

The Anthropology of Space in Harmonist and Owenite New Harmony

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The Significance of Space

Physical environments, including built environments, are not mere empty stages for social dramas. Physical surroundings are themselves sources of cultural meanings that convey unstated and often implicit messages to actors.¹ For example, Pierre Bourdieu's well-known study of the Berber house in Algeria shows that Berber domestic space is organized according to a set of mythico-ritual oppositions found at all levels of Berber culture. The house is divided into right and left sections. The right is associated with men, with religion, and with public affairs, while the left is associated with women, with magic, and with domesticity. Berber houses also embody homologous contrasts between human and animal, day and night, and cooked and raw food. These houses not only replicate cultural oppositions, but they structure activities in such a way that these oppositions are repeated on the plane of action. Both the house and the activities within it are part of a single symbolic system.²

In public space, Mona Ozouf has shown that festivals celebrating the French Revolution (itself a Utopian project) invariably were held in peripheral open spaces rather than in residential centers. To the heirs of the French Revolution, horizontality was privileged, and

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1. For a survey of spatial meanings, see Amos Rapoport, *The Meaning of the Built Environment* (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1983).

2. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology, Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 89-94. See also Marshall Sahlins' description of the Fijian house and its complex symbolic repetitions in *Culture and Practical Reason*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 31-35.

horizontal open spaces signified universality, liberty, and the leveling of the social order. Such spaces systematically signified a cultural ideal in which social distinctions were to be abolished, in which all segments of society were to be spontaneously united, and in which there were to be no vertical partitions to serve as hiding places for political intrigue.³

Such studies demonstrate that space is not only used, it is also thought, and actions occurring in a given space refer back to thought. Space and the actions within that space are like the container and the contained: the container shapes that which is contained, but the container is chosen for its appropriateness to that which is to be contained. Whether, following Claude Levi-Strauss and Jacques Le Goff, one may say that a given space is "good to think," whether the container and the contained fit each other, depends on the cultural actors with whose thought we are concerned.⁴ The meaning of objects and their arrangement in space can vary cross-culturally, so that an identical spatial arrangement may be interpreted differently by members of different cultures, who may consequently perform quite different actions in that same space. A given space may be good to think in one case and not in another.

In New Harmony, Indiana, two very different communal societies gave different meanings to identical surroundings, and these different meanings were expressed in quite different social action. The Harmony Society, a group of German Pietists, founded the village of Harmonie in 1815. The Harmonists encouraged celibacy, lived in communal dormitories, and believed that they were preparing for the Second Coming of Christ. Harmonie was purchased by the British reformer Robert Owen in 1824 for his secular and non-celibate Community of Equality. For a few years, Owen's communarians inhabited and utilized space which had been built by a quite different sort of communal society for quite different purposes.

Although the two communal societies differed in many ways, they were alike in one respect: each rejected the normal society of the early nineteenth century. Each had turned its back on what it saw as the evils of that society and each had attempted to create an

3. *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 126-157.

4. Levi-Strauss, speaking of Australian totemism, remarks that species are chosen as totems, "not because they are 'good to eat' but because they are 'good to think.' " See *Totemism*, trans. Rodney Needham, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), p. 89. Le Goff expands this concept to actual and imagined space in Christian cosmology. See *The Birth of Purgatory*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 4.

alternative way of life. The Harmonists had an other-worldly goal. They hoped that their communal life would lead them to the Millennium and to God. The Owenites hoped to inspire others to follow their example, so that all men and women would eventually live in enlightened happiness in a kind of this-worldly millennium.⁵

Consciously or unconsciously, both communal societies, like all communal societies, had, as Ozouf has remarked with respect to participants in French festivals, "hoped to find satisfaction is simply being together."⁶ Victor Turner has termed such satisfaction as the experience of *communitas*, whereby individuals are tied together by holistic bonds that cut across the boundaries of normal social distinctions.⁷ Persons who are bound together in this fashion are stripped of their normal social positions and are reintegrated into a new community in which individuals exist as totalities. According to Turner, ties of *communitas* are

undifferentiated, equalitarian, direct, extant, nonrational, existential, I-Thou (in Feuerbach's and Buber's sense) relationships."⁸

The Harmony Society seems to have been quite successful in achieving *communitas*, whereas Owen's communitarians never shed the social distinctions which they thought they had left behind. The suc-

5. Both W. H. Oliver ("Owen in 1817: The Millennialist Moment," Sidney Pollard and John Salt, eds., *Robert Owen: Prophet of the Poor* [Lewisburg, Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press, 1971], pp. 166-187) and John F. C. Harrison (*Quest for the New Moral World: Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960], 92-1939.) have claimed that Owenism was a type of millennialism. Both authors unfortunately stretch the definition of millennialism beyond its normal meaning by applying it in a literal sense to Owenism. The rhetoric of Owenism may have been millenarian at times, there may have been sect-like aspects to Owenism, and Owenites may have had connections with true millennial movements, but Owenism is millennial only in a metaphoric or metonymic sense. It is certain that Owenites were not anticipating a literal Millennium in the way that Harmonists were. Owenites hoped for a better life in the here-and-now, not in the hereafter. As a metaphor or a simile, "millennial" can apply to many revolutionary or reform movements, but to apply it literally to Robert Owen and his followers is to distort the meaning of the word. For discussions of revitalization movements, of which millennialism is one type, see Vittorio Lanternari, *The Religions of the Oppressed: A Study of Modern Messianic Cults* (New York: Knopf, 1960); Sylvia Thrupp, ed., *Millennial Dreams in Action* (The Hague: Mouton, 1962); Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58: 264-281; and Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of Cargo Cults in Melanesia* (London: MacGibbon & Key, 1957).

6. Ozouf, *Festivals*, p. 5.

7. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969); *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action and Human Society* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1974).

8. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors*, p. 274.

cess or failure of each to achieve *communitas* may be seen in the collective actions each took in the same public space.

