----------------------------------------------------------------

CARTHUSIAN MONASTERY

----------------------------------------------------------------

Organized as a series of layers arranged around a central cloister, the living quarters of the Carthusian monastery deployed the corridor as a device to modulate levels of privacy and collectivity in its community. Manifesting “with utmost clarity the tension between communal life and the possibility of being alone,” the monastery was a total environment for the lives of its 16-18 inhabitants, and the nested corridor organization provided variation within the whole. Rationalism and a desire for systematization underscored the plan, and “an ensemble of great beauty was created by the repetition of the same small elements” (The Charterhouse, 114).

In some senses a “form of ideal town-planning…that would have remained a Utopia in any other context,” the Carthusian monastery was a world unto its own, which, through its internal arrangement, could exist anywhere without having to consider external factors (The Charterhouse, 114). There were two types of monks, the *conversi* and the *donati*. The *conversi* were bound by eternal vows, and the *donati* were not, but they both committed to an isolated life in a single cell (The Charterhouse, 113). The challenge of the architecture was to weld the three distinct areas of life in the monastery into one whole. These areas were (1) the monks’ cloister and its dozen cells, (2) the group of community buildings including the refectory, chapterhouse and library, the church and the prior’s cell, and (3) the precinct in which the *conversi* and the *donati* saw to the needs of the monastery and received its guests, but which also shielded the monks from the world. This area was the economic interface with the outside world, which allowed the monks a greater degree of seclusion than the practice of begging, which was adopted by new Orders in the thirteenth century. The inclusion of this sphere into the monastery whole negated the need for the monastery to stipulate any specifications about the locale in which it was located. It was a security that “afforded against the intrusion of the world” and allowed these charterhouses to propagate in a multitude of environment types, from valleys and mountains to villages, outside of towns and even within towns (The Charterhouse, 113).

The monastery was strongly fortified and enclosed by a wall strengthened by seven towers. There was one entrance gate which led to the large domestic court of the monastery with the prior’s house in the middle. From here one could access the church, the guesthouse, the stables, and the cells of the *donati*. Also occupying the border between the domestic realm and the cloister of the *conversi* was the kitchen, the refectory, the chapter-house and the small cloister, but these were only accessible from the larger cloister. The small cloister had a visual connection to the church at the height of the rood screen.

Around the large cloister eighteen monks’ cells were arranged, forming “a kind of housing estate strung out round the passage or cloister,” within view of the cemetery, which stood in front of the church. In this configuration, all were reminded that “the silence of the living echoed the peace of the dead” (The Charterhouse, 114). Each cell was arranged to enhance the solitude of the monks. A secondary corridor along the cloister shielded the monks’ house and garden from noise from the cloister, and a small slit that opened into a closet was for passing food to the monk. “The layout took account of the monk’s need for solitude in every particular. He did not only want to be alone, but also to feel alone” (The Charterhouse, 114). The cell consisted of three small living rooms, as well as a latrine, a larder, and a large garden that was three or four times as large as the whole house, and surrounded by a high wall (The Charterhouse, 114).

----------------------------------------------------------------

The Charterhouse

“Living and Working: How to Live Together,” Dogma