Path and Place
A Study of Architecture, Man, and Nature

by
Nathan R. Butler

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APPROVED:

William Galloway, Chairman

Pia Sarapaneva

William Green

Andrew Honaker

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This book is dedicated to those who helped and guided me throughout the course of my studies.

To my family, my friends, my committee, and the faculty of the College of Architecture and Urban Studies.

Special thanks must go to my wife for her incredible patience and enduring support; to and for all their help; and of course to
ABSTRACT

...But architecture has limits, and when we touch the invisible walls of the limits, then we know more about what is contained in them.

-Louis I. Kahn

Ideally, a thesis study in architecture should be made at a personal level of investigation so that a student may develop his or her own ideas and interests and, therefore determine a focus or direction towards an individual architectural position. It should be understood at the beginning, then, that this thesis asks a question that may never be answered. It is a part of a process in what is likely to become a lifelong search for the limits of architecture.

Architecture has always been the product of man's attempt to shape his world. As such, architecture arose from a basic human need as a response to the challenge that nature poses to man. "...the first fact of architecture," wrote Vincent Scully, "is the topography of a place and the way human beings respond to it with their own constructed forms." Given these ideas, the focus of this thesis is the study of architecture as a potential medium through which man not only shapes his world, but interacts with it as well. This study has taken form through an investigation into the ideas of path and place as concepts which are fundamental to architecture, carrying with them implications of a relationship between man, architecture, and nature.
In the initial stages of the development of this thesis, the concepts of path and place were considered to be distinctly separated. The path was viewed as a means of arriving at the particular place which I wished to create at the edge of the river, and the place itself was viewed as a space in which to meet or gather for a specific purpose. Both of these elements were meant to occur with respect to the context into which the project was being placed, so that the project could become a framework through which the context could be experienced, and perhaps understood in a different way.

This concept of the architecture as a framework through which the surrounding environment is experienced carries with it ideas concerning searching, discovering, learning, and understanding one's place in the context. These activities occur both locally and regionally, and they became important influences in the determination of the program for the project as a place of religious study and contemplation.
At the edge of the river, the chapel is located at the terminus of a path, which is cut through the dense vegetation.

The path is delineated by the spatial enclosure which the surrounding trees offer. The approach to the chapel can be seen as a journey towards a clearly visible goal.

The river is presented through the structural framework of the chapel.
As the relationship of the building to the site became the central issue, it began to play an important role in determining the direction of the project. This resulted in a conceptual shift in the project, as it began to be seen as a sequence of events which occur within a larger context. Each of these places could then have a particular relationship to the site.

This development brought about a reconsideration of the idea of "place" in the project. It began to be seen as a concept which carries with it ideas of both meeting as well as separation. As a reflection of this development, the project increased in its scope, allowing for more than the singular relationship to the site which had been the subject of previous investigation. The program of the project then expanded from that of a single chapel space at the end of a path to that of a chapel and school. This programmatic expansion allows for the coexistence of activities which vary in both scale and meaning.

With these developments, the path began to have a greater impact on the building as the element which establishes the organization of the place.
Moving from the landscape and into the building, the path is marked by the spatial system created by the initial columnar structure of the building. The columns also make an analogous relationship between the surrounding trees and the building structure.
As it moves through the landscape, the path is delineated by a series of subtle markers which can serve
to measure one's position in the landscape relative to the building. Making the transition into the build-
ing, it becomes signified by the placement of the building structure. The structure of the building also
begins to make places for activities to occur, such as entry and meeting.
1- Lobby
2- Classrooms
3- Offices
4- Chapel
On the upper floor, the relationship between the building and the context is quite different. The trees begin to form the spatial boundary of the building. The plan is modulated to create a rhythm of solid and void, light and dark, with the more massive office and service blocks separating the lighter and more transparent classrooms.
The building utilizes the gradual slope of the site to enable the spatial volume of the chapel to be much greater than that of the school. The chapel is more enclosed than the school so that the focus of the chapel may be toward the river. The school, however, maintains a close connection to the trees, allowing them to form the enclosure of its spatial boundary. The markers of the path vary in their height from the ground, so that as one moves along the path, they begin to determine and explain the slope of the ground in relation to the building.
As the generator and organizer of the place, the path acts as a link between the building and its context. As such, a journey along this path allows for a rich variation. A complete understanding of the building as a whole in relation to its environment can not be gained without moving through it along the path.

The building is essentially made up of a series of moments which occur in a linear sequence as the progression is made along the path. This sequence begins with the first indication of the path, and culminates with the presentation of the river, which cannot be seen until one enters the chapel space at the end of the sequence. Therefore, through the experience of each of these moments individually by moving along the path, one can formulate a conceptual understanding of the building.

The following images and drawings present some of these moments in the project.
The movement of the path into the building makes a significant impact on the initial facade. The columnar structure is also present on the exterior, as an external expression of the internal markers of the path.

The solid-void relationship of the classrooms and offices arranged around the path makes a clear distinction between the spaces which are enclosed by the surrounding trees, and the spaces that frame views of the trees.
Section through classrooms, library, and meeting hall

Scale: 1" = 8'
Upon reaching the chapel space, the river is finally presented. The space of the chapel is enclosed on all other sides, so that the space is focused toward the river. At this point the path terminates in the tangible sense. The frame, however, provides a spatial extension of the path out across the river, so that while one is physically bound to the space of the chapel, the possibility exists for a continuation of the journey in one's mind.

The remaining edges of the chapel are designed so that each surface of the enclosure has its own expression. In this way, the components of the chapel work together to allow light to enter. This strategy of bringing light into the chapel is the result of a conscious decision at a conceptual level to express the distinction between the chapel and the school.
The chapel is viewed as an enclosed and directed space which is primarily concerned with looking inward, applying and focusing what is discovered in a very specific way. The school is considered to be a series of spaces which deal with taking in the knowledge and awareness of the context, and perhaps understanding it in a different way.

A journey to the chapel, and ultimately the river, then, is one which involves an interaction with the site on multiple levels and at varying scales, from complete exposure, to partial enclosure, to focused enclosure, and finally to a presentation of the river. In this way, the building becomes an apparatus through which the site becomes experienced and understood.
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