Space, Time, and Silence

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a meditation upon silence, upon its ontological relationship to architecture. As such, it relies more upon insight and contemplation than analysis. It seeks to explore this realm through the making of a trappist monastery, to ask fundamental questions about the nature of human dwelling in the most complete sense, to stir the memory and perhaps to move the heart toward that silence which is beyond thought, which precedes and bounds and yet pervades all human experience.
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and above all to the Grace of God.
INTRODUCTION

Silence is the marriage of time and eternity. It is, perhaps our last intimation of Being. Silence is not negation but rather otherness. Silence is not emptiness but fullness, not an absence but a presence.

Silence exists as truth exists. Neither can be negated. For the act of denying the existence of one requires the affirmation of its existence first.

The Swiss philosopher, Max Picard has said, "Silence is a positive, a reality, and language has the power to make assertions about all reality". Thus, architecture, as a language has something to say about truth and about silence: though, perhaps, it is but a whisper.

Of course, we speak here not of the silence of the tongue but of the silence of the soul. This is where all identity begins. This is where architecture begins. We are indebted to Louis Kahn for reminding us of this fact.

Each attempt to make a work of architecture is more than a mere revival of the past, more than a logical variation of tradition. It is an original rediscovery of past and future, a marriage of memory and dream, an intersection of time and timelessness. The point of intersection is silence. Silence abides.
"In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep you never were. I don't know what I am. I don't know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not. He cannot empty himself for sleep because he is not what he is and he is what he is not. Beyond the unlamped wall I hear the rain shaping the wagon that is ours, the load that is not theirs that felled and sawed it nor yet theirs that bought it and which is not ours either, lie on our wagon though it does, since only the wind and the rain shape it only to Jewel and me, that are not asleep. And since sleep is is not and rain and wind are was, it is not. Yet the wagon is, because when the wagon is was Addie Bundren will not be. But Jewel is, so Addie Bundren must be. And then I must be or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And if I am not emptied yet, I am is."

How often have I lain beneath rain on a strange roof thinking of home.

From, \textit{As I Lay Dying} by William Faulkner
I used to live just outside of the round valley of Burks Garden, Virginia. I remember lying alone in bed at night listening to the wind shape the trees beyond my walls; the wind carrying my thoughts there to those great and ancient oaks, howling in primordial anguish, in the wild black night of that hollow valley.

There, that hollow valley opens to heaven, a lonely eye upon the face of the earth. It appears as some extinct volcanic crater, perhaps containing a lost world. The mountain completely encircles, embracing this high, flat valley save for one cleft through which a little stream flows forming a natural gate to this cloister made by nature's hand. This enclosure awaits its community.
"The eagle soars in the summit of Heaven,
The Hunter with his dogs pursues his circuit.
O perpetual revolution of configured stars,
O perpetual recurrence of determined seasons, O
world spring and autumn, birth and dying!
The endless cycles of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
All our knowledge brings nearer to our ignorance,
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to God.
Where is the life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
The cycles of heaven in twenty centuries
Bring us farther from God and nearer to the Dust."

From, *Chorus of the Rock* by T. S. Eliot
The cemetery is the alter where the silence of life weds the silence of death; the place where death bestows its timeless kiss; where life casts off its silent veil.

Now see them turn in silent concord. They glide, arm in arm, in serene procession through eternity.

So does death make life a life.
"In my beginning is my end. In succession
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place
Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass.
Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,
Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth
Which is already flesh, fur and faeces,
Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf.
Houses live and die: there is a time for building
And a time for the wind to break the loosened pane
And to shake the wainscot where the field-mouse
trots
And to shake the tattered arras woven with a silent
motto."

From, *East Coker* by T. S. Eliot
As we enter this great hollowed valley we glimpse in the distance a little knoll floating on the morning fog, along its crest a cluster of buildings glint as gold in the late October sun.

The road undulates across the valley, winding round behind this small hill. As we approach, a small chapel with its nearby bell tower emerges from the hill and beckons us near. We are enveloped in silence here. Overhead, a lonely hawk circles and cries. Hovering in silence, his cry is as though this were the first hawk in the first silent sky.

We enter, passing down a long, narrow walk beside a stark, austere wall on one side; the chapel, silent, gathering on the other. Silence press in. We are confronted by silence here.
This monastery is an archetypal community, an original acknowledgement of agreement. In this place, body, mind, and spirit are unified and sanctified. In this place the solitary individual transcends himself, entering into a mystical and holy union with others and with his God.

So, the monastery project became a structure within which to ask fundamental questions concerning the nature of our existence and its relation to architecture. Thus, in a sense, this monastery is itself the question.
"We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw, Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats' feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar.

Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralyzed force, gesture without motion;

Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
Remember us-if at all- not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men."

From, The Hollow Men by T. S. Eliot
"Sunlight on a broken column
There, is a tree swinging
And voices are
in the wind's singing

More distant and more solemn
Than a fading star.

Let me be no nearer In death's dream kingdom
Let me also wear
Such deliberate disguises
Rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves
In a field
Behaving as the wind behaves
No nearer-
Not that final meeting
In the twilight kingdom."

