

CERES: SINGING UP THE CITY

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Sometimes, at sunset, I meet at CERES with friends, other members of our little group of 'reinhabitants'; we make a fire in the big domed oven to warm the food we have brought to share. We sit in the firelight till late in the evening. Sometimes till later. The moon rises. Windmills swish and trees murmur. There is the occasional clamour of roused geese up at the stables. Close by, but out of sight, the creek glides past in the dark. Bill, our inventor, boils a kettle on a methane gas-ring fed by a dozen barrels of compost. Louis, our musician, strums guitar and sings green-blues. Little rituals sometimes erupt in our midst, to mark the transit of the seasons. We tell dreams, make wishes. The whole site, deserted, shadowy and lamplit, rises and falls around us, breathing, its presence real and palpable. Though the gardens and African huts and animals in their straw beds are all wrapped in sleep, the world itself is awake, alive, alert to the conversation in our circle. And sometimes, sitting there in the company of my friends and this wide-awake world, in this slumbering place, I have a sense of the uncanny, as if the scene around me belongs to another world, a possible world, perhaps the future of this world, but not the present. We are at the edge of reality, neither in the country, for traffic drones in the background, and overhead the sky is lurid with city light, nor in the city, for we are gathered around a camp fire amidst food gardens and paddocks and bee hives. Our scene does not belong to the 'developed' world, since we are, at that moment, at the heart of a village surrounded by technologies of subsistence; but nor does it belong to the 'developing' world, since our talk betrays our identities as privileged, white 'first worlders'. This is not a glimpse into the premodern past: there is too much cryptic evidence of contemporary urban civilization - electric lighting, a computer screen glowing through the office window, the power lines. But it is not the face of modernity either, given its animistic ambience. It is a scene cut adrift from reality, and I wonder, where does it belong? In the future? Is this how social life will be organized late in the 21st century? Will we by then have brought nature - habitat and food production - back into the city; will we have recaptured the enchantment of the premodern world, saturated as it was with spirituality, in the secular civilization created by modernity; will we have worked the village culture and human-nature partnerships of the 'third world' back into the alienated fabric of the 'first world'? Or will society in the late 21st century have gone further, much further, down the other path, the path leading to a scenario in which this re-awakened site will be paved over again, sealed up and silenced under storeys of concrete, and the trees and kingfishers, the windmills and honey lane gardens have vanished forever from our cities, the cities which, by then, will have claimed the world?

CERES as a site of re-enchantment

The original - totally inspired - choice of 'CERES' (Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies) as the name for the ten acre environment park situated in East

Brunswick, close to the heart of Melbourne, accurately portended the unique blend of techno-environmentalism and re-enchantment, science and mythology, that was in time going to give rise to the 'genius loci' of this now blossoming locus of community activism. Over the years, CERES has situated itself at the cutting edge of education in environmental design, but at the same time the site has acquired an archetypal life of its own. An invocation of the Greek goddess, Demeter (who was known as Ceres in Rome), is implied in the site's name, suggesting dedication to the goddess, in much the way that sacred shrines or groves were dedicated to particular deities in the ancient world. This dedication would seem to have been uncannily successful, inasmuch as Demeter's myth is being played out with extraordinary appositeness in this antipodean setting.

In order to appreciate this appositeness, let's take a moment to remember who Demeter, alias Ceres, was. The story of Demeter and her daughter, Persephone (also known as Kore), was in fact the oldest story in Greek mythology, deriving from the myths of Isis (Egypt) and Inanna (Sumer), where the latter is the earliest myth still extant in the Western tradition. Isis and Inanna were survivals from pre-patriarchal Old Europe, and they both preserved many features of the neolithic and paleolithic Great Goddess - the fertility Goddess who was for many thousands of years the primary deity of the agricultural peoples of prehistoric Europe and the Middle and Near East. The myth of the Great Goddess was one of renewal - of birth, death and regeneration. In its original form, it revolved around the annual sacrifice of the young Horned God, a grain god who was the son and consort of the Great Mother: the god was sacrificed/harvested annually in order that new life could arise out of his death/blood. In Sumer and Egypt, this primordial agricultural myth acquired new spiritual depth and maturity via a detailed telling of the goddess' own mortifying descent into the underworld: through her encounter with the shadow side of existence in the realm of death, the sources of life within her were restored and replenished, and she brought renewal back to the world above.

