.

In great cathedrals, sunlight cycles occupy a year in the nave, a day in the transept. In a monastic church of the Middle Ages as well as a basilica of Renaissance Rome, some sort of spatial crossing proportions time. In these places, the perpetually renewed experience of wonder is intensified by the changing qualities of light, variations of hue as well as value.



San Marco Plaza in Venice is oriented so that its two parts manifest different solar cycles. Consequently, some building surfaces are mostly subdued, even a bit gloomy. Others are mostly alive and radiant. Still others alternate, moving first to one mode, then to another. The places where people choose to direct their attentions and energies, especially where they find a cafe table to sit down, all vary with the day and season.



There is a special place in San Marco Plaza that celebrates these two levels of awareness; it is marked by a great campanile. Shadows from its towering height sweep from west to east by day, from north to south by year. The tower and its shadows mark a ritual passage in time.

My family sits down every day to eat. But instead of sitting in the same place, we sit at different tables. The way this happens has been gently guided by rhythmic changes of sunlight and shadow on our back porch.

Almost every day we eat at least one of our meals on the back porch. The meals that we do not carry out to the porch we eat in the dining room, separated from the porch by glass doors. In and out, beginning at dawn and ending after sundown, we carry food and utensils through the doors.

Two independent sunlight cycles provide multiple combinations of places to sit down. In winter we are likely to eat breakfast and dinner in the dining room. But for lunch we have the choice of sitting on the sunny part of our back porch. In summer we are more likely to eat breakfast behind sun screens in the dining room. But for lunch and dinner we have the choice of sit-

ting on the shady part of the back porch. The texture of possibilities is rich and rewarding.

A neighbor's tree spreads over the south end of our porch. To catch the warm winter sun, we move our table northward. To sit in the cool summer shadow, we move the table southward. Back and forth, once each spring and again each fall, we carry the table across a shadow line. The moment we know that it is spring is not exact. We could remember the calendar, but more often than not, on a warm and sunny morning, somebody will say, "Let's move the table."

And then it is spring, no matter what happens next.

Somehow we are always astonished at the seasonal changes and the possibilities they evoke. Moving the table shifts all our connections to the house, the view and each other. After 25 years, we are still thinking up new ways of arranging things.

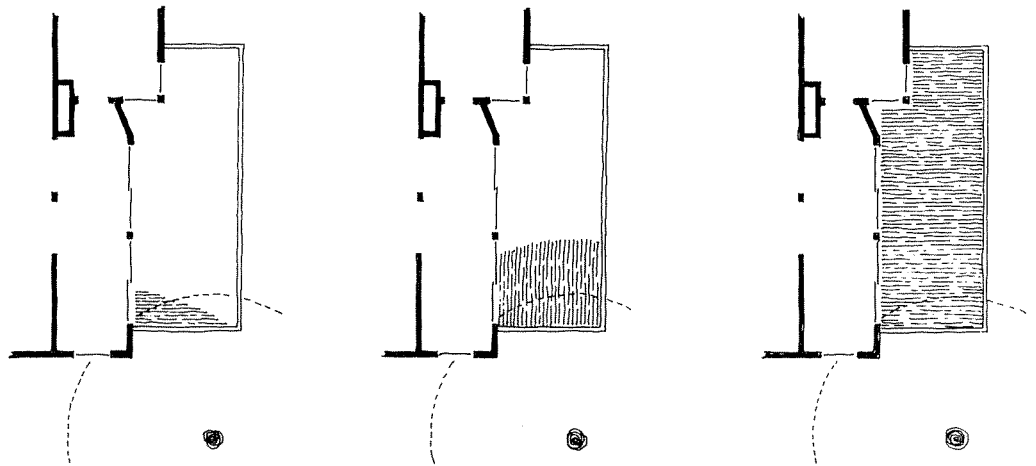
Architecture, by depending too much on machines, has destroyed ritual as a mode of self-expression. This is the result of neither designed nor accidental chaos in the patterns of space and events. It is, rather, the product of rhythms that

are too simple and insistent to challenge our imagination. We learn too quickly; too quickly we forget.

The great advantage in these machine-made places lies with those who are just passing through, who don't have the time to establish a more complex set of connections to a building or space. This may be helpful to a population on the move. But for those who spend time in these places, there is a quick decline of original possibilities.

For those who spend time in a place, time-rich environments offer a complex of possibilities for ritual. ●

**Summer shadows on the back porch, morning, midday and afternoon.**



**Winter shadows on the back porch, morning, midday and afternoon.**