The Harmony Society

The Harmony Society was led from Germany to the United States by the charismatic George Rapp. In common with many Pietists, the Harmonists believed that the secular, acquisitive world was dying and that the Millennium was imminent.⁹ They believed that their presence in Indiana had been foretold in Chapter 12 of the Revelations of Saint John the Divine, who spoke of "a woman clothed with the sun," who was with child, who was attacked by a dragon, and who fled into the wilderness, eventually to return in triumph.¹⁰ George Rapp and his followers saw the Harmony Society as the "Sunwoman," they saw normal society as the dragon, and they saw their sojourn in the United States in general and in Indiana in particular as the Sunwoman's flight into the wilderness.¹¹ They believed that this sojourn would eventually end with the Second Coming of Christ, when a prelapsarian harmony would be restored to the world. This harmony, however, would be extended only to the select few who had prepared themselves for this event. To prepare for and to advance this end, the Harmonists renounced private property, which they considered particularly corrupting, and attempted to live in harmonious obedience to their leader.¹²

Members of the Harmony Society viewed the outside world as both chaotic and evil, and they saw this condition as evidence that the Millennium was near. Society member Romelius Baker wrote to his brother John that:

. . . there is no other way for us than to have as little to do with the world as possible. The Lord has said, "My kingdom is not of this world," and so it goes with his followers also: the time and the judgments of God are hurrying . . ."

9. Frank H. Littel, "Radical Pietism in American History," In F. Ernest Stoeffler, ed., *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 166-183.

10. Karl Arndt, ed., *A Documentary History of the Indiana Decade of the Harmony Society, 1814-1824. Vol. 1:1814-1819* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1975), p. ix.

11. Arndt, *Indiana Decade. Vol. 1*, p. xii.

12. According to the Harmonist articles of agreement, all members of the Society were to give over to the Society all property. All members were to submit to the rules of the Society. In return, they were to be accorded religious and educational privileges and were to be provided with all life's necessities. See Arndt, *Indiana Decade. Vol. 1*, pp. x-xi.

13. Arndt, *A Documentary History of the Indiana Decade of the Harmony Society, 1814-1824. Vol. 2:1820-1824*, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1978) p. 126.

John Baker perhaps best summed up the Society's vision of the chaos of the outside world when he wrote:

No one knows the fall of Adam, but they have made it the law; the people know and see the results of evil, but not its source; everyone is reeling along in the hope of better times. Some few still talk of the near and growing Kingdom of God, but are working more against than toward it; no two are completely of one mind, but most are sure and without premonition of the danger which will strike them soon all the more horribly; their damage is cancerous and incurable; the vials of wrath are being horribly effective; people, of course, are trying to save themselves, but by nothing except wrong means, they want to avenge themselves instead of denying themselves, thereby hunger for sensuous enjoyment. In this are insatiable, only continue to go the more astray, are caught and are lamed, are blasphemers and despisers of the truth, ripe for the fiery sea. For the kingdom of God little is to be hoped in the present condition of man.¹⁴

The Harmonists had little to do with their neighbors apart from business transactions. They kept themselves aloof, and their Indiana neighbors reacted to this aloofness with suspicion and sometimes with overt hostility. Such hostility was taken as a further sign of God's grace. The Harmonists took the fact that they were, in George Rapp's words, "a small and despised people" as a sign that they were in fact elected to the kingdom of God.¹⁵ Frederick Rapp, George Rapp's adopted son and his chief lieutenant, wrote, ". . . it cannot be expected otherwise than that the Harmonie must be despised and scorned, which confirms that it has the right truth . . .,"¹⁶

In order to prepare for the Second Coming, it was necessary to create not only a godly society, but an orderly society. Chaos bred evil, and therefore it was necessary to live an orderly life. As George Rapp, in his *Thoughts on the Destiny of Man*, wrote:

. . . it will be necessary & proper to pay a strict attention to the temporal concerns of life; in order, that not only an indispensable, but even a comfortable support may be secured, the social interest promoted, & an obedience enforced to the laws & regulations, which must always be essential to the maintenance and prosperity of every community.¹⁷

14. Arndt, *Indiana Decade*, Vol. 2, p. 148.

15. Karl Arndt, *Harmony on the Connoquenessing, 1803-1815: George Rapp's first American Harmony, A Documentary History* (Worcester, Massachusetts: Harmony Society Press, 1980), p. 251.

16. Arndt, *Indiana Decade*. Vol. 2, p. 426.

17. Arndt, *Indiana Decade*. Vol. 2, p. 917.

To build Harmonie was to build heaven on earth.¹⁸

By 1819, the village of Harmonie was indeed orderly and ordered. There are many testimonies to the extreme regularity, both physical and social, of Rapp's Harmonie. An English visitor described it as follows:

... But however remarkable this society certainly is, for the rapid progress of its valuable establishments and consequent increase of prosperity, it is equally distinguished for the moral conduct and propriety of manners of the people; for the peculiar neatness of their fields and streets as well as their persons and houses; and for the uniform industry conspicuous in every department; not apparently urged by an overbearing chief or taskmaster, but that willing and moderate application which might be expected from the combined operation of principal and habit.¹⁹

The first public building erected in Harmonie was a frame church. Toward the end of the Harmonists' sojourn in Indiana, they erected a larger brick church next to the original church. George Rapp sometimes used the tower of this second church to survey his domain.²⁰ In front of the churches was an open greensward where concerts were sometimes performed. Adjacent was Rapp's large private house.²¹ This area was the social and cosmological center of the village.

Internal arrangements in both churches were similar. At the front of the church was a platform about three feet high, on which was placed a desk and Bible together with a chair from which George Rapp addressed the congregation. The vertical positioning of Rapp signified his social and cosmological positions: he was both literally and metaphorically closer to God. There was no altar, nor was there any decorations.²²

When George Rapp was absent, a surrogate, usually Frederick

18. With respect to heaven on earth, Rapp wrote, "Suppose, now, a thousand persons should reside together, possessing all their property in common, and having regulations for their conduct, adopted by themselves, which they know to be correct, would they not affectionately discharge their respective duties towards each other, and cheerfully perform every thing, essential to the comfort & happiness of all? Would not such a community be a resemblance of heaven?" (Arndt, *Indiana Decade*. Vol. 2, pp. 917-918).

