

Article

Campus as Sacred Ground: Laying the Foundation for Well-Being

Marie Clausén

Department of Classics and Religious Studies, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON K2P 0Z3, Canada;
mclau048@uottawa.ca

Abstract: There are accounts of increasing anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues among students and staff at many universities, including the University of Ottawa—accounts borne out by official numbers of referrals to mental health practitioners. The causes of these issues are frequently sought within individuals themselves; the solutions are assumed to lie in therapy, counseling, or medication. In cases where the reasons are sought externally, they are attributed to workloads, interpersonal conflicts, racism, sexism, or financial difficulties. These are all, without a doubt, valid causes for ill health. Could another reason for the seemingly general failure to thrive among staff, faculty, and students on the University of Ottawa campus, however, be connected to the campus itself? It is, after all, a known fact that we are all dependent upon and deeply reactive to our environments. From Vitruvius to Ruskin to Pallasmaa, theorists have made the link between the built environment—architecture—and wellness. Architecture has the power to make us feel anxious, alienated, and unseen, or to increase our sense of belonging, collective and individual identity, sense of place, security, and tranquillity. Sacred architecture appears to play a particularly pivotal role in this—to people of all faiths and none. This paper seeks to explore whether the University of Ottawa could potentially reverse the upwardly trending numbers of poor mental health by creating a sacred-architecture-centric campus that meaningfully and materially honours not only the school's history and motto, but also its location in the Ottawa valley, on the unceded land of the Algonquin, as well as the current religious and cultural diversity of its students.

Keywords: sacred space; campus; university architecture; mental health; post-secularity



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1. Setting the Scene

You would think that my lifelong love of books, knowledge, and academic settings and pursuits would make the University of Ottawa's downtown campus, a few minutes' pleasant walk from my home, one of my happy places. My introduction to this campus occurred when I, after my arrival from the United Kingdom, was offered the position of managing editor at the University of Ottawa Press. The press offices were located on campus, and it wasn't long before I started noticing that the overall mood on campus was unexpectedly low. Once I matriculated as a PhD student at the University, I was brought into closer contact with both students and professors, which only worked to confirm my sense that there was an unhappiness abroad on campus. When I started teaching at the University, being made privy to the mental health struggles of my students constituted a shocking awakening for me despite the years spent suspecting that there was something not quite right on campus. This was so upsetting that I felt compelled to finally look into the matter, in the hope of ultimately contributing a lasting and constructive solution to, or at least amelioration of, the situation at my university affecting so many of the wonderful, talented people who make it their workplace and educational home.

I decided to begin by finding out if there was any statistical evidence that would corroborate my own feelings and the anecdotal evidence with which I had been confronted. There was: according to the 2019 National College Health Assessment survey, 66.8% of

uOttawa students found their academic work traumatic or very difficult to handle (versus 59.5% in the pan-Canadian sample) and 48% of uOttawa students reported that stress had affected their individual academic performance (versus 41.9% in the pan-Canadian sample) (University of Ottawa 2020, p. 1). Just over 9% of uOttawa students had even seriously considered suicide within the last 12 months.

Professors and support staff also seem to be faring ill: in the summer of 2021, when 37% of students reported their mental health to be no better than fair or poor, the same number for support staff was 41% and, for professors, a whopping 47%¹ (Kristjansson 2021, p. 5). In a survey administered by the university's human resources department in May 2020, 67% of support staff and 80% of professors claimed to be overloaded, 51% of staff and 68% of professors to have problems with work-life balance, 48% of staff and 57% of professors to suffer from anxiety, and 57% of both staff and professors to experience social isolation.² (Kristjansson 2021, p. 22) I was staggered at the numbers. They were far higher than I had expected, suggesting that those struggling with significant mental health issues on campus are in fact in the majority, while those enjoying good mental health are a minority.

The causes of mental health struggles are naturally many and complex. In the fall of 2021, the referrals sent the Case Management team broke down as follows: illness and injury were concerns for 9 out of 300, finances worried 8 out of 300, the death of a loved one affected 7 out of 300, and harassment and discrimination 6 out of 300, the same number who reported issues with integration and adjustment. Other specific situations included domestic violence/assault (4), housing problems (4), family dynamics (3), and pregnancy (1). A larger number, 82 out of 300, reported having academic challenges, but by far the largest group, 146 out of 300, virtually half of all referrals, reported simply feeling mentally unwell.³ In other words, what we have is a large group of people who are suffering from an unhappiness that is more difficult to pinpoint—from a general malaise, the causes of which, to a large extent, remain wrapped in mystery. One of the problems is that sometimes—in fact, quite often—people do not know what ails them or how to fix it. Elizabeth Kristjansson, the appointed special advisor on mental health and wellness at the University of Ottawa, wisely notes that we need to consider systemic root causes of many mental health and wellness challenges, including poverty, discrimination, systemic racism, and academic culture (Kristjansson 2021, p. 10). Her assessment is sound. Mental health challenges should not always be assumed to arise as a result of there being something inherently wrong with a particular individual, such as a lack of resilience in the face of specific difficulties. The trouble with many systemic causes, however, is that they can tend to be 'invisible.' And just as causes can be invisible, so can benefits unfortunately be indemonstrable.

Good architecture cannot, for instance, be absolutely proven to result in an increase in well-being, nor bad architecture an increase in disquiet⁴ (De Botton 2006, p. 248). The pertinence of this observation relates to the fact that I, influenced by my past research, have gradually started to wonder whether there might not be a link between the evident presence of general ennui and malaise among the students, staff, and faculty on the University of Ottawa campus and the (physical) campus itself.

The University is, naturally, concerned about the mental health situation and has instituted a number of recommendations to try to address the unreasonable and unprecedented level of unwellness on campus. These include: signing on to the Okanagan Charter on Mental Health, providing more specialised mental health resources, providing staff and faculty with better training, improving support services and access, strengthening partnerships with community healthcare institutions, communicating the existence of resources more clearly, strengthening the profile of the wellness website, and appointing a special advisor on mental health and wellness for a three-year period to, among other key tasks, implement the recommendations (University of Ottawa 2020, p. 22). Some of the objectives sound fairly tangible, while others, such as 'fostering a culture of caring,' 'bringing people together,' and developing a 'culture of mental health and wellness,' are significantly more

vague and, in some cases, come close to sounding like jargon. What all of the proposed solutions have in common is that they sound essentially administrative and bureaucratic in nature.

It is for example notable that the commissioned reports make no mention of the physical campus. Or rather, while the word ‘campus’ occurs 32 times in the President’s 2020 Final Report and 22 times in the 2021 Progress Report, and the word ‘environment’ 17 times in the President’s 2020 Final Report and 10 times in the 2021 Progress Report, neither report reflects the fact that these words have literal and material meanings as well as being abstract shorthand for the university community.

The only mention of an actual place in the Progress Report relates to a so-called Wellness Lounge with a light therapy room and a plant room. Even this physical space is only described in purely abstract terms, mentioning its being ‘inclusive’ and ‘non-judgemental.’ (Kristjansson 2021, p. 16) While the Wellness Lounge is a step in the right direction and an exception from the otherwise abstract, non-material approach to mental health on campus, the space itself does not conform to the ideas surrounding the kinds of spaces that have been shown to result in improved well-being. It features polyester carpet tiles underfoot, acoustic tile and strip-lighting overhead, and the kind of furniture you might expect to find in the lobby of an inexpensive hostel.

This description might sound snide and sneering, but far from trivial, material facts such as these are critically important. Architecture and design are non-verbal forms of communication and research shows that non-verbal messages are universally seen as more truthful, reliable and meaningful than verbal communications (Waite in Temple 2014, p. 74). What an institution does with the physical environment, therefore, says far more about its values and priorities than any publicly disseminated verbal messages it may put out (Boyer in Temple 2014, pp. 74–75). What the true concern for student well-being is can, therefore, at least according to the American professor of architecture and landscape design Philip Waite, be read in the physical environment on campus (Waite in Temple 2014, pp. 75–76). An unkempt, commonplace, or anonymous campus milieu sends the message that a university is either very poor or simply does not prioritise student and staff well-being to the extent that it should (Boyer in Temple 2014, pp. 76, 81).

