

Sacred Space & Cultural Studies

studio

Bermudez / Pallasmaa

PROJECT 03 NON-DENOMINATIONAL BURIAL CHAPEL

STARTS	Friday 23 September
DUE 1	Phase 1: Friday 14 October at 2:00 PM (MILLER)
DUE 2	Phase 2: Friday 11 November
DUE 3	Phase 3: Monday 12 December

GENERAL In our current consumerist culture, the art of architecture is threatened by two opposite processes; it is reduced to mere utility and economy, on the one hand, and to pure representation or aestheticization, on the other. In these processes the fundamental historicity, as well as mental and emotional essence of architectural impact is lost. When buildings are viewed as aestheticized constructions and objects, the emotive, empathetic, and compassionate quality of architecture is lost. Yet, the profound task of architecture is to create horizons and frames for human experience and understanding, and to give even mundane acts and situations of life their meaning and dignity.

While architecture has been rationalized and instrumentalized through processes of modernization, it has lost its cosmic, metaphysical, symbolic and emotive content. Yet, ever since its beginnings, architecture has mediated between the cosmic and human realms, Gods and mortals, the transitory and the eternal. Architectural structures have also mediated and concretised the deepest emotions: grief and ecstasy, loss and hope, veneration and awe. If architecture is to help alleviate if not heal the various and serious social ills affecting our civilization, we need to deepen its commitments to our human condition as being born in our embodiment, emotion, and spirituality. Hence, the sacred role of architecture is not necessarily to design religious buildings but to participate in the creation of a good, true, and beautiful world. It is to emotionally and spiritually awaken visitors/users into dwelling in the Real.

TOPIC During the modern era, western culture has gradually eliminated the reality of death from ordinary consciousness and emotion. Today, death usually takes place in hospitals, and the entire process of burial is managed by specialized firms. The elimination of death from our conscious lives has given rise to a surreal attitude of fear and repugnance. On the other hand, death has been fictionalised and turned into a revolting theme, or downright entertainment in cinema, theatre, comics, and computer games. Through this process of secularisation and de-mythicization death has lost its deep metaphysical significance and human dignity, its essential connection with life.

Alvar Aalto often spoke of the necessity to design for “man at his weakest”, or in the case of a hospitalised patient, for “the horizontal man”. In addition to the condition of illness, we experience heightened weakness and helplessness when facing the death of a friend or relative. We go through an extreme gamut of emotion ranging from profound sorrow/sadness and loss/desperation to melancholia/nostalgia, consolation/solace, hope/optimism, transcendence, and more. As a result, the design of a funeral chapel calls for special sensitivity, understanding and tact born in *empathy and compassion*. Funerary architecture and design has to be consoling and dignifying without being sentimental or patronizing.

TASK The Studio assignment is to design an intimate non-denominational or ecumenical burial chapel which does not include the technical facilities for cremation.

The focus of the project is the emotional and spiritual dimensions of architecture. The expressive potential of materiality, light, color and proportionality are to be especially studied. In order to identify a personal emotive ground for the design of the funerary chapel, the studio process includes special methods, lectures and conversations on the emotional and poetic essences of architecture.

SITE The project site is located on 7th Street NW and K Street NW, across the street from Mt Vernon Square where the Washington DC Historical Society (former ‘Carnegie’ Library) is located. A site visit has been scheduled for Friday 23 September.

PROGRAM	Lobby area (reception, coat room, waiting, flower room, toilets) =	3,000 sq.ft.
	Main Chapel (to sit 200-250 people) =	6,000 sq.ft.
	Cold room (holding up to 4 bodies) =	250 sq.ft.
	Preparation room (2 bodies at a time) =	300 sq.ft.
	Private viewing/mourning room (for up to 15 people) =	400 sq.ft.
	Administration & Support (2 offices, toilets, daily storage, meeting room, priest prep room) =	800 sq.ft.
	Large storage (chairs, symbolic icons, etc.) =	2,000 sq.ft.
	Utilities (AC, heating, etc.) =	400 sq.ft.
	25 car garage (20 family + staff + service) =	4,000 sq.ft.
	Miscellaneous (according to parti) =	500 sq.ft.
	Total =	+/- 17,650 sq.ft.

Plus

Columbarium for 2,000-5,000 urns

Garden of Remembrance (public access) = up to designer (need argument)

Circulation 15-20% of total = +/- 2,000-2,500 sq.ft.

TEAM WORK All the work will be done in teams. Given the complexity, available time, and necessity of multiple perspective on a nuanced problem, the first phase (problem analysis/study) will be done in ‘supergroups’ of 4 or 5 individuals. The second phase (rest of the semester) will be carried out in teams of two or three people.

- PHASE 1
STUDY 1
SITE** (Deadline: Friday 30 September)
Given the remarkable nature of the site, your building will have to address/respond to powerful contextual conditions. We are expected to consider the place's
- (1) urban form (scale, fabric, morphology, language, etc.)
 - (2) urban function (traffic, land use, social use/patterns, accessibility, etc.),
 - (3) environmental conditions (light, seasons, wind, etc.), documentation (factual info: plot, distances, heights, 3D data, urban zoning ordinances, etc.), and phenomenology (experientials, views, tectonics)
 - (4) history, (local, regional, national) culture and symbolism
- The studio will build a physical site model (scale to be defined). This model will be fundamental to design operation. (Deadline for site model: Monday 3 October)
- PHASE 1
STUDY 2
PROGRAM** (Deadline: Friday 30 September)
Investigation of program at different levels and perspectives using diagrams:
- (a) size studies (axons vs. plan) at different scales (room, area, site)
 - (b) relationships/adjacencies spatial studies
 - (c) 'intimacy/protection' spatial studies
 - (e) 'silence/sound' spatial diagrams
 - (d) 'spiritual charge' spatial diagrams
- PHASE 1
STUDY 3
DESIGN** (Interim deadline: Wed 5 October. Final deadline: Friday 14 October)
to be presented Friday 30 Sept
- PHASE 2+3** Assignments and expectations for Phase 2 and 3 will be handed out after October 14th
- GRADE** Phase 1 of Project 3 will count for 20 % of the course grade.
Phase 2 and 3 of Project 3 will count for the remaining 50% of course grade.