19. Arndt, *Indiana Decade*. Vol. 1, pp. 799-800.

20. Caroline Dale Snedeker, ed., *The Diary of Donald MacDonald, 1820-1824*, (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1942), p. 246.

21. Rapp's house was the only private dwelling in the village. All other Harmonists apparently lived communally.

22. Arndt, *Indiana Decade*. Vol. 1, p. 746.

Rapp, took his place, rather in the way that the Nuer of the Sudan replace sacred sacrificial oxen with cucumbers when no oxen are available.²³ The congregation sat in the main body of the church, men and women seated separately on either side. Services were conducted in German. The basic units of the ritual consisted of music and a reading from the Bible, followed by an exegesis and sermon.

In their content, Harmonist rituals invariably reiterated Harmonist beliefs. Rapp's sermons were concerned with mankind's relationship to God, stressing the possibility of reconciliation with God through repentance. Rapp affirmed the possibility of human perfection and emphasized the moral importance of obedience, brotherly love, cooperation, industriousness, and self-denial.²⁴ Throughout his sermons he reiterated the important Harmonist concept that.

... all good men, however few in number, must unite together to obtain this aim & withdraw from the degraded scenes of life, and associate for nobler purposes."²⁵

Rapp's message repeatedly, and in many ways, depicted his Society as a set of beleaguered saints, banded together in order to worship truly and to live correctly, with the sure expectation that they would receive their reward at the coming of the Millennium, when the sinful world would perish in agony. In all their collective rituals, the Harmonists contrasted the sanctity of their Society with the corruption of the decadent outside world. They believed that God had favored Rapp with personal messages, not only about the fates of individual souls, but about the fate of the world. Rapp was mediator between man and God, and as a result, his speech, charged with significance, was the most important element of Harmonist ritual.²⁶ It is no accident that the primary symbols in Harmonist rituals were verbal symbols.

The syntactical order of Harmonist rituals was as unvarying as the message. The regularity of Harmonist ritual reiterated Harmonist social structure, which was both rigid and hierarchical. As a rule, there are only two primary social distinctions among groups sharing

23. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 141-146.

24. Arndt, *Indiana Decade*. Vol. 1, pp. 68, 98, 618, 918; Joel Hiatt, ed. *Diary of William Owen from November 10, 1825 to April 20, 1825* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Publications 4, 1906), p. 54.

25. Arndt, *Indiana Decade*. Vol. 2, p. 917.

26. With respect to mediation, George Rapp wrote, "How unhappy must he be who cannot believe the revealed word of God & who hates & scorns the mediator with his doctrine of atonement . . ." (Arndt, *Indiana Decade*. Vol. 2, p. 565).

a sense of *communitas*: leaders/teachers and followers/neophytes.²⁷ This was the case in the Harmony Society. George Rapp was both leader and teacher. His son Frederick and others occupied these statuses to a lesser degree, as cucumbers to George Rapp's ox. Rapp's followers were inexperienced neophytes who needed to be taught his message. With few exceptions, Harmonist saints were anonymous, their only significant internal distinction being gender.²⁸ Just as celibacy, or the biological separation of the sexes, was preached by Rapp, the separation of male and female was expressed in the division of the congregation during collective rituals. This separation, together with the abolition of the family, further reinforced Rapp's position as leader, making him the symbolic father of his followers, without competition from real fathers and without family loyalties to conflict with communal loyalties. Only Rapp, the teacher of these neophytes, was distinct, and his distinction was marked by his solitary place on the platform.

In the spatial and social isolation of their communal village, the Harmonists encapsulated themselves from the rest of the world. The use of German by the Society reiterated and supported this sense of separation and exclusion. Few Harmonists were fluent in English, while not many outsiders understood German. Although a few select outsiders, such as members of the Owen family, were allowed to visit the community, most of those who did visit could neither communicate with its members or understand its leader's message.²⁹ The Harmony Society was linguistically as well as spatially and religiously encysted, and its relationship with normal society in all domains was sharply bounded.

27. See Turner, *Dramas*, pp. 23-59; *Ritual Process*, pp. 94-165.

28. Members of Rapp's immediate family are exceptions. In addition to Frederick, Rapp's daughter-in-law and granddaughter lived in George Rapp's house, and Rapp's family lived rather differently than other members of the Society. Other possible exceptions to eschatological anonymity may include the Harmonist doctor, the tavern-keeper, and the Baker brothers, both of whom traveled outside the community on business. Although these latter individuals had distinctive occupational roles, their religious status is uncertain. Romelius Baker sometimes conducted religious services when both Frederick and George Rapp were absent. He may have been considered a leader. When both the Rapps and Baker were absent, no service was held. It is clear that the Harmony Society closely fits Max Weber's characterization of charismatic domination. See H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. and trans, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Galaxy Books, 1958), pp. 245-252. and Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1962).

29. Most outsiders were not allowed to attend Harmonist services. Applications for membership by non-Germans were rejected. See Arndt, *Indiana Decade*, Vol. 2, pp. 363-4.

The performance of sacred music, whether vocal or instrumental, was an important aspect of Harmonist rituals. Vocal and instrumental music was performed on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and at other times during the week.³⁰ These performances were secondary ritual repetitions of belief. Hymn lyrics repeated the beliefs of the Society, while music was always performed by groups.³¹ Apart from group musical performances, no members of the congregation participated actively in the Sunday morning ritual. The mode of musical performance, as well as its content, reinforced the harmonists' religious beliefs and communal ideology.