The Scanae Frons

Contrary to what the lack of focus on the material environment on campus as an ineluctable part of the mental health jigsaw would seem to suggest, the history of the ideas of architecture’s link to the state of society and to our individual state of well-being is actually long and storied. The earliest architect to have put this into writing was none other than Vitruvius. He shaped the notion that the architect should, as a matter of ethical mandate, be a creative force for the betterment of society, and that if he wasn’t, the debased or decaying architecture would soon become an illustration of an equally dissolute and declining society.⁵

These principles were treated as axiomatic until the end of the 17th century. Even after the fall of the *l’ancien régime*, resulting in or coinciding with the decline of the transcendent aims of architecture and the rise of the engineer architect, there were still those who saw architecture as having an inescapable social and ethical dimension. Claude Perrault believed that architecture could contribute to the refinement of civilised society, and Jean-François Blondel advocated the development of a social vocation for architecture with *la bienséance* as its goal (Pérez-Gómez 2008, pp. 86–87). Later in the 18th-century, Claude Nicholas Ledoux saw architecture as responsible for creating a new societal order (Pérez-Gómez 2008, pp. 162–63). After the Industrial Revolution, however, architects such as Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand began to deny all such links, considering architecture to be material and practical and absolutely nothing else (Pérez-Gómez 2008, p. 92). Durand was an exponent of a positivist architectural theory that deems the value of architecture to be attached purely to its utility and efficiency and not at all to any “illusory” expressive capacity (Pérez-Gómez 2008, p. 166). Many contemporary architects, and virtually all

developers, would seem to follow faithfully in the footsteps of Durand, by now more than two centuries old, in continuing to dismiss architecture's more affective abilities.

Parallel to this trend, however, there have always been those fewer, braver, souls who have insisted on the idea of there being a relationship between architecture and human well-being. One of those was Augustus Welby Pugin. He renewed the case both for architecture being an expression of society and for it being able to affect society and the individuals within it. His countryman John Ruskin took up this latter thread and wove from it a remarkable socio-architectural oeuvre titled *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, at the very opening of which he writes that architecture is an art "which so disposes and adorns the edifices raised by man, for whatsoever uses, that the sight of them may contribute to his mental health, power, and pleasure" (Ruskin [1849] 1989, p. 8).

Others, such as philosophers Roger Scruton and Alain de Botton, architecture historian Alberto Pérez-Gómez, and architects Christian Norberg-Schulz, Christopher Alexander, and Juhani Pallasmaa (2012a), have, right up to our own times, continued to investigate the relationship between architecture, mood, and meaning. De Botton and Scruton write of how it can 'contribute to a given mood'—how it has an emotional impact on individual people, and that it has the built-in ability to grant us access to emotions and thoughts on which we may not otherwise have alighted at all (De Botton 2006, pp. 13, 121; Scruton [1979] 2013, p. xiv). Several writers also note that the built environment has the power to shape our identities in the world. De Botton (2006, p. 62) says it can 'render vivid who we might ideally be' and Scruton ([1979] 2013, pp. xiv, 231) that it contributes to a search for the kind of proper self-identity and self-knowledge that is not merely a species of isolated subjectivity, but a sense of being someone with an enduring identity in the public world, in society.

A particularly iconic instance of an architectural setting seen to have contributed to someone's mental health and power is that of Dr Jonas Salk, who, when he felt his brain 'overloaded,' decided to go on a retreat to the Franciscan basilica in Assisi, the architectural setting which he later credited with his having had the intellectual breakthrough that resulted in the creation of the polio vaccine (Eberhard in Robinson and Pallasmaa 2015, pp. 123–25). The impression on him was such that he was convinced ever after that architecture has the power to profoundly influence our mental state of being. When the City of San Diego gifted him with 27 acres overlooking the Pacific Ocean in 1960, he partnered with the architect Louis Kahn to design a long-planned research centre. His brief to Kahn was to "create a facility worthy of a visit by Picasso." Opening in 1963, it has inspired countless researchers in their work and ended up on the must-visit list of such eminent architects as Juhani Pallasmaa, who recounts it among the most sacred spaces in the world (Figure 1).

The idea that we feel different things in different places, think different things in different places, believe different things in different places, walk, talk, express ourselves differently in different places, and perhaps even *are* different people in different places suggests that architecture has some sort of power over us, individually and collectively. We can intuit it, although we cannot prove it.

Ninety-five percent of all our thinking and perceiving occurs below the threshold of conscious awareness, and the influence that our physical environment has on us is one of those things that only rarely rises to the level of consciousness, while nevertheless having a significant and profound impact on us.⁶ The suggestions that it has the power to shape our individual and collective identities and, as in Salk's case, to grant us intellectual breakthroughs, are things that merit serious consideration, not least where university architecture is concerned, and when it comes to the forming of as-yet only half-formed minds (De Botton 2006, p. 13; Scruton [1979] 2013, pp. xiv, 13, 121; Campos and Wilson 2019, pp. 9–10).

Studies on the dynamics of neural growth and connections show that mammalian brains are stimulated by rich and interesting environments and significantly slowed by dull ones, and that there are two periods of 'dendritic bloom' (explosive growth of neural

connections) during which we are particularly suggestible to external influence (Howard 2006, p. 522 cited by Waite in [Temple 2014](#), pp. 72–73). The first of these happens between birth and the age of six, and the second between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one (Waite in [Temple 2014](#), pp. 72–73). The second period falls during a student’s undergraduate years.

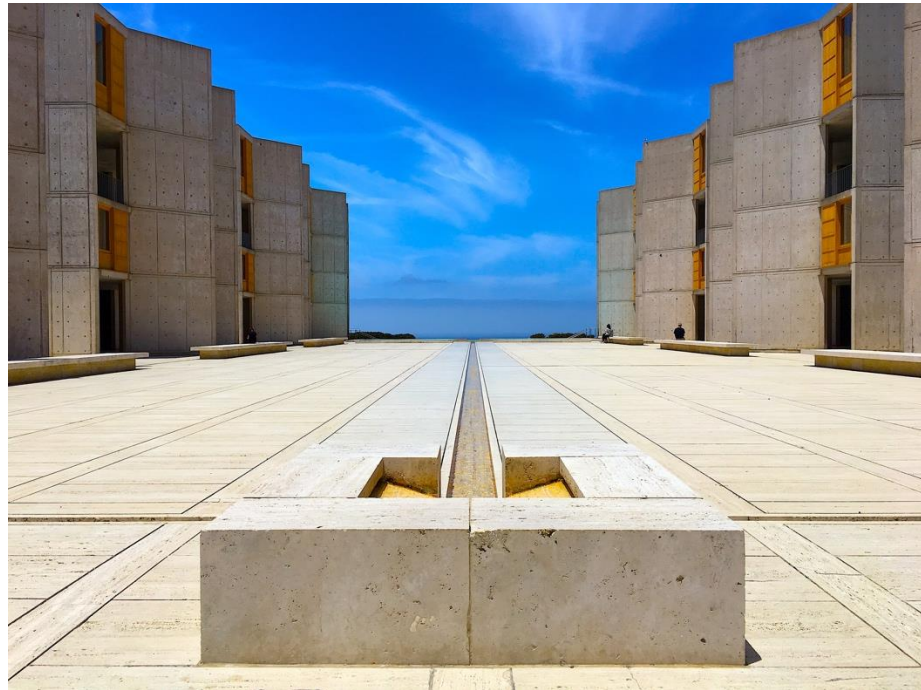


Figure 1. The Salk Institute, California.

While all this research has continued to be produced and disseminated, the findings do not seem to have reached those in whose power lie the decisions about our daily habitat. Not only that, but as ever larger numbers of people grow up without having had the opportunity to acquire or exercise skill or training in terms of judging the relative merits of architectural environments, they are themselves no longer able to identify and articulate their own displeasure and unease with their environment to those in a position to make a difference ([Bartholomew 2011](#), p. 196). As Nietzsche pointed out, already more than a century ago, the general public no longer “understands architecture,” not the same way they still understand and appreciate music, food, fashion, and other cultural expressions ([Pérez-Gómez 2008](#), p. 189). This seems increasingly to be the case; Western culture seems to have ceased to be able to see, understand, and evaluate architecture—or to take it seriously.⁷ Another take on this dilemma is that far from an insensitivity to architectural beauty, much of the current apparent detachment could, on the contrary, stem from too much sensitivity to prevailing ugliness. [De Botton \(2006, p. 13\)](#) argues that it is by way of a self-defence mechanism that people do not remain sensitive indefinitely to environments that they neither have the power to leave nor change for the better.

