



## SACRED SILENCE

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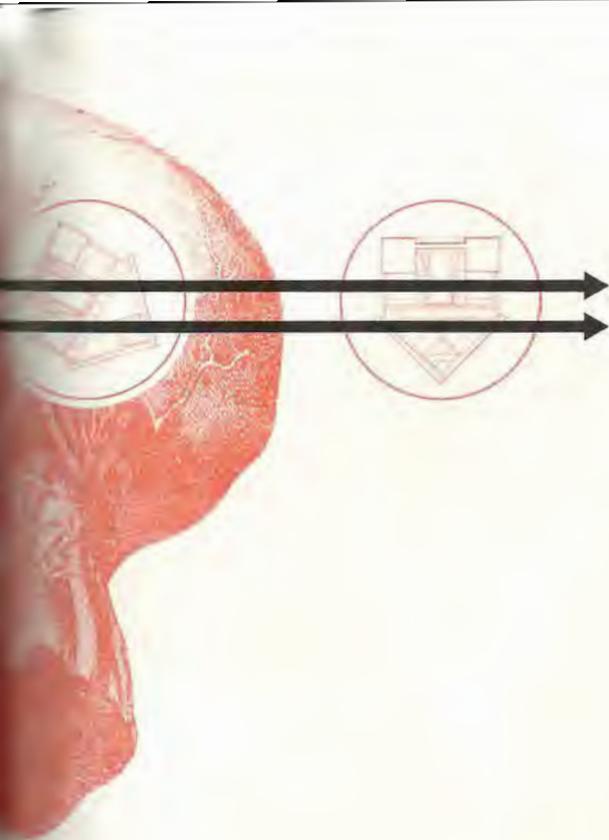
One of the most incredible experiences in architecture is when space prompts silence. This silence is not caused by a sign declaring such a need, but instead is a metaphysical reaction. The space is personal and intimate to each individual. To break silence down into physical properties may not seem to be an appropriate venture. This is because most of the final feelings experienced by the viewer cannot be planned ahead of time but must wait until a project's completion. There are architects who managed to produce a transcendent silence quality in multiple works; therefore there must be a consistent thread of design that can be followed.

As students the task of designing a full functional building is daunting. Designing that building to invoke a particular feeling seems nearly impossible. Predicting how someone will react to a place is an undertaking that appears, at first, to be a lot of luck. Although, like predicting anything else in life, one must relive past experiences to understand a future, similar reaction. With our survival instincts we quickly learn what causes have certain reactions. When we experience an architectural space it is easy to love or hate

an invoked feeling, but rarely do we analyze the particular physical aspects that contribute to that experience.

Most people can relate to a feeling of invoked silence by thinking of a church, temple or spiritual place. The goal of a spiritual dwelling is to create the silence for the sake of self-reflection and to draw within; at the same time opening oneself completely. A spiritual place often cannot be appropriately described, similar to the difficulty of interpreting an emotion. Though there are fundamental elements that reappear in these spaces when analyzed from a physical, material and elemental standpoint.

The structure is not only a decision on what is holding the building together, but instead is also a decision about light. The structure divides the light to create an absence. "Structure is the maker of light. From the column we realize a simple and beautiful evolution of rhythmic beauty from the primitive wall and it's openings.(1)" If one is to reflect on the massive, heavy nature of a gothic style cathedral, the experience on the interior space is not one of compression. The spirit of the place becomes about the voluminous transcendent light quality from the stained glass windows made possible by the massive stone engineering of flying buttresses lifting the vertical space. An 'honest' material



...ves to reinforce the spiritual nature. Modernism often  
...moves all ornamentation, including all presence of  
...material or assembly. A building no longer appears to have  
...been 'built'. By exposing the materials and connections, the  
...parts become the ornamentation. When a building exposes  
...an apparent system that seems to continue endlessly,  
...wood, concrete, glass and steel all serving their purpose  
...functionally within the system, it becomes apparent how  
...was assembled and labored over. The structure begins to  
...speak to the cohesiveness of the overlying methodology.  
...The spirit of a place depends on people, people who  
...construct it & people who experience the finished product.  
...A place cannot produce the silent spirit when it wasn't once  
...lived with human action, architecture cannot exist without  
...being built.

...The quality of the natural daylight created by the structure  
...is paramount in fabricating silence. Punched windows in  
...a sidewall is not enough. The light must be controlled  
...in a way which eludes the direct source but still changes  
...the space throughout the course of a day. A space truly  
...comes alive and has a spirit when it is different every time  
...it is experienced. Additionally, an over abundance of light  
...is not ideal, as there are no shadows created. Light is not  
...appreciated without the absence of light, "I sense light

as the giver of all presence, and material as spent light.(2)"  
Shadows are what change the space, move it and give it a  
sense of being. Only in the absence is the desired obvious.  
So many buildings have become a technological display,  
often satisfying, but very brief in entertaining the eye  
and mind. And what do we do when we can do anything?  
There must be a push back to the essence of architecture,  
the space created. When the desired quality of the space  
is revisited, the remaining physical attributes will fall into  
place to reinforce the spirit of the place.

If successful, any space can become spiritual, religious or  
not, it becomes a place that can withstand time, location or  
program. It is easy to become wrapped up in the details of  
the materials, textures and hardware and lose the essential  
meaning of architecture: the space, not the enclosure. The  
whole is absorbed immediately, but can never be completely  
understood, our architecture is only an offering from one  
creative mind to man. Some buildings serve their purpose,  
and do it well, but everything about them is measurable.  
A great building that causes a metaphysical wonder has  
another element that is unmeasurable and will endlessly  
fascinate.

(1) Louis I. Kahn and Robert C. Twombly, *Louis Kahn: Essential Texts* (New York: WW Norton, 2003) pg. 231. (2) *ibid.*, pg. 229.