Robert Owen's son, William, who supervised the transition from Harmonist to Owenite occupation of the village, observed a Harmonist performance in the brick church in 1824:

When we were all seated different parties of men and women sang hymns etc for an hour and V_z, the band assisting occasionally. Mr. Rapp said good or not so good, as the case might be, when each finished.³²

Here a kind of asymmetrical reciprocity existed, in which the collectivity collectively gave back to Rapp the message which he had given to them. Rapp, who always spoke and never sang, passed judgment on the quality of the singing.

Spatially, the Harmonist church constituted the sacred center of a sacred community. Within the church, there were no visual or other distractions from Rapp's teachings, which were the sacred core of a sacred ritual. It was at these times and in this space that he passed on God's message to the faithful. Although there were no decorations and no altar, this is not to say that these bare walls conveyed no message to Rapp's followers. The message conveyed by the spatial arrangement in Harmonist churches was that there was no significant message apart from the words of Father Rapp.

Harmonist sacred rituals expressed Harmonist beliefs on several levels, and this reiteration helped to reinforce belief. Harmonist rituals expressed the unity of the group in its conceptual, social, and spatial opposition to the outside world. At the same time they expressed and reaffirmed fundamental structural divisions within the

30. Harmonist musicians also performed secular music, although not apparently in the church. For a discussion of Harmonist music, see Richard D. Wetzel, *Frontier Musicians on the Connoquenessing, Wabash, and Ohio: A History of the Music and Musicians of George Rapp's Harmony Society (1805-1906)* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976).

31. Donald MacDonald describes Harmonist choral singing as comprising male or female sections made up of eight or ten persons. (*Diary*, p. 250).

32. Hiatt, *Diary of William Owen*, p. 78.

community. Only one person occupied the pulpit. Only one person was physically, socially, and spiritually elevated, and only one person led the ritual drama-George Rapp. Rapp was both political and spiritual leader, and the primary structural cleavage in this community was between charismatic leader and followers. Unity of belief and social solidarity were consistently reinforced by the rituals of the Harmony Society.

The effect of Harmonist rituals on members of the Society was noted by William Owen, who observed a portion of the celebration of Harmoniefest, the anniversary of the Harmonists' formation into a society. He wrote:

What they were engaged in we did not learn as they kept it to themselves, but they seemed to think they had passed the day agreeably, and from many expressions which they made use of, I should conclude that the meeting, from some cause or other, had tended to strengthen the bond of Union subsisting among them . . . Before breaking up at 5 o'clock, they marched out of the church in closed ranks preceded by their music, all singing. They halted before Mr. Rapp's house, and sang a piece of music and then dispersed.³³

The Owenites

Unlike Harmoniefest, the collective rituals of the Owenites did not "strengthen the bond of Union". When Robert Owen's secular community replaced the Harmonists' sacred community, it took over an already-built physical environment and adapted it to its own purposes. The two churches remained the community's physical and social center, and Owenites used them for somewhat similar purposes as the Harmonists: they were locales for collective rituals, and they comprised the central space of the community. However, the church buildings did not constitute marked sacred space as they did among the Harmonists. Instead, the churches constituted unmarked generic space, physical shells which could house a variety of events. While the Harmonist buildings communicated the importance of George Rapp's divine message, to the Owenites these buildings became empty signifiers capable of containing any community message. Although Owen and other community leaders tried to use the central area as a spatial metaphor for community unity, they failed, because, while they had a central space, they had no shared central beliefs which that space could signify. In addition, divisions in Owenite society were inadvertently repeated in their collective secular

33. Hiatt, *Diary of William Owen*, pp. 116-117.

rituals which, rather than bringing about the unity which the Owenites desired, served to emphasize social distinctions and cultural differences.

Robert Owen was a wealthy British industrialist and reformer. Like Rapp, Owen had turned away from normal society in the hope of creating a new and better world, and he had come to believe that small egalitarian communal societies were the world's only hope. Unlike George Rapp, Owen's Utopian quest was rational and secular, and Owen himself disliked organized religion. His New Harmony was to be a self-sufficient "community of equality," in which free speech and freedom of belief would be paramount, in which children would be educated to abhor selfishness and greed, and in which all members would share alike in the community's resources. The happiness of all individuals was Owen's ultimate goal.³⁴

Spatial and social boundaries between the Owenite community and the outside world were blurred. Unlike the Harmony Society, Owen's New Harmony was an open society in which all would-be communitarians were welcome. Owenites had frequent contact with persons outside New Harmony. There were numerous visits back and forth between New Harmony and English Prairie, located across the Wabash River in Illinois. Individual Owenites sometimes left New Harmony to visit such cities as Cincinnati. Visitors from the outside world frequently stayed at New Harmony and participated in its events.³⁵ In many respects, life inside New Harmony was little different than life in outside world, and many of the distinctions in that world were maintained intact inside the community.

The boundary between leader and follower was also indistinct. Although a persuasive speaker, and as convinced as Rapp was that his ideas were correct, Owen never really led his New Harmony followers. He had a strong rival in William Maclure, the wealthy leader of the dissident Education Society, whose influence Owen was never able to counteract. Owen was often absent from New Harmony, but he appointed no strong-minded surrogate comparable to Frederick Rapp. Instead he appointed his young and ineffectual son William to look after his interests. When Owen was present in the

34. For a discussion of Owenite goals in New Harmony, see Arthur E. Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian and Owenite Phases of Communitarian Socialism in America: 1663-1829* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950) and George B. Lockwood, *The New Harmony Movement* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1970 [1905]).