Either way, this situation complicates matters. It makes it difficult to see how any measurement of short- or mid-term improvement required by the wellness committees⁸ could be made to their satisfaction in an area such as this.

In light of the fact that the mental health crisis continues unabated on campus, and seeing as there seems to be, if not evidence, then ample indication of the powerful effect physical environments can have on us, it nevertheless seems an angle worth pursuing. Before I offer my concrete suggestions for a campus more attuned to the well-being of those whose daily lives are lived within its compass, I will briefly describe its history and its current status, as well as its proposed future look according to the 2015 master plan. I will do so in connection with the history and theory of campus architecture more

generally, placing particular emphasis on its relationship to our sense of well-being, both as individuals and as a collective.

2. Staging the Plot—Campuses Past

The first universities were essentially Christian inventions, off-shoots of the monastic way of life. Bologna, founded in 1088, is generally considered to have been the very first, followed by Oxford (1096–1167), Salamanca (1134), Paris (1160–1250), and Cambridge (1209). When they were founded, these universities all resembled monastic enclosures and many of them retain that look and feel to this day. (Figure 2) The German University of Halle, founded in 1694, was the first to have been founded on a different principle, that of a modern, secular institution whose interests were allied with government rather than with the Church. Consequently, these post-Westphalian universities also introduced a new aesthetic: they were built to look like urban palaces, demonstrations of temporal rather than celestial power, outward- rather than inward-looking (Bartholomew 2011, p. 219; Gaines 1991, p. 222).



Figure 2. Interior view of the Porticum and Loggia of the Royal Spanish College at the University of Bologna.

In North America, however, religion continued to play a critical role in higher education and, hence, in university design for at least another two hundred years. Here, universities followed in the footsteps of Harvard College, founded (in 1636) with the explicit mission of educating the clergy tasked with ministering to the European congregations in the ‘New World’ (Harper 2018, p. 119). Where the new European universities were being conceived as part of the cities in which they sat, the American campus was created to sit outside the cities, as pastoral idylls of knowledge. The supreme example of this is the University of Virginia, designed in 1819 by Thomas Jefferson.⁹ Designed as a ‘plantation green’ and with a plan reminiscent of a Roman temple ground, it gives the impression of being a both pastoral and sacred space (Gaines 1991, p. 3; Campos and Wilson 2019, pp. 23–25).

Most 18th and 19th-century universities in North America started out as a single building that functioned as a schoolhouse as well as serving all ancillary functions (Gaines 1991, p. 19). This was true of the University of Ottawa, which started off, at its founding in 1848 as the bilingual St. Joseph’s College of Bytown, as a single modest building situated at the corner of Guiges and Sussex in the oldest part of Ottawa called Lower Town. In 1856,

the College was relocated to the new neighbourhood of Sandy Hill, and into a significantly more substantial stone building. (Prévost 2008, p. 13)

As these types of North American 19th-century universities continued to grow, their original building often became the administrative building. As the historic anchors and administrative hubs of campus, these administrative buildings are often the last to disappear during campus renovations and thereby play a key role in the aesthetic perception of the entire campus and university. This is certainly true of the administrative building at the University of Ottawa. After a fire in 1903, the original stone building was destroyed and replaced by Tabaret Hall (Figure 3), a neo-classical building designed by the New York-based A. O. Von Herbulis whose pedimented and columned portico now forms the logo of the university.¹⁰ (Byrne 2007, p. 133)



Figure 3. Photograph of Tabaret Hall from 1903.

The beginnings of the University of Ottawa were also, like those of most North American universities founded in the 19th century, religious. It was founded by Bishop Guiges of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, at the time a fairly new order founded in France, and staffed by Oblates (Byrne 2007, p. 6). In connection with the 1856 move, the Oblates were given St. Joseph's church, having just then been erected across the street from the new university building. St. Joseph's attracted many of the government officials and civil servants who lived in the surrounding area, but was considered the university church and was popular with the students (Byrne 2007, pp. 14, 30). When the first St. Joseph's was, therefore, discovered to have structural problems in 1893, church services were held in the university chapel—a marvellous gem of Mozarabic architecture that occupied three stories in the original university building—during the reconstruction (Byrne 2007, p. 18).

The strong connection between religion and universities continued in the US—and in Canada—right up to the 20th century, and for its first 70 years (1856–1926), the University of Ottawa was, in line with this, a pronouncedly religious institution with a university chapel and a close relationship with St. Joseph's church, the ipso facto campus church.

However, in the 1920s, it was felt at many North American universities that a university education no longer needed to—or indeed should—include a religious dimension. This

was to cause a change in the look of campuses continent-wide, not least where the presence of campus chapels and churches were concerned.¹¹ At the University of Ottawa, however, it was a Franco-English linguistic rift, which had been percolating since the early 1900s and had come to a head in 1926, that ended up altering the campus profile by gradually distancing the university from its church—and, consequently, from the notion of having sacred architecture visibly present as an ineluctable part of the campus (Byrne 2007, p. 133). The rift occurred between the largely Irish (English-speaking) congregation of St. Joe's and the French administration of the university (Byrne 2007, p. 30). Indicative of the rift was the fact that after another fire at the church, this second St. Joe's was not mourned by the university administration as its university church, and the third St. Joe's (Figure 4), consecrated in 1932, was never known as the university church (Byrne 2007, pp. 41–42, 45). Interestingly and unusually, therefore, in the case of the University of Ottawa, the disassociation from visual sacred architecture on campus began while it was still a Catholic university, run by Oblates (Grubiak 2014, p. 4).



Figure 4. St. Joseph's Church, Sandy Hill, Ottawa.

The 1930s saw the increased democratisation of higher education, resulting after the Second World War in what has been called the consumer university. Together with the parallel rise of functionalism and utilitarianism, this had wide-ranging architectural consequences for campuses, including the replacement of the formerly enclosing Cantabrigian or Virginian rectangles of 'privileged space,' with buildings now placed as objects in 'free space.' (Bartholomew 2011, p. 219; Edwards 2013, p. 34) In the case of the University of Ottawa, the great post-war expansion resulted in new faculties founded, more students enrolling with each year, and the university receiving expropriation powers to expand its Sandy Hill campus (in 1959).¹²

As comprehensive as these changes were, it was the 1960s that marked the true watershed for universities in North America and elsewhere, not least where the relationship to religion was concerned. Where there were university chapels, these were ever more sparsely attended through the decades that followed, becoming either insignificant—white elephants—on campus, or being used principally for concerts, lectures, and other secular events (Kazanjan 2013; Grubiak 2014, pp. 3–4). In the case of the University of Ottawa, the break with religion took the form of the university being placed under lay leadership, ostensibly as a result of its ever more troubling finances (Byrne 2007, p. 133). It became secular and a corporation in one fell swoop, these changes coinciding with the larger societal and cultural shift towards secularity, which, amongst other things, showed itself in a student body no longer interested in attending religious services, at least not on campus.¹³

3. ‘... and Action!’—Campus Present

In 1968, a new master plan was instituted for the University of Ottawa, which saw building through the 1970s. The current core of the campus, including the main library and the university centre, remains based on this master plan.

According to the British architect Brian Edwards, there are nine types of university master plan: building-dominated (Oxford); landscape-dominated (Stirling); collegiate (Cambridge); linear (Simon Fraser, UEA); grid (California State U); molecular (Univ. of East London); radial (Manchester, Essex); and ad hoc (Edwards 2013, p. 7). The ad hoc master plan is barely a plan at all, yet it is a fairly common reality in terms of how modern university campuses have developed over time as a result of burgeoning student numbers and unclear architectural typologies and ideals (Edwards 2013, p. 13). While the University of Ottawa master plan of 1968 may have, perhaps, originally been described as a combination of a linear and a grid plan, it seems—not least since the additions of the 1985 and 1992 master plans—to have ended up more of an ad hoc one, the precincts as difficult to make out as distinct entities as they are to read as a whole campus, and the overall effect one of disjointedness and fragmentation.