This archetypal myth of descent and return found expression, in early Greece, in the story of Demeter and Persephone. (The Great Goddess was regularly represented in dual, and even triple, aspects: she sometimes appeared as a pair of sisters, or as maiden and mother, or as maiden, mother and crone.) In the Greek version of the story, Demeter loses her beloved daughter to Hades, the god of the underworld, who abducts her after the Olympian gods have refused to allow him to take her as his wife. Desolated, Demeter wanders in search of Persephone. In her wintry emotional state, she withdraws the life force from the land; plants no longer grow; animals cease to thrive or give birth. Eventually she arrives at Eleusis, where she lives incognito as a nursemaid within the community, till the Olympians arrange a deal with Hades. The deal is that Hades will restore Persephone, who has by now become the Queen of the Underworld, to her mother for part of the year, on the understanding that Persephone will also spend part of each year below ground with Hades. When Demeter is reunited with her daughter, the land blossoms and becomes fruitful again, and thereafter Persephone's descent marks the onset of winter, and her return the arrival of spring.

The CERES site itself started out as a quarry, a hole in the ground, a gateway to the underworld. Subsequently, it was a tip - the very image of waste, desolation, blight. Then, fifteen years ago, the goddess Demeter was invoked, and the process of renewal began. The soil, originally so compacted and barren, gradually became fertile again. Regeneration was slow at first, but in time the efforts of Demeter's devotees bore fruit. The ground sprouted with gardens and groves; animals (particularly pigs, the creatures sacred to Demeter!) made their home there; and people - especially children - came from far and wide to visit the site and learn about the ways of renewal, exemplified in windmills and solar generators, methane digesters and grey water systems, worm farms and native permaculture. There was music and dancing and art, as Demeter's people understood the need for celebration as much as for work. There were many festivals. That this place has indeed become a sacred site, charged with the power of the old fertility goddess, however, is most powerfully evident in the main event in the CERES calendar, the annual Kingfisher Festival.

In classical times, the cult of Demeter and Persephone gave rise to the most revered and hallowed religious event of the ancient world (Roman as well as Greek): the initiation rites at Eleusis. There, where Demeter was believed to have grieved for her daughter, a large-scale ritual was conducted each spring, for the purpose of revealing to the initiates the mystery of death, and the promise of regeneration contained therein. The contents of this ceremony are to this day unknown, because initiates were sworn to secrecy, but that it consisted of an enactment of the descent of the goddess, and her subsequent return and the renewal of the earth, is clear.

In an almost eerie resurrection of the Eleusinian Mysteries, adapted to the present place and time, we now have the spring Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival here at CERES. The return of this little azure bird, the sacred kingfisher, to its homelands along the Merri creek, after the long 'winter' of colonization/development/modernization, is an appropriate Aboriginal/Australian expression of the sacred daughter's return. That she should take the indigenous and local form of this bird is not only philosophically appropriate - it also resonates with the fact that the Great Goddess was archetypally represented as a water-bird woman. (Persephone herself was originally attended by water-bird women, who in later stories became the sirens.)

The Kingfisher festival brings hundreds of local performers of different ethnicity and cultural provenance - schoolchildren, dancers and artists - together with thousands of local residents, environmentalists and activists, in a cathartic, high energy celebration of place. Its dramatic re-enactment of the retreat of the kingfisher in the face of ecological holocaust and its return in response to the efforts of local people to regenerate their 'country' through revegetation and restoration, symbolizes the beginning of a new 'season' of peaceful coexistence between the people and the land in this locality. Mythic elements from Aboriginal culture are woven into the proceedings, and the Aboriginal custodians who lead the entire performance 'initiate' non-indigenous Australians into ancient local rituals of place, thereby inducing a more custodial consciousness in the new peoples, and inviting us all, indigenous and non-indigenous alike, to become 'reconciled' as one people through our common commitment to homeplace.

With a blend of forms faithful to the land and its first and later peoples then, but also to the archetypal meaning of its eponymous goddess, CERES both celebrates and powerfully invokes, via this festival, the return of life, of fertility, to our blighted planet.

