

Phase 2: The Miracle Box / Urban Spiritual Retreat

(a two week long warm-up assignment)

Starts Monday 8 September
Due Monday 22 September at 1:00PM

Introduction

This assignment is inspired in a short text written by architect Le Corbusier on the miraculous possibilities afforded by the simplest architectural geometry: a **box**! Yet, we hardly need the Modern master to remind us of the wondrous nature of buildings. Since time immemorial, peoples across Earth have counted on the ineffable dimension of architecture to design and build spaces that make us enjoy, realize and celebrate our immanent and transcendent natures. The ability of seemingly inert form, space, light and matter — architecture — to make us shiver in awe for its ability to lovingly protect/connect us with mother nature, gracefully help us live together, or invoke and secure the presence of God, is extraordinary, miraculous indeed!

“Box of Miracles” by Le Corbusier



He [she/the architect] can create a magic box enclosing all that your heart desires. Scenes and actors materialize the moment the magic box appears; the magic box is a cube; with it comes everything that is needful to perform miracles, levitation, manipulation, distraction, etc. The interior of the cube is empty, but your inventive spirit will fill it with everything you dream of—in the matter of performance of the old Commedia dell'Arte. ¹

Assignment

Over the past two weeks you have built a theoretical and precedents scaffolding that you will use to think, speculate, and design the main project of the studio: A rural Spiritual Retreat. However, it'd be wrong to believe that knowing what you now know is enough foundation to embark in this journey. After all, meeting the transcendent (the whole point of an spiritual retreat) cannot be 'figured out' as it depends in a miraculous happening. In this exercise we are going to explore the antipodes of what you just finished doing. A good designer must be mentally agile, inquisitive, and thirsty for new

¹ Le Corbusier, "The Core as the Meeting Place of the Arts", in Jose Luis Sert and Ernesto N. Rogers, ed. Jacqueline Tyrwhitt: *The Heart of the City: towards the humanization of human life*, (London: Lund Humphries & Co. Ltd., 1952), 41-52. The quote is from p.52.

challenges and opportunities, so we hope you are ready. In this case, you will need to turn your attention toward imagination (not reason), experience (not generalities), conceptions (not pragmatics), uniqueness (not series), and emotion (not detachment). We are asking you to let go of all your architectural preconceptions and inhibitions (even the ones we just taught you) and go for the unbelievable, the impossible ... the Miracle!

Your job is to design a set of experiences that take someone from an ordinary state of mind to one of transcendence. In other words, how do you go from the everyday and quotidian to this metaphysical realm? Your building program, an urban spiritual retreat, will assist such transformation by inviting the practice, study, and/or contemplation of one of the following 6 attributes or qualities of God:

- (1) Omnipresence is the quality of being everywhere at the same time. Fundamentally this means non-locality in space, ubiquitousness.
- (2) Omniscience is all knowing or infinite knowledge, beyond the normal spatial and temporal boundaries.
- (8) Eternal is existing without or having no beginning or end; forever. Fundamentally this means non-locality in time and/or timelessness.
- (4) Acausal is an agent or force producing an effect in neutral or reverse time. It is also referred to omnipotence, that is, the power of doing at will, without any inhibition, including the creation of anything out of nothing. Part of this power is being self-sustaining.
- (5) Ultimate love is unconditional affection or appreciation for everything and anything, including complete forgiveness and compassion (mercy)
- (6) Absence of greed, wrath, fear, fault-finding, hatred, conceit, and restlessness. This 'via-negative' type of divine quality is emphasized in Eastern traditions.

If God is always sentient, loving, and powerful even (or especially) when seemingly absent, then, how do we use the everyday to point at the obvious?

Readings

Bermudez J., Smith A. & Striefel S. (2005) "Visualizing the Non-Visual Nature of Architecture," *CAADRIA 2005 Proceedings*, Volume 2, pp.510-515

Bermudez J. & Smith A., (1999) "Reinvesting in the Power of Interpretation & Representation," in 87th ACSA Annual Meeting Proceedings (Minneapolis, MN ACSA Press) pp.26-29

McLeod, M. (1997) "Henri Lefevre's Critique of Everyday Life: An Introduction," in S. Harris and D. Berke (eds.): *Architecture of the Everyday* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press), pp.9-29

Pallasmaa, J. (2008) *Encounters* (Finland: Rakennustieto Publishing) (particularly chapter "The Geometry of Feelings")

References/Precedents (for Stage 1)

Massimo Scolari (drawings), Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Hieronymus Bosch, James Turrell, Giorgio de Chirico, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, Viktor Timofeev, Archigram, Bennett Neiman (bebop series), Paolo Soleri (drawings), John Hejduk (Mask of Medusa), M.C.Escher, Francis Bacon's Paintings (specially all his triptych series), Lebbeus Woods (various works), Mark Rothko paintings (from 1949 on), Etienne-Louis Boullée (e.g., Cenotaph for Sir Isaac Newton, 1784), and Douglas Darden (various)

Evaluation

All five segments will be presented for the Monday 22 September Review. The design will be evaluated using the following criteria:

1. Demonstration of insightful and progressive interpretation of the Divine Quality. Breadth, depth, and creativity of the design/interpretive process. Risk-taking and clarity of the inquiry
2. Strength of the architectural idea (parti) in relationship to the Divine Quality. Clarity in articulating conceptual and experiential orders. Relationship between intentions and design. Ability of the project to elicit the experience of the Divine Quality.
3. Interaction between representation, thought, and design products.

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Procedure

The design process is an act of active and progressive interpretation ('reading') that is informed by its own unfolding. The emphasis is on how the 'reading' evolves as a continuum, how each stage is read in the context of the other ones, and finally how the whole process/transformation is grasped at once. You will need to use a five-stage methodology grounded on metaphoric-analogical leaps that demand you to (1) address conception and experience at once, and (2) manifest your insights through specified depictions.

Stage 1: Box of Miracles Brief + Divine Quality (in studio) ***

Task: definition of the Miracle Box program and precedents

Format: text and imagery

Assigned: by lottery (Divine Quality)

Due: Monday 8 Sept at 4:30pm

To begin, ask yourself a few simple questions: What and how does my Divine Quality make me think, imagine, hear, taste, touch? And why? Does it feel cold, dry, dark? Is it a scary or liberating experience? Does it unfold in silence? How long does it last? Do I need to prepare for it? How do water, air, earth and fire relate to it? Do I need other people around in order for the miraculous experience to occur? How do I create the conditions for such an experience to occur? Does anything inspire me in the found precedents?

***** Team of two students**

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Stage 2: Two-dimensional Assemblage ***

Task: produce your best interpretative synthesis of your program in such a way that opens and yet defines the Divine Quality as a design problem suitable to understanding and exploration.

Format: Two Collages/Videos/Paintings (up to the students) with a poem (max. 200 words) — found or written (or a piece of music). Graphic work should not be smaller than 20"x20"

Due: Wednesday 10 September at 2:10pm

To begin, ask yourself a few simple questions: What and how does my Divine Quality make me think, imagine, hear, taste, touch? And why? Does it feel cold, dry, dark? Is it a scary or liberating experience? Does it unfold in silence? How long does it last? Do I need to prepare for it? How do water, air, earth and fire relate to it? Do I need other people around in order for the miraculous experience to occur? How do I create the conditions for such an experience to occur? Does anything inspire me in the found precedents?

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