While Edwards laments the flaws of some master plans as compared with others, the American architect Christopher Alexander decries master plans altogether. He claims that all the architectural environments where people feel most at home and comfortable are the products of small, piecemeal growth and organic order rather than master plans, which according to him tend to result in ‘large lump development,’ one of the problems with which is that all the buildings are erected at the same time, and therefore also all replaced at the same time, meaning there can never be any sense of continuity, through small-scale and incremental repair and replacement in these milieux (Alexander 1975, pp. 67–68, 71). This is, of course, exactly what is happening now, with much of the 1960s and 1970s campus buildings at the University of Ottawa being found to be in a state of poor repair and slated for demolition. The new buildings set to replace them are, as we shall see, every bit as much of this period as they were of theirs, and also likely projected to have equally short, if not shorter, life spans.

It is, perhaps, particularly unfortunate that the major expansion of this and so many other universities occurred at a time when ideas regarding architecture and city planning were, as we can see and judge in hindsight, the least likely to lead to successful place-making in the long run. While a sense of place was still considered paramount for a university campus at the turn of the last century, that was no longer the case by mid-century.

Perhaps it seems that any campus would naturally be considered a place, but a place is more than a collection of buildings and streets.¹⁴ One of the things that distinguishes a place is the connection of the architecture present to its natural surroundings. It must have a proper relationship to the site on which it sits, and not be built as if it could be placed anywhere (Casey 2009, p. 149). Related to this, a place ought always to show a strong local quality, achieved through material, colour and possibly also style.¹⁵ (Norberg-Schulz 1979, p. 70) Another important aspect of place is a certain stability or *stabilitas loci*, as Norberg-Schulz terms it. The development of individual and social identity is a slow process and cannot take place in a continuously changing environment, making *stabilitas loci* a basic human need (Norberg-Schulz 1979, p. 180). This does not mean that there cannot be any changes made over time, of course, but rather that these need to be gradual, of a consistently local character, and expressive of the same general *Stimmung*—the atmosphere that first and foremost ties us to place (Norberg-Schulz 1979, pp. 180, 182). It has also been shown that a sense of place arises most naturally for humans in the context of small enclosures and small-scale density. Finally, there must be a sense of some sort of cosmological and existential dimension. From the dawn of our building enterprises as a species, we seem to have intuited that creating places that register as meaningful, and in which we can feel at home, means to create somewhere that both expresses the essence of human being, i.e., our precarious but unique existential situation, and is created as an *imago mundi* or microcosmos (Casey 2009, pp. 15, 50; Norberg-Schulz 1979, p. 17).

The notion of place (concrete, specific, anthropological) is often juxtaposed with that of space (abstract, generic, geometrical). The distinction between space and place is brought into clear focus on university campuses, and all the best ones, both ancient and modern, are places with distinct identities rather than faceless, placeless groups of anonymous buildings (Edwards 2013, pp. 46, 151). In order for a campus to properly express its place in the world, and, through that, to create a sense of identity and a feeling of community, it needs to acknowledge its own history and geography and show a sense of regional location beyond pastiche (Edwards 2013, pp. 3, 7, 14). Based on these requirements, it is dubious whether the Ottawa campus can currently be considered a place.

The consequences of perceived placelessness on the human psyche are serious: the emotional symptoms of it are disorientation, alienation, depression, desolation, emotional insecurity, and even fear, memory loss, and various modes of estrangement from self and others (Casey 2009, pp. x, 38; Walter 1988, p. 211; Norberg-Schulz 1979, p. 191). Worst of all, many people will, in the end, feel not merely that they are displaced from particular sites, but that they, in essence, have *nowhere* to go, i.e., that there is no place that can offer them “a refuge for their full and true selves” (Casey 2009, p. 309). Collectively, these are called ‘place pathologies’ (Casey 2009, p. 38) and present an ever-larger problem in contemporary Western culture. Could this be what students are experiencing on the University of Ottawa campus? It is certainly a possibility worth taking under advisement.

Yet, the conversations about campus architecture have become almost solely about how effectively—and cheaply—a given layout will accommodate the particular functions to which it will be dedicated. Dependent on their corporate and millionaire investors and funders, universities today are reluctant to challenge the architectural functionalism that is the result of placing concern for profits above concern for artistic or aesthetic considerations, or for how campus buildings might intellectually and emotionally influence the people who spend their lives amongst them. The trouble with this is that the attempt to reduce a building to an instrument, a ‘machine for living,’ causes it and its environment to degenerate in our eyes (Scruton [1979] 2013, pp. xiv, 32). As a result, we will either be alienated by it,¹⁶ or—if we, like the French writer Noël Arnaud, feel that we are the space where we are, i.e., that we cannot help but identify with our surroundings—we are liable to start ascribing the same sort of notion of being only of passing use and value onto ourselves, understandably resulting in our feeling anxious, depressed, misunderstood, and undervalued. Either way, the view that architecture is purely functional or instrumental, and should be evaluated based purely on its efficiency, denies architecture the very quality that makes it the object of our identification with it in such a way as to give us an existential foothold in life, which, according to Norberg-Schulz and other architectural phenomenologists, is its main point after all (Norberg-Schulz 1979, p. 5).

Another problem is that if architecture is allowed to be wholly functional and utilitarian, it does not last longer than those functions and utilities. Utility is a short-term goal, which is why function ought always to follow form and not the other way around; if form follows function, both become equally impermanent, whereas aesthetic values in architecture contribute to its longevity and sustainability. As long as a building is handsome, some use will likely always be found for it (Scruton [1979] 2013, p. xix).

3.1. Enter, Stage Left—The Sacred

As worrying as placelessness and utilitarianism are, the most worrying thing about the current campus is arguably its total lack of visible, beautiful, and dignified sacred spaces. Yet, we are now in the 2020s, an age when the almost aggressive anti-religiosity of the 1960s–80s seems as passé to many of us as the intense and sentimental religiosity of the 19th century probably seemed to the Flower Power generation.¹⁷ The separation of church and state is a past issue, and society has moved on. Our communities are also far more diverse and multi-faith than they were in the mid- to late-20th century, and not least people under thirty now have a high interest in faith and spirituality, with many describing

themselves as ‘spiritual but not religious’ (Kazanjian 2013, p. 100; Possamai and Brackenreg 2009, p. 355).

Sacred space has also shown itself to be of vital importance to the spiritual and psychological well-being of all people, quite irrespective of where on the faith spectrum they stand. We have a fundamental need for places that are different from all other places, whose function is other than that of all other places. You could call them counter-sites—or heterotopias, to use the Foucauldian term. These are places with the ability to transgress, undermine, question, and ultimately expose the absurd, disordered, or illusory quality of the mainstream or authoritarian systems within which they exist, and which are otherwise taken for ‘normal’ (Sheldrake 2001, pp. 10, 100–1, 104). What could be more heterotopic at a secularised and utilitarian university than a sacred space, where the mystical and pre-reflective is promoted over the cognitive, rational, and discursive, and where nothing can be gained that is of any practical use in the outside world?

One putative effect of sacred space on humans—particularly relevant to this study—is a healing or restorative one. There is a growing literature on the healing effects of certain buildings, making the point that place and space can have critically restorative qualities (Daelemans 2020). Bert Daelemans has found that stress reduction can be a function of being in buildings explicitly made for spiritual activities by bringing us into contact with a fundamentally cosmic rootedness.