It is such evocation of a mythopoetic sense of life in the context of scientific demonstrations of environmental repair and sustainability that places CERES at the frontier of environmentalism. Mythopoesis by itself cannot save our planet - as the comfortable coexistence of the New Age movement with unreconstructed corporate capitalism attests. But nor is techno-environmentalism by itself adequate to this task - as is evidenced by the current stagnation of the mainstream environment movement. Without the motivation and creative energy that spring from re-enchantment, environmentalism is, it appears, being experienced increasingly as a chore, a burden, an abstract cause which cannot compete with the distractions, obligations and expediencies of everyday life, a responsibility best delegated to the very authorities who are in fact overseeing the regime of development that has ravaged the natural world. Re-enchantment however, by transforming people's relation to their world, putting them in touch with larger sources of meaning, reconfigures the old self-centred patterns that emanate from our modern society, so that 'caring for country' is no longer merely a burdensome duty but integral to our sense of self and, on a spiritual level, to our very sustenance.

To provide such new ways of life, based on aesthetics and mythopoeics rather than on the ethos of modernity, is, I believe, the primary task of environmentalism in the twenty-first century. Techniques and technologies for ecological sustainability must, of course, be available, but these should be offered incidentally to a way of life that, being based on poetic dialogue with creation, is simply incompatible with techniques and technologies of destruction. The appeal of environmentalism should thus, from this point of view, be first to our imagination, rather than to our conscience or our reason. When our imagination is engaged, and our poetic sense of life is rewoven into all our everyday practices, then we shall reach for the techniques and technologies that are compatible with - though not in themselves the substance of - our vision.

CERES as a site of reinhabitation

It is these mythopoetic aspects of CERES' mission, and particularly its festivals, that have led to the re-awakening or re-enchantment of CERES as a site. This recapturing of an organic sense of place, through re-enchantment, is a major precondition for the overturning of the modern worldview that underpins the environmental crisis.

From the basically Newtonian or mechanistic viewpoint of modernity, the category of place, central to the organization of the premodern world, is replaced by that of space. Space is conceived as an infinite, qualitatively undifferentiated manifold, contingently occupied by accidental assemblages of matter. Material objects themselves are aggregates of inert, intrinsically indiscernible units or particles - atoms. We can cut the cloth of either space or matter any way we please, because both are without innate form, and are

organized solely according to the quantitative principles of division and aggregation. Both space itself, and the matter which randomly occupies it, are, from this reductionist viewpoint, profoundly inanimate. Meaning and purpose reside exclusively in human consciousness - it is we who render the world meaningful by making it over to suit our purposes, to match our abstract designs and ends.

The Newtonian perspective facilitates the human control and exploitation of reality. By analytically dividing matter and space up into supposedly discrete parts (objects, locations), and logically isolating them from one another, we greatly simplify their identities; by minimizing the degree of interaction between things, and thereby reducing the number of variables with which we have to contend, we minimize complexity and unforeseeability. To minimize complexity and unforeseeability is, of course, to maximize predictability, and when we can predict the outcome of our interventions in the course of events, we can begin to bring reality under our control, to use it for our own purposes.

The lay-out of the European world, physically as well as intellectually, reflects this mechanistic outlook, which divides reality up into supposedly discrete parts the better to be able to control and exploit it. The theoretical division of matter into arbitrary, inert units or parts (atoms) is reflected at a more everyday level, in the representation of *land* - the tangible face of reality - as the inert substrate, 'property'. This theoretical outlook is actualized by the physical division of land into (usually rectangular) 'blocks', which can then be fully subordinated to human utilization. The evolutionary integrity and character of the land is in this process obliterated, and the organic identity of places ignored and destroyed. Land uses too are separated out and segregated: there are 'zones' for agriculture (and, within monocultural regimes, different 'zones' for different crops); there are zones for forestry, zones for (human) residence, industrial zones, sports and entertainment complexes, business districts, zones for children (schools), zones for old people (retirement villages and nursing homes) and zones for worship (churches). Efforts are made to exclude all other uses and occupants from a zone designated for a particular use or class of occupant. This is the compartmentalized mentality of modernity, segregating everything - work in factories and offices, leisure in sports and entertainment complexes, nature in nature reserves, food production in intensively specialized factory farms and centres of agribusiness - in order to simplify reality and thereby render it predictable and controllable.