35. The best known of these visitors is Karl Bernhard, Duke of Saxe-Weimer Eisenach, whose "Travels Through New Harmony During the Years 1825 and 1826" (Harlow Lindley, ed., *Indiana as Seen by Early Travelers*, [Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Collections 3, 1916]) is an important source of information about Owen's New Harmony.

community, he failed to draw clear boundaries between himself and his followers. Instead of living in Rapp's large house, he resided at the plebeian tavern. Simple in dress and manner and open and talkative with all, he was not always recognized by newcomers as the important man that he was.³⁶

Moreover, Owen was willing to tolerate a greater diversity of opinion than George Rapp. This willingness was related to Owen's adherence to Enlightenment concepts of individualism. Unlike George Rapp, Owen emphasized the individual rather than the collectivity. To Owen, society was composed of an aggregate of individuals and could only be transformed through the separate transformations of individuals. It was the individual who, by applying a rational approach to living, would improve himself or herself. In his emphasis on the importance of the individual as the basic unit of society, Owen was no different than many others of his time. Some of his ideas are reminiscent of Rousseau or Locke, particularly Owen's conception of natural man as being unformed and therefore intrinsically neither good nor bad. Like Rousseau, Owen maintained that, with civilization, this perfectible natural man had been corrupted by bad institutions. Like Rousseau, he felt that the ideal social system should be small and intimate.³⁷ Owen added the idea that the new social contract was to be achieved through the economic and political cooperation of individuals living in small communities. As he wrote in his autobiography:

And as soon as society can be made to think rationally on a true foundation, to replace inferior by superior conditions will be found to be the task which society has to learn and in good earnest to put into practice.³⁸

New Harmony was his attempt to provide these superior conditions. In doing so, Owen hoped to prepare the ground for his Utopia, but its ultimate success depended upon each individual, who would discover individually that which constituted the rational path to happiness. This emphasis on the individual was expressed in the use of central space in the village, particularly in the frame church and in the brick church.

36. Saxe-Weimar was startled when the unassuming man with whom he had been exchanging pleasantries in the tavern turned out to be Robert Owen. ("Travels," p. 421.)

37. For a discussion of Enlightenment thought regarding individualism, see Louis Dumont, *Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 196), pp. 85-92.

38. *The Life of Robert Owen, Written by Himself. With Selections from His Writings and correspondence.* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1857), p. 95.

The Owenites renamed the brick church, calling it "the Hall," while the wooden church became "the steeple house" or "the church." Both were used for a variety of secular collective rituals. Whether overtly or implicitly, these rituals expressed values and beliefs assumed by those who organized them to be shared by the entire community. That not all persons shared these values and beliefs and indicated so publicly is symptomatic of the social divisions within the Owenite community. As the unity of the community disintegrated, the resulting cleavages were reflected in the use of the Hall and the steeple house.

The steeple house was less frequently used as a location for public events than the Hall. Unlike the Hall, it retained a bit of its original religious character. Visiting preachers were allowed to speak in the steeple house. However, Christian preaching was sometimes followed by a rejoinder by a member of the audience, such as the former universalist minister Robert Jennings. Sometimes this rejoinder was followed by a response by the original preacher. The messages conveyed on these occasions were varied and contradictory, and there was always the possibility that the roles of speaker and listener, of leader and follower, could be exchanged. Under these circumstances, speakers elevated on the platform could reiterate the beliefs of only a portion of the group and do so only temporarily.³⁹

The relegation of visiting preachers to the less important of the two buildings reflected a division within the Owenite community between the religious and the non-religious, to the disadvantage of the religious. Religiously inclined Owenites were sometimes upset that the Hall, a former church, was now used for secular matters.⁴⁰ They were no doubt also disturbed by the likelihood that a statement of faith in the steeple house might be followed by a refutation by an unbeliever. Matters of religious faith and skeptical rejoinders do not co-exist comfortably. Community member William Pelham noted that a Baptist preacher who had been subjected to one of Jennings' rejoinders "did not seem to be in so good a humor as he had been the evening before," particularly after a young couple whom he had just married went off to a dance at the Hall rather than listening to his reply to Jennings.⁴¹

The steeple house was a location for public affairs only on Sun-

39. See William Pelham, "Letters of William Pelham, Written in 1825 and 1826," in Harlow Lindley, ed., *Indiana as seen by Early Travelers* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Collections 3, 1916), pp. 370-371, 379.

40. Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, p. 169.

41. Pelham, "Letters", p. 370.

days. During the rest of the week, it was used as a school. It was the Hall that was the focal point of collective activities.

Like the Harmonists, music was important to the Owenites. Unlike the Harmonists, Owenites included dancing among their musical activities. A regular ball was held every week, and dancing also concluded the weekly concert. Sometimes meetings that were concerned with governance ended with a dance, and special occasions were also marked by balls.⁴² The open space of the Hall was put to advantage by the dancers, while amateur musicians performed upon the platform.

To understand the social importance of music among Robert Owen's followers, one must look outside New Harmony. Parlor music was a popular entertainment in nineteenth-century European and American bourgeois society. Every well-bred young man and woman was expected to learn to play an instrument, particularly the pianoforte, and to sing the popular songs of the day. The evidence from New Harmony indicates that the music Owenites enjoyed was similar to parlor music elsewhere and that the social distinctions signified by such music were the same in New Harmony as they were in the outside world.⁴³

Musical performances in normal bourgeois society were often the center of formal and informal social gatherings, as may be seen in the numerous musical events recorded in the diaries of William Owen and his companion, Donald MacDonald, as they traveled through the United States in 1824.⁴⁴ Documents from nearby English Prairie in Illinois, some of whose residents joined Owen's community, also took careful note of musical evenings. Morris Birkbeck, one of the founders of English Prairie and whose son became an Owenite, brought a pianoforte across the Allegheny Mountains in 1818. George Flower, another founder of English Prairie who was closely connected with New Harmony, owned a pianoforte by 1824.⁴⁵ The

42. Music and dances were also performed in private parlors. See Claude K. Sluder, "Music in the Owenite Experiment at New Harmony". Paper presented to the American Culture Association, New Orleans, Louisiana, March, 1988.

43. For a general discussion of music of the period, see H. Wiley Hitchcock, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1974), p. 65. For Owenite music see Sluder, "Music".