Aside from the positive psychological effects that sacred architecture can have on us individually, one can hardly exaggerate the importance of sacred buildings to the public domain (Deibl 2020, pp. 75–89). Their aesthetic contribution alone is invaluable (Deibl 2020, pp. 75–89; Bartholomew 2011, p. 200). They also have a centering role, and function as nodal points around which urban flows and public space shape themselves, thus playing a critical and complex role in urban space. Sacred buildings are ‘distinctive places’ in and of themselves, and are, as such, also invaluable in place-making endeavours.¹⁸

Universities are a microcosm of society at large, and the role of spirituality in the educational process is, therefore, a conversation that has really taken off in the last twenty years (Kazanjian 2013, pp. 98, 103). There is a growing body of research on the roles that religion and spirituality play in higher education that points to their importance in overall student development, including helping students to seek meaning and purpose in life and deepen their understanding of self, other, and world (Kazanjian 2013, p. 97). Far from being seen as an irrelevance on university campuses, we are seeing signs of spiritual practices being accepted again on many campuses, from meditation and yoga to the emergence of multifaith chaplaincies (Kazanjian 2013, p. 100). Questioning and exploring religious and spiritual beliefs is a critical part of a young person’s overall identity formation, helping them to locate themselves in a larger societal context (Harper 2018, p. 120; Kazanjian 2013, pp. 100, 176–77). A sense of belonging, of ‘mattering,’ to this larger societal context is something that all students need to enjoy in order to feel well and do well (Schmidt-MacKenzie 2016, pp. 198, 207–8). A greater sense of belonging has been linked to academic achievement, student resilience, and likelihood of graduation, and survey results suggest that having access to faith communities and sacred spaces on campus could potentially provide this sense of belonging and mattering (Schmidt-MacKenzie 2016, p. 207; Possamai and Brackenreg 2009, p. 356).

Connecting with a community becomes paramount when going through a difficult time. In the wake of national and international tragedies, the use of sacred spaces increases dramatically, and for those students who struggle with depression, anxiety, loneliness, or other mental health challenges, the sense of connection offered by these places is valuable (Possamai and Brackenreg 2009, p. 365; Schmidt-MacKenzie 2016, pp. 174, 178). According to surveyed students at NYCU, therapy had not had as beneficial an effect on them as having a faith community to which to turn, and some even mentioned that spirituality is what had in the end ‘saved’ them from their debilitating fears and anxieties (Schmidt-MacKenzie 2016, pp. 178–80).

Sacred architecture on campus also helps a university to pay more than lip service to religious and cultural diversity. It is one thing to talk about diversity, another to materially support it. One could wonder precisely how deep the commitment is to students of various faiths if they cannot be accommodated with proper prayer rooms (Johnson 2012, p. 298). Creating spaces where all students feel that their identity is actively and visibly supported should be a given on any campus that considers itself to value inclusivity and a liberal education (Schmidt-MacKenzie 2016, p. 228). Spirituality is and must be part of diversity.

3.2. The Off-Stage Presence of the Sacred on the University of Ottawa Campus

In spite of all this, the present University of Ottawa campus does not at present offer its students, professors, and other staff the sacred spaces that they might need to thrive. According to the university website there are four so-called multifaith spaces on campus, two of them in the SITES building and two in the student union building.

I have sought out all four, and found all but one discontinued. One of the rooms is now being used as a graduate meeting room; another two lack signage and, seemingly, occupants. The fourth, situated in the student union building, is still in operation. However, although it was created as a multifaith space and is still signposted as such (Figure 5), the demographics of use has made it a de facto and by default Muslim worship space over time.



Figure 5. The sign to the multi-faith room in the Student Union Building.

The people using the space have done their best to make it homely and welcoming—it is carpeted, has shoe boxes at the entrance, bookcases with beautiful copies of the Koran, and a blackboard that has been covered in prayers and inspirational quotes and sayings. Architecturally, however, the space is sub-par. It has a dropped acoustic ceiling, making any chanted prayers fall dead to the carpeted floor, and strip neon light tubes that cast an equally deadening, white glare. Worst of all, leading to the space is a dinged and beat-up metal door, covered in warning-stickers, that looks like it belongs in a prison rather than leads to a sacred space (Figure 6). The fact that this space is visibly Muslim also, of course, means that it would not be a comfortable space for a Jewish or Christian student or a Sikh, Hindu, or Buddhist student to practice their religion. These other groups, by no means unrepresented on campus, are therefore denied sacred space, as, of course, is the large but uncounted contingent of those who count themselves among the Spiritual but not Religious.



Figure 6. Door leading to the multifaith space in the Student Union building.

4. Casting for Campus Future(s)

Does the new master plan of 2015 do any better? It recognises that the University of Ottawa scores lower than peer institutions in ‘recreation space’ and student services, and that it comes across as ‘congested’ (University of Ottawa 2015, pp. 28–29). It hopes to address these issues and reverse some of the damage of the 1968 plan, and many of its suggestions are good ones, as far as they go. Certainly, the language used in the plan is promising. It undertakes to create a campus that is “inviting, memorable, and sustainable” as well as “humane, safe, and inspiring” and thereby hopes to “improve the quality of life of the university community” (University of Ottawa 2015, pp. 1–2). It would be difficult to disagree with these ambitions, and indeed, the very fact that they acknowledge an important link between the built habitat and the quality of life of those who spend time in it is itself a victory. The aims are rather vaguely worded, however, and hence open to a multitude of interpretations. And how, precisely, are they to be implemented?

Some of the practical suggestions that sound likely to result in significant improvements on the campus master plan are: to work with the city to create more and better linkages to the canal, enhancing the views to it wherever possible (University of Ottawa 2015, p. 36); to create a large event space for convocation and high-profile lectures;¹⁹ to create more open green spaces as well as greener streetscapes and pathways (University of Ottawa 2015, p. 90); to make campus more pedestrian-friendly and bike-friendly; and to commission public art, including commemorative sculptures (University of Ottawa 2015, p. 104). Again, this all sounds very promising.

If the images in the master plan are anything to go by, however, in real terms, the aim seems to be to build lots of new glass-fronted buildings surrounded by lots of trees. In all essentials, it looks like the quintessential 1960’s plan, with aspirational high rises in park landscapes surrounded by wide, high-speed roads. Where, I wonder, has this modernist design scheme ever promoted the ‘sense of community’ or ‘distinct identity for the area’ that the master plan claims to aim for? (University of Ottawa 2015, p. 8) It is a mistake to assume that trees (especially young ones, recently planted) can, on their own, carry the burden of injecting life and character into a habitat that otherwise consists almost wholly of interchangeable glass buildings without distinction. It is a model that has been tried for over half a century with, as we know, limited success, particularly in being perceived as either memorable, sustainable, humane, or inspiring.²⁰

The endless proliferation of the blank glass wall is also a mistake. For a start, for a city such as Ottawa, on a major migratory bird route, it is essential to steer away from walls of factory-made glass as the situation is already dire, with thousands of migrating birds (143 species) dying annually from crashing into glass buildings in Ottawa's core.²¹ The curtain wall of glass also produces an architecture that is essentially faceless—that literally lacks a façade. It has been described by the psychiatrist and neuroscientist Iain McGilchrist as having an 'autistic flatness'²². Another problem with these buildings is their global ubiquity. They are part and parcel of what is sometimes referred to as the 'international style,' since a glass high-rise in Frankfurt looks much like one in Tokyo or Houston, rather than honouring or referencing any culturally specific aesthetic, which, while it purports to be neutral and 'global,' is actually an exportation and proliferation of a particular Western aesthetic ideal. The concrete, the sheet glass, and the stainless steel tend to be manufactured industrially, which, together with the 'international style,' contribute to the sense of placelessness. This type of architecture also easily gives the impression of being short-lived and lacking any air of permanence. This problem is, again, at least in part an effect of the materials used, which have a built-in obsolescence, and also tend to age and weather poorly. Concrete stains badly in the rain, and glass and metal are rendered ugly and shabby the moment they are scratched or dirtied.

The new master plan recognises that a campus needs to incorporate not only academic and research spaces, but places to sleep and eat and socialise, and to enjoy sporting events and arts and culture—all heralded as important for a good university experience ([University of Ottawa 2015](#), pp. 7, 9). I do not at all disagree with this, but it is notable that the needs that the new campus architecture is being asked to respond to are primarily somatic and, one could say, hedonistic. In a hedonistic culture, architecture's vocation becomes to ensure "the greatest pleasure and least pain for each individual" and to constitute "a functionalist utopia in which all desires are fulfilled through material means, eliminating all irritants and always aiming at greater economy and comfort" ([Pérez-Gómez 2008](#), pp. 4–5). In addition to having our somatic needs and desires met, however, our psyches also require that which acknowledges and fulfils our far deeper needs, such as feeling life to be genuinely meaningful, and of seeing in our surroundings "the imprint of past lives and values held over time" ([Scruton \[1979\] 2013](#), pp. 28, 104). Confusing or replacing our quest for deeper meaning with that for individual freedom, comfort, and hedonism results in architecture that is perceived as a consumable commodity, a passing fashion, banal functionalism, and empty formalism ([Pérez-Gómez 2008](#), p. 5).

