ANCHORING

STEVEN HOLL

SELECTED PROJECTS 1975–1988

PRINCETON ARCHITECTURAL PRESS

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Writing's relation to architecture affords only an uncertain mirror to be held up to evidence; it is rather in a wordless silence that we have the best chance to stumble into that zone comprised of space, light, and matter that is architecture. Although they fall short of architectural evidence, words present a premise. The work is forced to carry over when words themselves cannot. Words are arrows pointing in the right directions; taken together they form a map of architectural intentions.

Here, then, are some excerpted thoughts that have, over the past ten years, acted as catalysts for the projects that follow.

ANCHORING. Architecture is bound to situation. Unlike music, painting, sculpture, film, and literature, a construction (non-mobile) is intertwined with the experience of a place. The site of a building is more than a mere ingredient in its conception. It is its physical and metaphysical foundation.

The resolution of the functional aspects of site and building, the vistas, sun angles, circulation, and access, are the "physics" that demand the "metaphysics" of architecture. Through a link, an extended motive, a building is more than something merely fashioned for the site.

Building transcends physical and functional requirements by fusing with a place, by gathering the meaning of a situation. Architecture does not so much intrude on a landscape as it serves to explain it. Illumination of a site is not a simplistic replication of its "context"; to reveal an aspect of a place may not confirm its "appearance." Hence the habitual ways of seeing may well be interrupted.

Architecture and site should have an experiential connection, a metaphysical link, a poetic link.

When a work of architecture successfully fuses a building and situation, a third condition emerges. In this third entity, denotation and connotation merge; expression is linked to idea which is joined to site. The suggestive and implicit are manifold aspects of an intention.

A building has one site. In this one situation, its intentions are collected. Building and site have been interdependent since the beginning of Architecture. In the past, this connection was manifest without conscious intention through the use of local materials and craft, and by an association of the landscape with events of history and myth. Today the link between site and architecture must be found in new ways, which are part of a constructive transformation in modern life.

Ideas cultivated from the first perception of the site, meditations upon initial thoughts, or a reconsideration of existing topography can become the framework for invention. This mode of invention is focused through a relative space, as distinct from universal space. It is in a bounded domain. Architecture is an extension; a modification establishing absolute meanings relative to a place. Even when a new work is an inversion of inherent conditions, its order attempts to embody an aspect, or illuminate a specific meaning distinct from generalities of abstract space. An ideal exists in the specific; an absolute in the relative.

Standing in the courtyard of the Nunnery in Uxmal, time is transparent, function unknown. The path of the sun is perfectly ordered with the architecture. The framed views align with the distant hills. Descending through the ball court, ascending the "House of Turtles," and looking again toward the great courtyard—the experience trancends architectural beauty. Architecture and site are phenomenologically linked.

At Louis Kahn's Salk Institute, there is a time of day when the sun, reflecting on the ocean, merges with light reflecting on the rivulet of water in the trough bisecting the central court. Ocean and

Uxmal: View from "House of Turtles."

courtyard are fused by the phenomenon of sunlight reflecting on water. Architecture and nature are joined in a metaphysics of place.

Across a vast, fecund valley in Oregon, an irregular form clings to the edge of the Benedictine Monastery on Mt. Angel. Approached from the garden of the hilltop cloister, it appears as a low one-story building of modest consequence. Once inside, it unfolds in a burst of space splayed outward and downward, freely engaged in the rolling panorama of earth and sky. Aalto completed the edge of the monastic plateau and created a serene cascade of space for study and contemplation. The qualities of the architecture are fused with the qualities and meaning of its situation.

The grand shrines of Ise, Japan are reconstructed every twenty years on adjacent sites; each temple has two sites. Since 4 B.C., this religious act has had a mysterious power most manifest in the vacant site with its stone pads ready to receive the adjacent temple according to the next twenty-year cycle. Time and site are further engaged in the Sakaki—the paper ornaments hanging on the gates and fences that are replaced fresh every ten days.

Adalberto Libera's Malaparte residence in Capri stands as a mysterious example of order in space, light, and time. Its simple walls merge with the rock and cliffs and rise from the Mediterranean like a strange platform offering itself to the sun. Without style, almost without identifiable elevations, it connects with the site by jumping over time.