Urban and even rural planning, with its general disregard for the integrity, character and relational complexity of the world-as-it-is, its commitment to the principle of division in the form of zoning, and its subscription to the concept of an isolable site as a set of coordinates in space, a segment of the empty backdrop to human agency, on which different scenes can be drawn, and erased, regardless of context, according to designers' maps and abstract projections, clearly rests on Newtonian premises.

But there are other approaches to organizing reality, and the growth of the CERES site over the last 15 years testifies to these. The organization of this site has not (at least until recently) been guided by a grand plan, but has largely been a result of piecemeal creative initiatives and spontaneous adaptation to changing conditions and contexts. Although this

ad hocness has been partly a function of circumstances, it has also expressed an intuitive sense of an organic approach to organization at odds with dominant modes but in keeping with the ecological mission of CERES. A consistent ecological philosophy may be read, retrospectively, off the site itself, and from the history of CERES' unfolding. According to such an ecophilosophical point of view, the world is an indivisible whole, a dynamic, holistic system, in which parts and regions (and hence places and sites) take their identity from their relations with one another and with the wider system. Such a whole cannot be broken down into discrete elements, and any attempt so to break it down will destroy its integrity and essential qualities. For the same reason, such a whole cannot be *understood* analytically, in terms merely of the nature of its parts, for the 'parts' themselves can only be understood in terms of the way they reflect, in their individually distinctive ways, the nature of the whole.

Viewed in such systemic terms, the world is animate and intelligent, because the life and mind which are, in the Newtonian scheme of things, localized within discrete elements of reality (such as ourselves), are here dispersed throughout the system. The system thus has its own telos, its own principles of unfolding, its own meanings. No part of it is inert, since no part of it is separable from other parts. The interactions between parts inform the identities of the parts themselves.

The organization of the CERES site expresses this organic and relational view of things. Different aspects of life intermingle and permeate each other: offices are situated in the midst of food gardens; in the gardens themselves, cross-species mutuality rather than species apartheid is fostered; animals wander around the cafe; children run freely; sociability informs work; functional areas are inscribed with 'art', which endows the mundane activities that take place in those areas with larger meanings, and lifts the tone of daily life to a ritual or poetic level. This is the village model of organization, in which all the different aspects of life, from the most trivial to the transcendent, are interpenetrating, and thereby enriched and cross-fertilized.

In such a scenario, human activity starts to fall into step with the larger life of things. Control dissolves. Spontaneity is rampant: when a chook jumps onto your table while you are following your usual suave cafe-conversation routine, or when you spend your lunch break checking what's happening in your vegetable plot, or when fifty schoolchildren dancing to an African drum turn up to watch you fix your solar panel, life can no longer be contained by our conventional scripts. Our experience becomes essentially unpredictable. 'Efficiency' inevitably suffers, but the opportunities for engagement that the world presents, and that 'efficiency' occludes, proliferate.

To engage with the larger life of things, to encounter the intelligence in the world, and to be borne along on the current of its unfolding, is to experience re-enchantment. The experience of re-enchantment is, I am suggesting, bound up with the recovery of place, for it is only in a world which has been allowed to organize itself according to its own organic principles, into qualitatively differentiated places with their own overlapping coherencies, that that informing intelligence is manifest. The organic integrity and character of original places reflects the organic integrity and character of the awakened

world. Moreover, if we wish to encounter the world, experience it as a responsive, communicative presence, then we do so through entering into deep, informing relationship with it, through coming to belong to it. To belong to the world is to engage with it concretely rather than *in abstracto*, and we can only engage with the world concretely through particular places. Truly to reinhabit places then is to re-enter the stream of a larger life, to experience re-enchantment.

Our attitude to biological nature, or the green environment, is only one aspect of our attitude to our world. If we have a purely instrumental attitude to the world at large, and do not view the world as the ultimate source of the meanings which sustain us, then this instrumentalism is likely to be carried over into our attitude to the biological world. We know that when people inhabit a particular place for a long period of time, and come to know both its history and its physical character well, it tends to acquire an important significance for them: they develop a 'sense of place'. Such a sense of place is partly a function of mutual identification of person and place - the way the identities of place and person come to be reciprocally informing; but it might also be seen as a function of the effect of that identification on the place itself - its coming to life, its responsiveness to its people. To invest a place with our life is, as Aboriginal people say, to 'sing it up'¹, to awaken its own life and capacity for recognition: the place claims us, as we claim it. To develop such a sense of one's own 'country' is inherently conservationist and custodial: when people feel this way they will spontaneously defend their place against threats to its character and integrity. To encourage relationships between people and places whereby the place in question, whether urban or rural, becomes somebody's 'country' is thus an important way of promoting locally based environmentalism. The CERES site provides opportunities for local people to discover, over time, a deep, non-instrumental relationship with a particular place, and so explore a new metaphysical orientation to the world.