This brings me to my main quibble with the plan. While sports facilities, food facilities, research facilities, and housing are all explicitly mentioned as "fundamental" to the "uOttawa experience" ([University of Ottawa 2015](#), pp. 78–79) there is—again—no mention anywhere of the importance of spiritual facilities.²³ This strikes me as a glaring omission, as the plan was published a decade and a half into what has been termed the post-secular age ([Habermas 2010](#), p. 18), and as the University of Ottawa is a diverse university with students from all over the world, representing a number of world religions.²⁴ These spaces have also, as mentioned, been shown to be particularly important to students with mental health concerns. They are also growing in importance to those who have simply begun to register discomfort with the increasingly hard-line Cartesian principles and materialistic pedagogies that many universities are pushing, which are resulting in key elements of the humanities, such as aesthetics, beauty, art, and religion, being held in contempt ([Fawell 2016](#), pp. 222, 236). There seems to be a countermovement afoot among some students who are increasingly disillusioned by the narrative of progress, seeing it for what it is, a range of purely superficial, technological developments, and fatigued by the cliché about the 'rapid changes of our time.' They are also enervated by the self-help principles that counsel constant happiness and make them feel as if they are ill—or failures—if they experience any sadness or doubt about their own lives or about life in general. Instead, there is an increased appetite for timeless values and ideas, proportionally more curiosity about the non-empirical and more of an interest in seeking spiritual nourishment through introspec-

tion (Fawell 2016, pp. 222, 233). This increasing appetite is one that could—and, in my view, should—be supported by the presence of sacred architecture on campus.

Both the sacred spaces themselves and the debates over religion's role in the university and on campus are continuing to evolve (Schmidt-MacKenzie 2016, p. 233). Universities today can basically be classified as belonging to one of four types when it comes to their relationship to the presence of sacred sites on campus: the 'anti-religious' (which makes no provision at all for religious and spiritual practices); the 'tolerant' (which makes minimal provision); the 'anti-denominational' (which has multifaith spaces, but is opposed to specific spaces for specific groups); and the 'multi-faith' (which is genuinely open to religious plurality and a full spectrum of spiritual needs).²⁵ (Possamai and Brackenreg 2009, p. 356)

Based on its currently minimal provision, I would classify Ottawa as no more than 'tolerant.'²⁶ An increasing number of universities are, however, striving to fall into the anti-denominational or multi-faith categories and building spaces to match. New York University, a diverse urban university campus in downtown New York City, is aiming to belong to the multifaith category. In the early 2010s, they completed construction of The Global Center for Academic and Spiritual Life (Schmidt-MacKenzie 2016, p. 60). The eye-catching, five-storey granite-clad building sits immediately adjacent to the Student Union on the south side of Washington Square Park on southern Manhattan. It includes "spaces for religious observance, offices for New York University's Chaplains' Circle, classes, music rehearsals, and conferences" and aims to be "a multi-faith initiative designed to enhance the educational experience at NYU by fostering a community of scholars who support religious expression, leadership, integrity, mutual respect, and open dialogue."²⁷

Some other universities that already have chapels and other sacred structures on their campuses have, since the early 2000s, been considering having these restored, adapted, and upgraded (Jay 2005, p. 43). In this way, they can capitalise on the structures' heritage value, and also often their strong aesthetic value, while addressing the growing need for spirituality within a multid denominational student body (Jay 2005, p. 43). An example of this is the Goddard Chapel at Tufts (Figure 7), considered the campus's architectural jewel, which was restored in 2002 to cater to the current student population's greater religious diversity as well as a shift among many to a more non-denominational spirituality (Jay 2005, pp. 44–45). This kind of chapel rehabilitation has also been undertaken at Wellesley College's Houghton Memorial Chapel (Figure 8), which now also includes a Muslim prayer room and a Buddhist and Hindu meditation room.



Figure 7. Exterior of Goddard Chapel at Tufts.



Figure 8. Houghton Memorial Chapel and Multifaith Center, Wellesley College.

According to the research, placement of these sacred spaces is crucial. Sacred spaces on campus should be given pride of place (Johnson 2012, p. 307; Grubiak 2014, p. 111). Obscure placement, small size, and unremarkable design all work to create spatial inequality between the sacred space and the other facilities on campus such as the library or the sports facility, and is felt to be expressive of a university's true feelings about the presence of religion on campus (Grubiak 2014, p. 53). The prominent placement of sacred architecture on campus, on the other hand, asserts that the natural sciences do not alone possess the whole truth, and that religion and the humanities reveal a vital truth of their own (Grubiak 2014, pp. 41, 97).

Careful attention should be given to their design—to the light, materials, colour, shape, height, and decorative expressions of the structure. The haptic, multisensorial dimension is also important. Pallasmaa calls for a re-sensualising of architecture, through a strengthened sense of materiality and hapticity, texture and weight, density of space and materialised light—for the pure pleasure of it, but also as a way for it to respond through its very materiality to our existential questions and longings (Pallasmaa 2012b, pp. 41, 76).

Beauty is another critically important quality: these buildings should inspire awe in anyone who enters, as this not only communicates the special, non-secular nature of the space, but can itself act as a starting point for discovery of similarities and shared horizons.²⁸ The role of beauty in the activation of something larger has been intuited by many, including Socrates, who claimed that the experience of the beautiful invokes knowledge of the potentially whole (and holy) order of things, and Pérez-Gómez, who has more recently expressed his conviction that beauty is critical for our spiritual well-being (Pérez-Gómez 2008, pp. 114–15). In spite of this, we live in a time where advocates of critical theory and practitioners of contemporary building design appear to have conspired to regard beautiful and inspired architecture as something that somehow challenges democratic values and social responsibility, generating an increasingly unquestioned and purely conjectured belief that we are unable to create that which is *both* beautiful and ethical. (Pérez-Gómez 2008, pp. 25, 28, 205)

As of 2013, we need no longer merely speculate on or intuit the connection between beauty and meaning or between beauty and human well-being. That was when the American neuroscientist Gabrielle Starr published her research on the neural underpinnings of aesthetic experience and concluded that beauty is important to the very architecture of the brain itself (Starr 2013, pp. xi, xii). While the neural processes underlying aesthetics are complicated and we are only just beginning to understand them, the evidence at hand points to the fact that beauty matters because it actually 'shapes' the human brain by supporting both memory and identity.²⁹ (Starr 2013, pp. xv–xvi, 29)

Starr has, through her research, established precisely how art and architecture is able to not only change how we feel in the now, but how we think and feel in the future, by

engaging systems for emotion, reward, and memory in the core network. In other words, art and architecture have the transformative potential to take us out of one set of ideas and into another.³⁰ (Starr 2013, pp. 144, 145, 147)

So, what is beauty? Is it not in the eye of the beholder? Is it not true that *de gustibus non est disputandum*? Not necessarily. Beauty does not stand alone; it is, on the contrary, connected neurologically to many things—our aesthetic judgement can be said to be continuous with our moral, religious, and political feelings, of our entire *Weltanschauung* (Scruton [1979] 2013, pp. xc, 97, 219). Aesthetic judgement is, hence, not something that takes place outside of the reasoning that governs other domains of thought, but is tied to the same value system and guided by the same desire for happiness (Scruton [1979] 2013, pp. x, 221). To the extent that we can agree that our basic moral judgements, such as ‘murder is wrong,’ can be considered something more and other than a mere expression of personal opinion—an objective stance imposed on us by our common rationality—we can plead also for the objective reality—and importance—of beauty (Pérez-Gómez 2008, p. 111).