From, The Hollow Men by T. S. Eliot
"In silence, therefore, man stands confronted once again by the original beginning of all things: everything can begin again, everything can be re-created. In every moment, of time, man through silence can be with the origin of all things. Allied with silence, man participated not only in the original substance of silence but in the original substance of all things. Silence is the only basic phenomenon that is always at man's disposal. No other basic phenomenon is so present in every moment as silence."

From, The World of Silence by Max Picard.
This day man dwells beneath the silent dome of heaven where the day star dances with the dawn.

The shadows of the colonnade mark times passing; glide across the walk, the orphans of night.

The night sky, a shroud strewn with splinters of light shimmering in the stillness.

On the horizon, the moon ascends red into white, contracts in silence between us and distant lights.

It glides across the window sill; the room transfigured as a bride beneath a glowing veil of silence.

Descended night dies into the dawn.
SOLITUDE

The diagram of the circle in the square recalls the renaissance and the early days of the monastic tradition in the west. In this project I have associated this with the many grain silos which tower up from the undulating landscape in this rural region of southwest Virginia. Here they spring from the earth in silent testimony as signs of abundance, fertility and hope.

In this monastery, in the case of the monks cells, form and shape are identical. Here we pass through a tall, narrow entry into the dark center of a cluster of towering silos, like immense columns with smooth, curving walls, washed light blue by the sky. Here we recollect not the radiant splendor of Greece, but rather the introverted darkness of Egypt.

We turn toward the stair, ascending, ever nearing our solitude. The stair winds upward in a square pattern; its corners set into each round tower, in each corner a door, a door to a round room, an opening to solitude, the abode of silence.

So, each tower yields a portion of its roundness to give the stair. This roundness recedes into a silent, invisible presence. Thus the stair is given its shape by that which has been yielded by the tower. Yielded, but not lost, it is given up to the wholeness of the building.

Here the shape of the building signifies the nature of the indwelling community, setting the stage where man may participate in the symbol of dwelling as a true duality of community and solitude.

Every human soul truly dwells in silence, within its cell, within its own solitude. In this way we are all monks in our monasteries, cloistered in silence. Silence bounds this dwelling between man and men.
Place is a union of two silences; the silence of man and the silence of nature. Silence is the ground upon which man finds that which is hidden in himself, his real relationship to nature, to his brother and to his God.
A place to think
Library
Library
Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
All our knowledge brings nearer to our ignorance,
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to God.
Where is the life we have lost in living?
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From, *Chorus of the Rock* by T. S. Eliot
"Dilsey put some more wood in the stove and returned to the bread board. Presently she began to sing again.

The room grew warmer. Soon Dilsey's skin had taken on a rich, lustrous quality as compared with that of a faint dusting of wood ashes which both it and Luster's had worn as she moved about the kitchen, gathering about her new materials of food, coordinating the meal. On the wall above a cupboard, invisible save at night, by lamp light and even then evincing an enigmatic profundity because it had but one hand, a cabinet clock ticked, then with a preliminary sound as if it had cleared its throat, struck five times.

'Eight o'clock,' Dilsey said. She ceased and tilted her head upward, listening. But there was no sound save the clock and the fire. She opened the oven and looked at the pan of bread, then someone descended the stairs. She heard the feet cross the dining room, then the swing door opened and Luster entered, followed by a big man who appeared to have been shaped of some substance whose particles would not or could not cohere to one another or to the frame which supported it. His skin was dead looking and hairless; dropsical too; he moved with a shambeling gait like a trained bear. His hair was pail and fine. It had been brushed smoothly down upon his brow like that of children in daguerrotypes. His eyes were clear, of the pale sweet blue of cornflowers, his thick mouth hung open, drooling a little.

'Is he cold?' Dilsey said. She wiped her hands on her apron and touched his hand.

'Ef he aint, I is," Luster said. 'Always cold Easter....."

From, The Sound and the Fury by William Faulkner
"Men's curiosity searches past and future
And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint—
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender."

From *Four Quartets*, by T. S. Eliot
Man's existence is solitude.
His essence is community.
"O blind sinner! I tells you; sistuh, I says to you, when de Lawd did turn his mighty face, say, Aint gwine overload heaven! I can see de widowed God shut his do; I sees de whelmin flood roll between; I sees de darkness en de death everlasting upon the generations. Den, lo! Breddren! Yes, breddren! Whut I see? Whut I see, O sinner? I sees de resurrection en de light; sees de meek Jesus sayin Dey kilt me dat ye shall live again; I died dat dem whut sees en believes shall never die. Breddren, O breddren! I sees de doom crack en de golden horns shoutin down de glory, en de arisin dead whut got de blood en de ricklickshun of de Lamb!"

From, The Sound and the Fury by William Faulkner
SILENCE ABIDES

In a world of stillness there would still be silence.
In a world of timelessness there would still be silence.
In a world nothingness there would still be silence.
Were there no world at all, silence abides.
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