IDEA AND PHENOMENA. The essence of a work of architecture is an organic link between concept and form. Pieces cannot be subtracted or added without upsetting fundamental properties. A concept, whether a rationally explicit statement or a subjective demonstration, establishes an order, a field of inquiry, a limited principle.

Within the phenomena of experience in a built construction, the organizing idea is a hidden thread connecting disparate parts with exact intention. Although the experience of semi-transparent planes of glass defining a space with a glow of light presents a sensory experience irreduceable to a stated concept, this inexpression is not a gap between concept and phenomena, but the range or field where various conclusions intersect.

The intertwining of idea and phenomena occurs when a building is realized. Before beginning, architecture's metaphysical skeleton of time, light, space, and matter remain unordered. Modes of composition are open: line, plane, volume, and proportion await activation. When site, culture, and program are given, an order, an idea may be formed. Yet the idea is only conception.

The transparency of a membrane, the chalky dullness of a wall, the glossy reflection of opaque glass, and a beam of sunlight intermesh in reciprocal relationships that form the particular experience of a place. Materials interlocking with the perceiver's senses provide the detail that moves us beyond acute sight to tactility. From linearity, concavity, and transparency to hardness, elasticity, and dampness, the haptic realm opens.

An architecture of matter and tactility aims for a "poetics of revealing" (Martin Heidegger), which requires an inspiration of joinery. Detail, this poetics

of revealing, interplays intimate scaled dissonance with large scale consonance. The vertical patience of a massive wall is interrupted by a solitary and miniature cage of clarity, at once giving scale and revealing material and matter.

Similarly, the spatial experience of parallax, or perspective warp, while moving through overlapping spaces defined by solids and cavities opens the phenomena of spatial fields. The experience of space from a point of view that is in perspective presents a coupling of the external space of the horizon and the optic point from the body. Eye sockets become a kind of architectural position grounded in a phenomena of spatial experience that must be reconciled with the concept and its absence of experiential spatiality.

An infinite number of perspectives projected from an infinite number of viewpoints could be said to make up the spatial field of the phenomena of a work of architecture.

Space remains in oblivion without light. Light's shadow and shade, its different sources, its opacity, transparency, translucency, and conditions of reflection and refraction intertwine to define or redefine space. Light subjects space to uncertainty, forming a kind of tentative bridge through fields of experience. What a pool of yellow light does to a simple bare volume or what a paraboloid of shadow does to a bone white wall presents us with a psychological and transcendant realm of the phenomena of architecture.

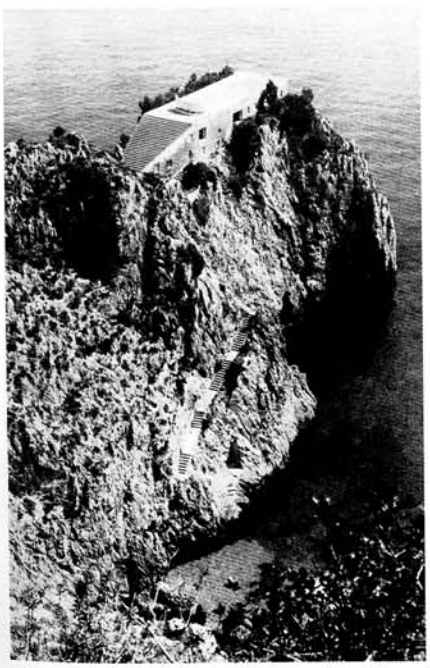
If we consider the order (the idea) to be the outer perception and the phenomena (the experience) to be the inner perception, then in a physical construction, outer perception and inner perception are intertwined. From this position experiential phenomena are the material for a kind of reasoning that joins concept and sensation. The objective is unified with the subjective. Outer perception (of the intellect) and inner perception (of the senses) are synthesized in an ordering of space, light, and material.

Architectural thought is the working through of phenomena initiated by idea. By "making" we realize idea is only a seed for extension in phenomena. Sensations of experience become a kind of reasoning distinct to the making of architecture. Whether reflecting on the unity of concept and sensation or the intertwining of idea and phenomena, the hope is to unite intellect and feeling, precision with soul.