From the viewpoint of this new metaphysical orientation, the project of environmentalism necessarily includes the project of *reinhabitation*. When people become truly native to their own home-places, when they identify with them, and commit to them, then degraded places will be lovingly restored and intact places will be lovingly maintained. When all places, whether urban or rural, have their custodians, then protection of 'the environment' will be assured. Environmentalism, from this point of view, is not merely about energy conservation, waste management, pollution control and promotion of biodiversity; it is also, at a more fundamental level, about the renegotiation of the relation between people and place, where this renegotiation rests on a new metaphysical understanding of the world and its implication in human identity.

¹ I think - I hope - it is justifiable to use this Aboriginal expression here, even though it might not correspond exactly to the uses of the expression in traditional contexts. To 'enchant' the world is, after all, literally, in an etymological sense, to sing it, to inform it with chant or song. The sorcerer or witch 'enchants' by singing spells or incantations, reciting charms. 'Singing up' is thus a concept which has roots in premodern Western as well as Aboriginal traditions.

It is worth noting in this connection that environmental organizations often betray, in their relation to their own work-bases, a lack of understanding of the depth of this necessary renegotiation. Many such organizations operate out of offices or premises to which they attribute a purely instrumental status. These premises are not allowed to assume the status of place in an organic sense, but are treated as part of the movable scenery we erect around ourselves to serve our own linear, blinkered purposes. In light of CERES' exemplification of the way a metaphysical reorientation to the world, actualized through our own life-places, is integral to environmentalism, other environmental organizations might also begin to attend to their relation to their places of work, treating them as sites of reanimation and reinhabitation, exploring and enhancing their poetic significance.

Finally, returning to the question of design or planning, it should be noted that, since cultivation of a sense of place in a community requires the maintenance of continuity - a certain respect for the given - developers and planners, if they are to have a role at all from the new point of view, should be warned against succumbing to the familiar hubris of modernity: erasing the old in favour of the new, however inspired and well-intentioned the planners' and developers' visions of the new might be. Old existing structures and landforms should be respected as far as possible, and built on or modified rather than replaced. Simply by existing in the world and interacting with their surroundings for long periods of time, these features of the environment have acquired a character and identity of their own, and have become woven into the identity of those who have known them. If they have been ugly, they can be made beautiful and interesting. If they have become obstructive or non-functional for human purposes, they can be ingeniously adapted to serve new purposes. By insisting in this way that changes to the built or natural environment should always grow from within the shell of the given, we not only preserve the conditions for the cultivation of sense of place and the reinhabitation of the world; we are also assured of an endlessly fascinating, non-standardized and locally-specific landscape.

Countering the anthropocentric outlook in the city

When different aspects of life are allowed to intermingle and permeate one another, and the world is allowed to organize itself according to its own intrinsic organic principles, then the division between country and city will begin to blur. Distinct 'zones' for dwelling and food production, for instance, will lose their definition. Food production will enter the suburbs. Wildlife habitat will overflow the reserves and start to reclaim available urban spaces. 'Nature' will creep back into town. CERES is an illustration of this process: within the parameters of its own site it allows the organic principle to operate, but its placement within the inner city also represents an instance of organicism in the wider context, a breakdown of the 'zoning' mentality of the planners. And by providing local people with opportunities to experience 'nature' - to witness and participate directly in the processes of food growing and composting, animal care and energy generation from familiar, at-hand sources, such as wind, sun and decomposing organic material - CERES is helping people to overcome their alienation from the natural world and develop a genuinely ecological sensibility. Integrated as it is into its creekland setting, CERES has

the capacity to offer a superbly balanced ongoing experience of the processes of life, and in this way can offset the human-centredness already endemic to Western culture, but inevitably exacerbated by the intensive urbanization of modern life.