44. Hiatt, *Diary of William Owen*. Snedeker, *Diaries of Donald MacDonald*.

45. For Birkbeck's pianoforte, see Edgar L. Dukes, *Yesteryears in Edwards County Illinois: A Simple Tale for Simple People Compiled by a Simple Writer*. (Albion, Illinois: Privately Published, 1950), p. 77. William Owen entered in his diary an account of an evening at the Flowers': "In the evening we had a supper and musical party at Mr. Flower's, attended, besides his family and ourselves, by Mr. and Mrs. Carter, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis, who all sang, and by Messrs. Cave, Spring and Ronalds, who played the violin,

Owenite teacher, Mme. Marie Duclos Fretageot, brought a pianoforte with her on the crowded keelboat on which she and other educators and scientists traveled down the Ohio River to New Harmony.⁴⁶ Clearly, a willingness to ship an object as expensive, bulky, heavy, and fragile as a pianoforte into what was then a frontier wilderness underlines the symbolic importance of a particular type of music and a particular musical instrument in the social life of polite society.

Among bourgeois society in the nineteenth century, dancing, like parlor music, was more than mere entertainment. Well-bred young ladies were restricted in their movements, and musical evenings and public balls were among the few occasions when they could interact with eligible young men without risking a scandal. Therefore, such events, especially balls, were of social and cultural importance. The etiquette of dancing depicted in the novels of Jane Austen, considered by many to have been a good ethnographer of her own society, has been described as "a complex metaphorical prefigurement of marriage" and "a highly formal social drama."⁴⁷ By emphasizing balls, the Owenites were in effect declaring their attachment to (at least) one aspect of the Anglo-American culture they thought they had rejected.

Such forms of music and dance marked social distinctions, presupposing as they did a certain amount of leisure time on the part of the participants. The music which was played required formal instruction. The dances also required instruction and practice. The Duke of Saxe-Weimar observed such instruction being given to "the unpracticed in dancing" in the kitchen of one of the community's boarding houses. Being embarrassed by his presence, they desisted until he left.⁴⁸

flute, and violoncello. The two principal performers, we were told, were absent, Judge B and Mrs. Pickering [born Martha Flower]. The former is leader and the latter presides at the piano forte, which was left out this evening altogether." (Hiatt, *Diary of William Owen*, p. 82.

46. The boat was named "The Philanthropist," and Robert Owen termed its passengers, "The Boatload of Knowledge." See Bestor, *Backwoods Utopias*, pp. 133-4. Mme Fretageot's pianoforte is mentioned by the Duke of Saxe-Weimer ("Travels," p. 438). The Harmony Society also had a pianoforte shipped to their community on the Wabash, where George Rapp's granddaughter played it for William Owen and others. See Wetzel, *Frontier Musicians*, pp. 24, 28.

47. Daniel A Segal and Richard Handler "Serious Play: Creative Dance and Dramatic Sensibility in Jane Austen, Ethnographer," *Man* 24: 323. Austin's novels, like contemporary factual documents, are replete with descriptions of musical evenings and balls.

48. "Travels" p. 434.

These musical forms signified the distinction between the respectable members of the community and "the lower orders."⁴⁹ Not everyone in New Harmony appreciated such music and dances nor had the opportunity to learn them. Between one-third and one-half of the community's population was made up of frontier settlers who had come from the backwoods areas of the Upland South.⁵⁰ While music and dancing were also important to backwoodsmen, their preferred style of instrumentation and dancing was less genteel, although not necessarily less complex. Backwoodsmen played cheaper and more portable fiddles rather than pianofortes. Their dances were athletic reels rather than the elaborate and sedate dances that were performed in the Hall.⁵¹ Furthermore, backwoods dances, or "frolics" had different cultural meanings than balls. Frontier girls were less restricted than bourgeois girls, and, although courting occurred at frolics, this was not their primary purpose. Frolics were held after large-scale communal labor or at important rites of passage such as weddings. Frolics were always accompanied by the consumption of copious amounts of food and corn whiskey, with the result that they sometimes became very rowdy.⁵² Formal balls, on the other hand, tended to be abstemious and sedate.

Not all members of the community participated in Owenite balls. A letter written in 1825 by a local resident, James Hood, says in part:

... this evain thay take a dance I was invited to the bawl rume by one of the party thare seams I understand the pore ones will likely danse outter-dorse ... ,"⁵³

49. There were two social categories in Owenite New Harmony, referred to by the participants as "the higher orders" and "the lower orders," "the better sort" and "the lesser sort," or similar terms expressing a binary division. These terms do not precisely correlate with social class. For a discussion of social categories in New Harmony, see Lucy Jayne Botscharow, "Disharmony in Utopia: Social Categories in Robert Owen's New Harmony," *Communal Societies* 9 (1989): 76-90.

50. Lucy Jayne Botscharow, "Demography and Community," Paper read to the International Communal Societies International Conference, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1988.

51. See Bernhard, "Travels", pp. 424, 432 for a description of New Harmony balls.

52. For descriptions of backwoods frolics in Indiana, see R. Carlyle Buley, *the Old Northwest: Pioneer Period, 1815-1840, Vol. 1* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1950) and Sanford Cox, *Recollections of the Early Settlement of the Wabash Valley*, (Lafayette, Indiana: Courier Stream Book and Job Co, 1860). Susan G. Davis, in *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1986), describes the opposition between "respectable" and "rowdy" styles in urban public life.

53. Arndt, *Harmony on the Wabash in Transition, 1824-1826: Transition to George Rapp's Divine Economy on the Ohio and Robert Owen's New Moral World at New Harmony on the Wabash* (Worcester, Mass.: Harmony Society Press, 1984), p. 557.

Here there is a spatial distinction between the bourgeoisie and "the pore ones," which correlates with the Hall and the green, or with inside and outside. Social distinctions were homologous with spatial distinctions.