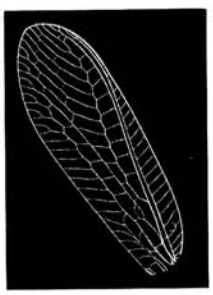
PROTO-ELEMENTS OF ARCHITECTURE (AN OPEN LANGUAGE). The open vocabulary of modern architecture may be extended by any compositional element, form, method, or geometry. A situation immediately sets limits. A chosen ordering concept and chosen materials begin the effort to extract the nature of the work. Prior to site, even prior to culture, a tangible vocabulary of the elements of architecture remains open. Here is a beautiful potential: proto-elements of architecture.

Proto-elements: possible combinations of lines, planes, and volumes in space remain disconnected, trans-historical, and trans-cultural. They float about in a zero-ground of form without gravity but are precursors of a concrete architectonic form. There are elements that are transcultural and transtemporal, common to the ancient architecture of Kyoto and of Rome. These elements are fundamental geometric precepts common to ancient Egypt and high Gothic, to twentieth-century rationalism and expressionism.

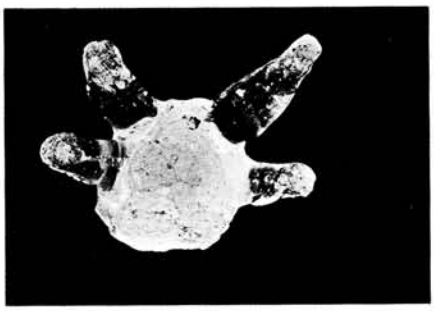
Lines: stems of grass, twigs, cracks in mud, cracks in ice, veins in a leaf, woodgrain, nodal lines, spiderwebs, hair, ripples in sand . . . The astonishing Gothic stone tracery of King's College Chapel, of Westminster Abbey, or of Gloucester Cathedral. The steel linearity of Paxton's Crystal Palace . . .



Malaparte House by A. Libera, Capri, Italy 1938.



Wing of a fly.



Left: Hailstone that fell at Sydney, Australia on 3 January, 1971.

Planes: ribbons of seaweed, palm leaves, cabbage, sediments, stone, elephant ears, sheets of water, wings, feathers, papyrus . . . The planar wall architecture of ancient Egypt; the temple of Luxor. The wonderful superimposed lyrical planarity of Terragni's Casa Giuliani-Frigerio or of Rietveld's Schroder House.

Volumes: nautilus shells, pumpkins, watermelon, tree trunks, icebergs, endomorph crystals, cactus, planets . . . The volumetric intensities of Roman architecture, the stone drums, the pure pyramid of Cestius or the Romanesque interior volumes of St. Front at Periguex.

An open language, an extension of the field of architecture is analogous to the range of composition in modern music. As a student of music might study the widest variations and structures in composition, so the student of architecture must cultivate an appetite for composition that is other than a habitual way of seeing. The combination of tones in a harmonic unit or the dissonance that reflects another side of consonance have architectural parallels. If music no longer depends on adherance to a major-minor system of values or a system of classical tonality, our musical range is extended. In the study of the composition of architecture we may likewise seek to extend its range but remain open to the inevitable limits that define it with each circumstance and site.

IDEOLOGY VS. IDEA. General theories of architecture are constrained by a central problem; that is to say, if a particular theory is true, then all other theories are false. Pluralism, on the other hand, leads to an empirical architecture. A third direction, as potentially resilient as it is definite, is the adoption of a limited concept. Time, culture, programmatic circumstance, and site are specific factors from which an organizing idea can be formed. A specific concept may be developed as a precise order, irrespective of the universal claims of any particular ideology.

A theory of architecture that leads to a system for thinking about and making buildings has, at its base, a series of fixed ideas constituting an ideology. The ideology is evident in each project that is consistent with the general theory. By contrast, an architecture based on a limited concept begins with dissimilarity and variation. It illuminates the singularity of a specific situation.

Principles of proportion or deliberation on rhythm and numbers are not invalidated by beginning with a "limited" concept. Abstract principles of architectural composition take a subordinate position within the organizing idea. The "universal-to-specific" order is inverted to become "specific-to-universal."

The critic will observe that this strategy of inversion may become an ideology in itself. This is not the intention here, but even so, this would be an ideology forever changing, a black swan theory, mutable and unpredictable. This would be an ideology denying the homogeneity of the accepted by celebrating the extraordinary, parallel to nature's diversity. If it is a theory, it is a theory that allows for an architecture of strange and mysterious beginnings, with the hope of original and unique meaning in each place. Its aim is variation, precision, and a celebration of the as-yet-unknown.

"The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity."

—L. Wittgenstein