CERES' status as a 'mixed community' - a community in which human beings coexist in a relatively intimate way with a diverse array of other animals - should be underlined in this connection, because although environmentalists routinely emphasize the need for alternative urban technologies and urban bushland reserves, few question the increasing exile of non-human animals from the city. This trend towards cities becoming animal-free 'zones', and the millennia-long commensality and co-evolution of humans and animals thereby coming to an end, is ecologically - and socially - undesirable for a number of reasons. These include the fact that as urbanization intensifies around the globe, there will obviously be less and less living space and fewer and fewer biological resources for non-human animal species. Niches and resources for animal life will accordingly have to be created within cities themselves. (Advocates for animals sometimes object to the co-optation of animals for human use, even when this use does not involve undue suffering or death for the animals concerned. However, those who take this position appear to forget that many instances of 'domestication' have in fact been instances of the colonization of humanity and its habitat by other species.²) Personal encounter and interaction with animals also helps people to develop empathy for non-human life, and hence works against a narrow anthropocentric view of the world. Animals coexisting with people in urban settings thus function as 'ambassadors' for nature. Moreover human psychological and physical health has been shown to be improved by interaction with animals. As a species we have evolved in community with other species for hundreds of thousands of years, and the diseases and malaises of modern industrial civilization might be due in part to the absence of animals from our lives. Physical interaction with animals reduces blood pressure and stress levels in humans, and emotional involvement with creatures who do not share our human expectations and aspirations allows us to gain an external perspective on our social imperatives, exposing them as less binding and absolute than they otherwise appear to be. Contact with animals thus helps to reduce socially generated pressures on us, and encourages us to 'drop out', to some extent, from competitive, driven lifestyles that are exploitative both of ourselves and of the natural environment.

By enabling local people to interact on a regular basis with various kinds of farm animals that have been part of the human community for many thousands of years, but are now mostly confined to special 'zones' offlimits to the general public, CERES is providing a chance for cityfolk to become reacquainted with some of the other members of their ancestral 'mixed community'. Moreover, by way of the annual Animal Festival, and the inclusion of animals and animal imagery and symbolism in other community festivals and ceremonies (such as the Kingfisher Festival), CERES is helping to integrate our

² The theory that many of our presentday domestic animals initiated the process of domestication themselves, in pursuit of their own evolutionary advantage, has been explored at length in Stephen Budiansky, *Covenant with the Wild*, William Morrow, New York, 1992.

animal kin into the creation and celebration of contemporary cultural and spiritual meanings.

Future directions: the dream

There is a danger, to my mind at least, that as CERES becomes increasingly well-known and successful in its mission, it will be encouraged, by council and sponsors, to engage in more and more 'development' of the site, and to take upon itself the role of a centre of environmental education for Melbourne as a whole. To a certain degree, this is already happening. To the extent that CERES succumbs to these temptations, it will, in my opinion, be buying right back into the dominant ethos of abstract design and planning as opposed to organic growth, and abstract centralization of function as opposed to localism and context-sensitivity. This is not to say that CERES should not expand: it could expand in the same ad hoc, organic way that it has grown to date, by adding to its present site any little pockets or parcels of land that become available up and down the creek, where this would in no way compromise the local focus of its function. At the same time it could promote its educational mission beyond its own municipality by 'seeding' further, sister centres in other municipalities, both in Melbourne and in other cities and states. In other words, it could consciously take on the role of model, and assist groups to establish similar environment parks in their own areas. (This too, happily, is already beginning to happen.) By resisting the temptation to become 'bigger and better', more important, rich and famous, CERES could retain the organic, improvised, in-process feel of its site, and hence its unique spirit of place - with all that this implies for the deeper meanings of environmentalism - while yet spreading its message, in its authentic, organic, localist form, to a wider constituency.

An expanded version of CERES, with ad hoc extensions which were each the site of a different project, such as community gardens and orchards, fisheries, froggeries, windfarms and wetland restoration, could eventually link up with sister sites along the Merri creek, and indeed along the Yarra, and other nearby tributaries. These sites could include the market garden upstream, the hand-built Russian Orthodox Church, the Koori Caring Place, the Collingwood children's farm, and of course, that site of heroic and historic community contestation, the haunting and haunted old convent on the river, St Heliers. This could become a linear community of related places and projects, linked by the waterways, and mutually accessible by foot and bicycle. It would afford a kind of green 'city within the city', offering a fascinating glimpse into the ecological possibilities of a large metropolis like Melbourne. These traffic-free, nature-friendly routes through the city could come to constitute something like a contemporary, urban version of the Aboriginal songlines, sacred pathways for journeying, rather than merely traversing space, and journeying for the purpose of 'singing up' the land.