Understudies

I concur with the master plan that there need to be more cultural venues on campus. The plan seems to prioritise sporting venues over other cultural venues, though, while I would, above all, like to see beautifully designed theatres, ditto cinemas, cafés, and several bookshops specialising in different types of literature. A university is after all first and foremost a cultural and educational milieu. Perhaps a (non-hockey) outdoor skating rink would also add to its appeal. This is the second coldest capital in the world, after all, and a handsome skating rink with music and ice sculptures, a hut for cocoa, and decorative bridges would be a huge and exotic draw for students from all over the world. It would also contribute to the sense of place, skating having been practiced in Canada for thousands of years, and being a time-honoured way for humans to interact with and enjoy a natural element (frozen water), to celebrate the weather and climate of the region, and to enjoy and be nourished by each other’s company.

I also agree with the master plan’s ambition to commission public art, including commemorative statues, for campus. I would welcome statues of the founders (Bishop Guigues and Father Tabaret); of Thomas Foran, the very first graduate, who remained a lifelong friend of the university; of Father Auguste Morisset, the founder of the university’s library school; and of famous alumni such as Angela Hewitt, a pianist renowned around the world, and Paul Okalik, Nunavut’s first Inuit lawyer. Memorials to the students and staff who made the ultimate sacrifice during the First and Second World Wars would also help to connect the current cohort of students to their fellow alumni and, through this fellow feeling, create a sense of belonging. If students today can see that past students are honoured and remembered by their university, it cannot help but create an unconscious feeling that they will not be forgotten either, that they are not merely anonymous scores moving through the education system, but individuals, each one worthy of remembrance. Any current students caught up and killed in airplane accidents or natural disasters should also be honoured with a plaque somewhere on campus, perhaps in one of the designated green spaces.

More generally, I would like to see campus feature buildings of human scale, made of warm, natural, local, or regional materials. The buildings should be well-proportioned, graceful, and harmonious, and relate to one another by a variety of means, such as pedestrian paths, gateways, promenades, and eye-catching enfilades (Alexander 1977, p. 233; Edwards 2013, pp. 1, 2, 51). The promenades could be lined with cafés, bookshops, and attractive student facilities, and the spaces between buildings furnished with pools, fountains, gazebos, courtyards, gateways, and dignified gardens in which students can be photographed in their gowns at graduation.³¹ (Edwards 2013, pp. 42, 47; Gaines 1991, p. 2)

Most of all, however, I hope that the university will, in honour of its own founding and history, in honour of the university motto (*Deus Scientiarum Dominus est*), in honour of the fact that it is situated on the unceded land of the Algonquin Anishinaabe

and—importantly—in honour of the vibrant and diverse religions practiced by its current students, faculty and staff, decide to put sacred architecture at the very heart of a future campus. This sacred architecture should be significant, dignified, and beautiful—it can either take the shape of one multifaith building, or several more distinctly denominational buildings. If following the model of the multifaith building, it could take its inspiration from The Global Center for Academic and Spiritual Life at New York University or the House of One, currently under construction in Berlin (Figure 9), which, when completed, will feature three separate holy rooms—a church, a mosque, and a synagogue—arranged around a central hall that offers opportunities for interfaith dialogue as well as the hosting of art exhibits, lectures, and other secular events.



Figure 9. Model of the House of One, Berlin.

If the option of distinctly denominational buildings is instead followed, one could do worse than taking inspiration from Seattle University’s St Ignatius Chapel (Figure 10), whose award-winning architecture is by Stephen Holl, with a great amount of student input, and furnishings as well as architectural details fabricated by local artisans (www.seattleu.edu/chapel/ accessed on 13 October 2022).

Depending on the demographics, there could also be a Sikh gurdwara and a Hindu temple. Quite irrespective of demographics, there should, in my opinion, definitely be an Algonquin smoke lodge.³² After all, as Philip Sheldrake points out, reconciliation consists of more than words and other abstractions. It is, amongst other things, about reconsecrating desecrated places, as well as about making a (distinct, non-homogenised) place for those who have been marginalised or diminished and issuing an invitation for them to inhabit it. Reconciliation must and does include architecture (Sheldrake 2001, p. 168). While, with Le Corbusier’s chapel in Ronchamp as proof, it is not always necessary for the architect(s) of sacred spaces to themselves follow a particular thought tradition, it would in this instance be an important sign of goodwill to not only consult with, but leave the design and building of the lodge entirely in the hands of local Algonquin designers and craftspeople.

It would also have been interesting to consider having St. Joseph’s once again made the university church, and to have it restored, adapted, and upgraded in the manner of Tufts and Wellesley, as this would have capitalised both on the structure’s heritage and aesthetic value. Sadly, however, it may not be possible in view of the political history and present circumstances.

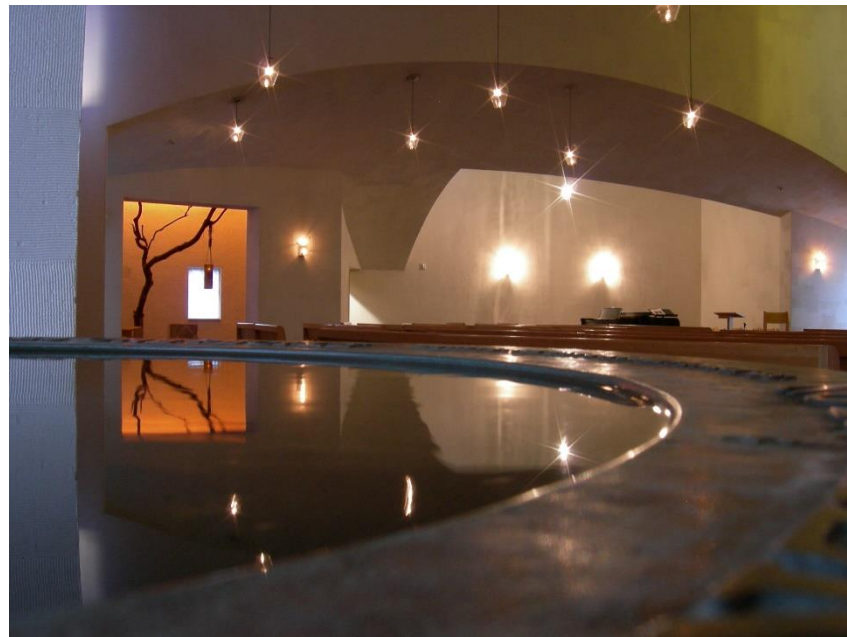


Figure 10. The interior of the St Ignatius Chapel, Seattle University.

These sacred spaces on campus need not be only for private prayer, meditation, or communal services. They could be used to hold cultural festivals, weddings, and even memorial services for faculty and students. They could possibly even include tombs, thus helping to turn campus into a truly sacred ground.

Sacred architecture is key to creating a campus that feels sanctified, as its very presence acts as the necessary material marker and reminder of the existential dimension to all our lives. Sacred edifices will do the work of radiating (perhaps literally, by the means of light shining through windows and other apertures) holiness to the rest of campus. It is also important, however, to acknowledge that there is more to creating a sacred campus than erecting one or several holy houses on it. There is a give and take between architecture and its immediate surroundings, and just as these sacred structures can be expected to disseminate some of what they are to their environment, so will they also absorb the spirit already present on campus. It will, therefore, be equally important to seek to express a diffused sacredness through an overall thoughtful, respectful, and humane campus design.

Perhaps King Faisal University in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, could act as an inspiration. It features a central grand mosque that anchors the campus visually, culturally, and historically, and gives it identity, but there is more to the campus in Dammam than a mosque. In order to turn (abstract, generic, geometric—profane) space into (significant, poetic, unique—sacred) place, all buildings have an important role to play: they need be made to human scale and of local, natural materials. King Faisal University showcases the rediscovery of local building traditions and vernacular architectural styles which contribute to the sense of placemaking that should, arguably, lie at the heart of campus design everywhere. It also has the immense benefit of being a seafront campus, but rather than treating its location as merely scenic, it has found ways of using its location to contribute to its sustainability by taking advantage of the winds off the water, raising buildings on pilons, erecting wind towers, planting shaded walkways, etc. (Edwards 2013, pp. 28–29). Similarly to the Salk Institute in California, this campus joins not only sea and land, but learning with a sense of the spiritual.