Distinctions also existed inside the Hall and were correlated with the use of space. The Duke of Saxe-Weimar noted that not all community members participated equally in Owenite balls:

All the men did not take a share in the dance, i.e., the lower class, but read newspapers, which were scattered over the side-tables."⁵⁴

Once again we see a spatial distinction coinciding with a social distinction. Bourgeois dancers were socially and spatially central, while the lower orders were peripheral and did not dance. The apparent unwillingness of the lower orders to participate in formal dances seems to have signified a rejection of at least some values held by the more genteel Owenites. At the same time, the relegation of "the pore ones" to the green or to the sidelines seems to indicate a rejection of them by the more respectable Owenites.

Saxe-Weimer observed that it was only the "members belonging to the higher class of society" who wore the Owenite costume at these balls, and that such persons separated themselves from the others, "and formed a little group apart."⁵⁵ Both the Harmonists and the Owenites had adopted a distinctive costume emblematic of group membership. All members of the Harmony Society wore their costume, simultaneously signifying a distinction between the group and the outside world and also signifying internal solidarity and individual anonymity. However, costume was a source of disunity and an expression of individuality among the Owenites. The Owenite costume was similarly designed to mark Owenites as separate from the outside world. Instead, it marked some Owenites as distinct from each other. Costume signified less a difference from the outside world than it did internal differences. Some members refused to wear the costume, and so signified a rejection of at least some part of Owen's message. Not only did the lower orders refrain from wearing the costume; so did some of the respectable folk.⁵⁶ Community member Sarah Pears was appalled by shortness of the petticoat and wrote:

54. Bernard, "Travels", p. 432. Saxe-Weimar's use of the term, "the lower class," is unusual for this time period.

55. Bernhard, "Travels," p. 430.

56. It is possible that some members could not afford to buy the material necessary for a new costume and so were excluded from exhibiting this visible sign of unity. The cost of the new costume is not known.

... the ladies are decreasing the length of the petticoat more than I think either becoming or seemly. However, there are comparatively few married ladies who have put them on, and I have declared absolute war against them both for myself and my daughters.⁵⁷

In Sarah Pear's comments, we see distinctions between youth and age and between propriety and impropriety among one segment of New Harmony society.

Clothing is a significant form of communication in all cultures and carries messages that can be read by those familiar with cultural codes. Dick Hebdige has pointed out that, when there is choice regarding which clothes will be worn, if nothing else, clothing is expressive of normality versus deviance. Clothing chosen to go against the grain of the generally accepted signifies rejection of the generally accepted and constitutes a kind of nonverbal guerilla warfare.⁵⁸ The Harmonists, by their uniform use of a uniform, communicated their opposition to those without, but their solidarity with those within. The Owenites, however, sent a multiplicity of confusing messages. The Owenite costume (one cannot call it a uniform) was meant to communicate a message similar to that of the Harmonists: interior unanimity versus the rest of the world. To community members such as Sarah Pears, the costume was sufficiently subversive of the accepted as to be immoral. To others, it seems to have been regarded as emblematic of the difference between the higher and lower orders and may have also been thought to be bizarre, if not scandalous. For a variety of reasons, the use of the Owenite costume did not refer so much to differences with the outside world as it did to internal differences.

The most significant symbolic mode utilized by the Owenites was speech, but the content expressed through this mode was varied and often contradictory.⁵⁹ Owenite discourses took place in the Hall on Sunday mornings as a substitute for normal Christian rituals. There were also lectures given on Sunday evenings and occasionally at other times during the week. Unlike the Harmony Society, in which there was only one speaker, there were many Owenite speakers. Speeches were given by Robert Owen and by his sons, Robert Dale and William. Robert Jennings and Owen's architect Stedman Whit-

57. Pears, *New Harmony*, p. 42.

58. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), pp. 100-127.

59. It is possible that speaking is generally of symbolic importance in Western culture. For a discussion of the central importance of both speech and silence in English Protestantism, see Richard Bauman. *Let Your Words be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence Among Seventeenth-Century Quakers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

well also spoke.⁶⁰ Paul Brown, a disgruntled Owenite, gave some dissenting lectures, and it is possible that others did the same.⁶¹

The subject of discourse was chosen by each speaker. Owenite discourse had diverse themes, although, like Harmonist discourse, it usually included a depiction of the ills of the outside world. However, while the opposition between the community and the world was strong among the Harmonists, it was weak among the Owenites, most of whom did not really wish to leave the world but merely to improve it or perhaps to improve their individual lots within it.

The diversity of Owenite speakers and topics, and their spatial and temporal occurrences, reflects the diversity and lack of cohesiveness of the community. It also reflects the importance of individual choice. Some discourses consisted of readings and exegeses of Owenite texts, rather in the manner that George Rapp read from and interpreted the Bible. William Owen read and explained his father's writings. Robert Jennings did the same for the "Outline of the System of Education at New Lanark", written by Robert Dale Owen. At other times Jennings recited the poetry of Lord Byron.⁶² Jennings also gave several speeches on the importance of equality as essential to happiness and on the necessity of dissolving all "artificial distinctions and particularities not founded on real merit."⁶³ Stedman Whitwell talked about steam engines.⁶⁴ Robert Owen spoke on a great variety of subjects, including his "Declaration of Mental Independence", which was an attack on religion, private property and marriage.⁶⁵ All these topics, including steam engines, reflected the Owenite concern with individual happiness. Every Owenite agreed that happiness was a thing to be desired, but there was no general agreement on just what happiness was, much less on the way in which the goal was to be achieved.

During at least one of these public discourses, the lack of unity in Owenite society was made manifest by the behavior of the participants. Saxe-Weimar noted:

During these lectures, I made my observations on the much vaunted equality, as some tatterdemalions stretched themselves on the platform close by

60. Pelham, "Letters", p. 376; Bernhard, "Travels," p. 423, 429.

61. Paul Brown, *Twelve Months in New Harmony* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1972 [1827]), p. 54.

62. Bernhard, "Travels," p. 429.

63. Pelham, "Letters," pp. 376, 386.

64. For William Owen, see Pelham, "Letters," p. 383; for Whitwell, see Bernhard, "Travels," p. 429.

65. See Brown, *Twelve Months*, p. 33.

Mr. Owen. The better educated members kept themselves together and took no notice of the others.⁶⁶

It is impossible to imagine a similar scene in George Rapp's Harmonie.