Such green journey-lines through the city might in time start to send tentacles out into the surrounding built-up areas, in the form of community gardens and native plantations in streets and parklands, thereby expanding the possibilities for urban re-enchantment and reinhabitation, and reversing the process of the colonization of 'nature' by the city, where

such a reversal of the vectors of colonization is surely integral to the new environment movement of the twenty-first century.

Ultimately the ‘dream’ - as I am dreaming it here - is to have a CERES-type environment park in every town and every suburb of every city. This is not so unrealistic when one remembers that, until recent times, in every town and every suburb of every city there used to be anything up to half a dozen churches, most of them established, one way or other, by the communities themselves. Churches, however, by and large no longer express the spiritual sensibilities of their communities, and they are, one by one, closing down and being sold off and their sites ‘redeveloped’³. The new spiritual sensibilities of these communities are increasingly ecological: throughout the nation ecological concerns and inspirations are permeating old spiritual traditions and giving rise to new ones. The environment movement however remains generally activist and campaign-and-policy driven in its orientation, and is largely failing to provide a vehicle for this deeply poetic new consciousness, which longs to express itself in everyday life, in ritual and celebratory modes and in personal and community practices which tie us back into the larger life process, the larger meanings of fertility.

In other words, there is a growing need in communities everywhere for ‘centres’ in which people can physically come together to experiment collectively, both practically and poetically, with new ways of being in the world, to renegotiate the meaning of ‘home’ and experience the power of sites which have been ‘sung’ into a new kind of being and a new - dialogical - relation with their inhabitants. CERES provides a prototype for such centres, though of course all such centres would need to be sensitive to context, growing out of local conditions - the needs and interests of local people, and the particularities of local conditions. For if these centres are to serve the purpose of enabling people to renegotiate their relation to the world, and to experience a new sense of belonging to it, then it is of paramount importance that the people for whom the centres are intended enjoy a real sense of ownership of them, through creation and custody of the site and through initiating and participating in the activities that take place there.

³ It is interesting to ponder whether, through the central role they have played in the Christian tradition, churches, as actual sites, have in fact served to satisfy some older, deeper need of Christian worshippers for the sacralization of land, of homeplace. It was after all through a *site* that people expressed their sense of the sacred; it was on a *site* that they lavished their labour, their money, their poetic imagination. It was a *site* which drew them together, and it was a *site* which sacralized the actions performed there. To what extent were people actually, unconsciously, ‘singing up’ their world through these sites? And now that people are no longer, by and large, tending these sites, how much greater is their sense of metaphysical homelessness?

We might speculate that the existence of the churches, as sacred sites, was in fact one of the most powerful underpinnings of Christianity; through these hallowed places, which so often recreated the atmosphere of stone circles and grottoes and other powerful earth sites, Christianity perhaps maintained continuity - as it did in so many other ways - with the pagan traditions it sought to displace, symbolically satisfying the older, deeper need of its followers for a grounding in land and place, even while explicitly repudiating this need in its doctrines.

As the churches close their doors however, and the longing for such grounding reasserts itself unapologetically and unambiguously, and is no longer a muffled subtext to a creed which explicitly denies its validity, there is a need for new centres, in which creed at last matches need!

In conclusion, CERES has intuitively, over the years, found ways to recreate, on its own degraded urban site, and in its own contemporary vernacular, something of the significance that 'country' had, and still has, for traditional Aboriginal peoples. It is the destruction of this kind of metaphysical understanding of the dialogical relation between people and their world that is, in my view, the deepest root of modernity, and hence of the ecological crisis. To have brought about the evolution of this patch of ground in Brunswick into a new kind of 'country', newly sung up from the wastelands created by the practices of modernity, is, from the present point of view, CERES' most profound achievement. Through this achievement CERES can serve as an exemplar for a new, far more encompassing environment movement, a movement which ceases to be merely 'environmental', and becomes instead a movement for the reinhabitation not only of our planet but of our own lives.