

Theory of Architecture Notes:

Professor David Niland, University of Cincinnati

Architecture is an art. Architecture goes beyond providing mere shelter or just pure function. The purpose of architecture is to enrich the lives of those who come in contact with those works. The purpose of architecture, the purpose of art, is to evoke a strong, positive, emotional, memorable response.

Architecture, as opposed to building, is the realization of a manifest order, appropriately conceived, logically developed, conditioned and disciplined, coherent through consistency, animated with wit, and enlivened with spirit. Architecture is the manipulation of solids and voids and light; not just ordinary light, but light that touches the spirit (as perhaps a metaphysical proposition).

An order, not the order. An order, one of an infinite number of orders that are available to the architect as he goes about the business of designing. Communication is the purpose and touchstone of architecture. If you cannot communicate you cannot get a message across. And if you share the aspiration that architecture is to evoke some kind of emotional response from those who come in contact with it, then the architecture has to be able to set up a dialogue between an inanimate object and human response and it is a communication that must be delivered by an order.

A work of architecture must address a single, strong, identifiable idea that is developed through the details. The design must play upon the single idea with all parts relating back to and informing the whole.

Architecture must have sufficient cogency and resonance to speak for itself.

Where do you begin design? Louis Kahn used to say that architecture went from the *immeasurable*, through the *measurable*, and back to the *immeasurable*. There is no single assured way to start design. Design comes out of something which is nebulous, untidy, and uncertain. Architectural design cannot be charted. It starts with the emotional, it starts with the intuitive. But once it has a start, it can be taken through logical stages of progression. Progressively one moves from concept, this is design concept, to strategy, design strategy, to tactics, design tactics, to techniques, to technology, not engineering technology, but design technology.

An architectural concept is a generality that gets us off dead center. Perhaps the nuances, the subtleties, the ramifications, and the breadth of concept, someplace along the line, is made known to us once we have become intimate with what we are trying to do.

There is a tendency is to take something simple and turn it into something that is so complex that it becomes incoherent. The essence of architecture is very modest. GOOD ARCHITECTURE is the essence of simplicity.

Tactically, strategically, what the architect wants to say, if it's to be lucid and literate must be put into a cohesive package where each of the component parts is harmonizing and mutually supportive of the others so that the message will come across.

Otherwise its chaos.

Three Components of Architecture: the stuff of substance or *hardware* of which design is made.

(1) Size and Shape:

- is self-evident, consisting of an infinite variety of different sizes of masses or volumes: such as squares, rectangles, circles, pyramids, ellipses, curves, cubes, etc.

(2) Treatment:

- What do you do with the size and the shape?
- If you have an anything, how many different ways can you treat it in a simple way and how does that treatment alter or change?
- In what ways can you define or manipulate the sizes and shapes?
- What is your strategy for detailing and joinery (articulation)?
- Treatment is pattern, texture, color, figure, ground, light, illumination, contrast, opacity, transparency, translucency, reflectivity, visual density, thickness or thinness, etc.

(3) Orientation:

- What is the *relative position of something or someone*?
- location: *a particular place or position*.
 - external - internal - interstitial.
 - placement and displacement.
 - edge (periphery) vs. center (core) or foreground, middle ground, background.
 - relationship of a building to its neighbors
 - relationship of building to sky (penetration, transition, frame, receptacle, passive/active)
 - relationship of building to ground: in the ground, on the ground, above the ground.
- directionality, redirection or reversals:
 - up vs. down
 - left vs. right
 - longitudinal vs. transverse
 - horizontal vs. vertical
 - orthogonal vs. diagonal
 - exposure: north - south - east - west

Three Types of Spaces In Architecture:

(1) Place-Spaces: major spaces that portray a sense of definite location or position.

(2) Path-Spaces: major transition spaces which are directional; corridor, connector, passageway.

(3) Transition-Spaces: minor spaces which process a change from one condition to another.

- joint spaces (or articulation spaces)
- can define a pause between spaces
- can juxtapose spaces of contrasting or continuous character
- can act as a separator space
- can act as fastener, joining or linking space
- *servant-spaces* are transition spaces that act as functional support (storage spaces, built-in elements, bathrooms, mechanical voids, space occupied by structural elements, etc. They serve place-spaces, path-spaces, and other transition-spaces.

Constants and Variables:

- CONSTANTS are a series of clues, cues, signals, datum (a fixed starting point of a scale or operation), reference points, underlying structure, or framework.
- VARIABLES are the potential options, choices, or thematic elaborations within a given framework.