These are principles that could and should be translated to Ottawa. For the campus to be truly sustainable and hence read as sacred, the land itself needs be honoured as something other than a location for buildings. Trees will need to be seen as something other and more than mere decoration between buildings—as inherently valuable and sacred forms of life—and water should be incorporated, including, but not limited to, views of the

Rideau Canal. The wildlife of the region, including the many species of bird that migrate through the campus each year, needs to be made safe and welcome through the design of the space. Once there is water that reflects the sky, a sky full of birds, a canopy of mature trees giving shade and shelter, groupings of attractive and warmly welcoming structures among them, the mood created will, in turn, feed the sacred structures, giving them the additional resonance and plangency they need to continue reminding us to keep the ground all around themselves sacred.

5. Denouement

A university environment must be considered part of the learning experience, in fact, part of the pedagogy. It has been said that buildings are ‘silent teachers.’ (Edwards 2013, p. 3; Post 2020, p. 168) Aside from its potential to contribute to the retention of learning, as well as identity formation and a sense of belonging, university architecture—and the campus milieu more generally—seems to be able to play a therapeutic role through stress relief and temporary escapism from the manifold pressures of academic life.³³ (Boyer in Temple 2014, p. 81) Why not harness architecture’s apparent power to affect us for the better and develop the university’s architecture in order for it to face its share of the responsibility for student welfare? In the current mental health crisis, surely this potential of architecture, hereto untapped, must be made use of? And surely, in this post-secular age and on a cosmopolitan, multi-spiritual campus such as University of Ottawa’s, we should consider turning to the very special powers of sacred architecture in an effort to lift ourselves and our fellow academicians, both young and older, from both near and far, above the everyday which, from time to time, threatens to bury us all? Not to do so would be to leave a stone unturned.

In the Progress Report regarding the University of Ottawa’s mental health initiatives, Kristjansson writes: “Using an evidence-based approach, we have started and will continue to establish both qualitative and quantitative methods to determine the effectiveness of initiatives, identify corrective action to address gaps, and review and update our objectives and plans” (Kristjansson 2021, p. 25). It is my belief that the general lack of graceful, unified architecture, beautiful gardens, and other visually attractive amenities on campus, and especially the lack of beautiful, awe-inspiring, and significant sacred architecture, is such a gap. It is my hope that it will be identified as such and addressed in the coming objectives and plans in a way that will lay lasting foundations for the well-being of students, faculty, and staff at the University of Ottawa.

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Notes

- ¹ In fact, as the percentage of students declaring themselves to not experience a sense of community on campus also rises from 18% of first-year students to 19% of fourth-year students (University of Ottawa 2020, p. 9), we can conclude that a sense of well-being does not seem more likely to manifest itself the more time is spent on campus, whether as a student or as an even more long-term employee—quite the contrary.
- ² Some of this could, of course, given the timing of the survey, be attributable to the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic.
- ³ Email to author from Corey MacDonald, Student Support at the Faculty of Arts.

Alberto Pérez-Gómez also argues that the trouble is that while our sub-conscious knows that the quality of something like our built environment is in fact central to our spiritual well-being, our reason has been trained to dismiss the fact (Pérez-Gómez 2008, p. 201).

Robert Tavernor, in the introduction to the 2009 Penguin Classics edition of Vitruvius's *On Architecture*, p. xiv. (Gigerenzer 2007; LeDoux 1996; Mlodinow 2012; Zaltman 2003) as cited in (Temple 2014, p. 77).

Yet Pugin (1895, p. 18) famously opined that "Those who regard these matters [architecture] as childish toys are surely mistaken in their estimate."

According to the progress report, all new mental health initiatives need to 'demonstrate' positive impact (Kristjansson 2021, p. 24).

It also remains an excellent illustration of the educational mission of university architecture, something that Jefferson took seriously (Campos and Wilson 2019, p. 13).

The choice of style was interesting for what was still a religious institution. Pugin famously opined that while the Gothic was the pre-eminently Christian style, Classicism was a pagan and therefore profane style (Pugin [1841] 2013).

At some universities, there was, however, a continued desire to have a university chapel. At Princeton, for instance, they built a neo-Gothic chapel in 1923 at the very centre of campus as a sign of religion's continued meaning to the mission of the university, its style designed to appeal to the emotions of the students (Grubiak 2014, p. 3).

The Canadian Encyclopedia (2012), entry on University of Ottawa: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/university-of-ottawa> (accessed on 17 September 2022).

A new entity, Saint Paul University, was created out of the religious faculties of the University of Ottawa (Byrne 2007, p. 133).

Lefebvre (1991) famously distinguished between real (social, anthropological, sensory) space and ideal (abstract, geometric, politico-economic) space, and Marc Augé (1992) between places (local, anthropological) and non-places (globalised, anonymous, transient). Their categories both map onto Norberg-Schulz's categories of space vs. place. Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph also work with these phenomenological categories.

What do the buildings on the University of Ottawa campus say about the Canadian Shield, the Ottawa Valley, or the Algonquin land on which they stand? In what way do the structures on campus reflect any or all of these local or regional material realities?

The Marxist critique of architecture is sprung out of the theory of alienated labour, which itself builds on Hegel's notion of self-consciousness as transcendental, i.e., as exhibiting or expressing intentionality not only towards the interior self but also towards that which is other than and in excess of itself. As architecture is part of this exterior world that either rebuts or confirms our self, we must see what we recognise to be our own values and tastes and ideas reflected back at us as proper aims in the world, and if we do not, we end up standing against it in an alienated relation (Scruton [1979] 2013, pp. 225, 227; Pérez-Gómez 2008, p. 201).

Recent scholarship argues that the practice of religion has been resurgent since the early 2000s (Grubiak 2014, p. 121).

It is not impossible that the reintroduction of sacred architecture on campus would concomitantly solve the problem of its sense of disjointedness and fragmentation, by reorganising the flow.

For a major university to have to host its convocations elsewhere in town is both unusual and very unfortunate in terms of creating a memorable day for graduates that feeds into their positive memories of their university and their campus.

Le Corbusier had the same ideas nearly a century ago in his so-called 'Green City' or Ville Radieuse, which was thankfully never built (Norberg-Schulz 1979, p. 191).

The university does seem to be realising this, no doubt as a result of the tireless awareness-raising campaigning by Safe Wings Ottawa, and we are starting to see the glass windows of the raised walkways around campus etched with designs to make them more visible to birds (Safe Wings 2022).

Iain McGilchrist (2012), in the Taliesin West symposium 'Minding Design' (10 November 2012), around the 63-min mark. YouTube.

Unless they are to fall under "recreation" or "entertainment", but such a categorisation would seem a little odd.

Precisely what the demographic statistics are on campus when it comes to religious affiliation is unknown, however. On querying, I have been told that the university does not keep statistics on this (Private communication with the author).

The University skates dangerously close to being considered an anti-religious university, as three out of its four 'multifaith' rooms are out of commission and the fourth one, functioning purely as a Muslim worship space, is poorly housed. This one space just about makes it scrape through to the tolerant category.

I should add that the university does have a complement of multifaith chaplains, but located as they are "in the 2nd floor hallway between Morrisett and Fauteux" and without any proper sacred spaces, my classification stands fast.

From the centre's website, cited in (Schmidt-MacKenzie 2016, p. 61).

Conversely, when an old classroom or meeting room is converted into a worship space, the opportunity to communicate architecturally across the denominational boundaries is often missed altogether (Johnson 2012, pp. 300, 301).

Making it, of course, not least important to young people whose identities are still largely unformed.

- 30 If that is not a case for making university campuses oases of gorgeous architecture, I do not know what is.
- 31 The fact that University of Ottawa graduates have their pictures taken by the canal or at the Conference Centre or National Arts Centre to which the convocation ceremonies have lately been outsourced speaks volumes of the feelings both among students and the administration about the lack of attractive vistas of which one can be proud on the campus itself.
- 32 A ceremonial lodge (Mikinàk Lodge) has just been opened for Indigenous workers on the Central Experimental Farm, in which they can pray and hold ceremonies and meetings (CBC News 2022): https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/federal-government-smudging-ottawa-1.6609661?fbclid=IwAR0NIPXysIaf7rtOlifLxG1OnDnJqVxdNKRdET4uWM_IMuADEq2HEOSHqw (accessed on 14 May 2022).
- 33 Natural landscaping 'has been shown to reduce student stress levels (Temple 2014, pp. xxvii–xxviii, 182).

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