Unlike Harmonist rituals, where the primary distinction was between leader and follower, social divisions expressed during Owenite lectures included categorical distinctions similar to those expressed at Owenite balls. Simultaneously, the distinction between leader and follower was spatially as well as politically blurred. Robert Owen's authority was not nearly as undisputed as George Rapp's, and Owen's lack of complete authority was signified by the fact that members of the lower orders familiarly, and to Saxe-Weimar's eyes, disrespectfully stretched themselves out near him while he spoke.

By February, 1826, the community of equality had begun to break up, and by the following year it was defunct. In the end, even the right to use the Hall was disputed. The Education Society purchased the Hall and passed a resolution that those wishing to use it had to apply for the key. Even Robert Owen found himself locked out, and some of his followers broke down the door so that he could deliver a lecture.⁶⁷ Finally, the young students and their teacher, who had been housed in the steeple house, moved into the Hall. When a young lady applied for permission to hold a ball there, she was refused on the basis that it interfered with their arrangements.⁶⁸ And so New Harmony no longer had a community center. As the community dissolved, so did the communal use of its physical center.

Conclusions

Robert Owen's community and George Rapp's community used the same physical structures to perform collective rituals, and they used much the same symbolic devices: speaking and music. In the case of the Harmonists, beliefs were shared, and social structure was simple. Accounts by outsiders of the tranquility or even passivity of the members indicate that *communitas* characterized most relationships.⁶⁹ Communal rituals expressed and reinforced these shared beliefs, and they also reinforced the social structure of the Society. The

66. "Travels," p. 430.

67. Brown, *Twelve Months*, p. 83.

68. Pelham, "Letters," p. 414.

69. See William Owen, *Diary*; Donald MacDonald, *Diary*, William Hebert, *A Visit to the Colony of Harmony* (London: George Mann, 1825), and accounts reprinted in Arndt, *Indiana Decade*, Vols 1 and 2.

central space in which Harmonist rituals were performed mirrored the centrality of religious belief. Space in the Harmonist community served to focus thought and to sharpen a sense of unity. The central cosmology of the Society was reiterated by its central cosmological figure—George Rapp, mediator between man and God. The entire community was brought together in a visible expression of solidarity. The Harmonist churches and their surrounding areas must have been exceedingly good to think, for they tangibly expressed the entire complex of Harmonist beliefs about themselves, about their place in the world, about their God, and about their relationship to God. Since internal dissidents were expelled,⁷⁰ and since there were no skeptical outsiders present to challenge their beliefs, the Harmonists could indeed live in apparent harmony, metaphorically reenacting the prelapsarian harmony they strove to bring about. This harmony, both ideal and real, was expressed in the visible metaphor of their central space—the holiest space in a holy communion of saints.

In the case of the Owenites, beliefs were not shared, and Owenite social structure was complex, fluid, and divisive. Differences between the governors and the governed, the religious and the irreligious, the better sort and the lesser sort, the old and the young, the proper and the improper, were sharply exposed in collective rituals. Because collective rituals focus attention on shared beliefs and actions, cleavages may be more clearly and publicly apparent than they are in daily life. The difference between the ideal and the real can become painfully obvious. This difference was evident at Owenite dances and lectures. Dances in which some members were excluded indicated a lack of whole-hearted commitment to the principle of equality, while the refusal to participate in community activities or to wear the costume signified a lack of whole-hearted participation in the social experiment. Exhortations regarding the importance of equality could only drive home the fact that not all community members were equal. Lectures were attacking religion, private property, or marriage could only alienate those for whom these institutions were sacred, while lectures extolling these institutions, such as those given by visiting preachers, alienated the non-religious and other rebels against normal society. The very diversity of opinion indicated by the topics of the Owenite lectures demonstrates a lack of focus in Owenite thought and a lack of unity among the participants. When individualism is unchecked *communitas* cannot exist.

Robert Owen seems to have believed that by allowing the expression of diverse opinions he would in the end create a stronger com-

70. Carol Weisbrod, *The Boundaries of Utopia* (New York: Pantheon Press, 1980).

munity. Perhaps it was to this end that the new Harmony newspaper, *The New Harmony Gazette*, quoted him in its motto: "If we cannot reconcile all opinions, let us endeavor to unite all hearts." However, any successes New Harmony may have had in the direction of tolerance were overshadowed by the fact that the expression of diversity made explicit differences among its residents. Instead of bringing people together, Owenite public rituals drove them further apart. Owenite rituals inadvertently expressed a lack of shared belief and a lack of agreement as to what the structure of the community should be. Community rituals, rather than reinforcing community unity, exposed social divisions and contributed to the dissolution of the society.

In Owen's New Harmony, the use of central space did not reflect a centrality of beliefs or goals. It could only become a metaphor for disunity rather than the visible sign of united hearts. Beliefs expressed and actions performed in this space had a centripetal effect, driving the community's members further apart, each individual in effect acting out Owen's concept of society as an aggregate of individuals by being different than and separate from the rest. In such a situation, central space could not have been good to think, and this may have been reflected in the elimination of the free use of that space and of its atrophy as a central meeting place for the entire community. In the end, reflecting the fragmentation of the community, the use of this space became discrete, specialized, and restricted. In later years, the old frame church was destroyed by fire. The Harmonists, who had moved to Pennsylvania, returned in 1871 and dismantled the brick church, using some of its bricks to build a wall around the old Harmonist cemetery. The green was built over with dwellings. New Harmony was left with neither a central social space nor a central physical space.