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The Sacred and The Individual

by

Christopher Mechaley

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Master of Architecture

Approved, Thesis Committee:

David Brown, Director
Assistant Professor
Rice School of Architecture

Fares el-Dahdah
Associate Professor
Rice School of Architecture

Douglas Oliver
Brocstein Visiting Asst Professor
Rice School of Architecture

David Guthrie
Hild Visiting Critic
Rice School of Architecture

HOUSTON, TEXAS
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ABSTRACT

The Sacred and The Individual

by

Christopher Mechaley

This thesis is an investigation of the relationship between the sacred and the individual, defining a private place for prayer, meditation and personal reflection.

To examine what is sacred in our world today it is necessary to understand that advancements in science and technology have changed our attitude toward spirituality. A growing number of people have moved away from communal worship and no longer identify with one specific religion. This thesis is a response to this current condition seeking moments of intervention within the daily experience; defining places for transition and pause against the fast paced trajectories of our normalized daily routine. Short periods of pause, such as waiting, can provide the opportunity for personal inward reflection and allow people to center oneself within moment. This project is seeking a means of intervention within places of waiting such as transportation terminals, hospitals and other such institutions.
my most sincere gratitude to
my family, my wife, my friends
and professors who have rooted
my interest in sacred space, and
have encouraged me to walk
along this path...
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Pre-Thesis Research Sacred Space and The Machine Age

The history of religion shows us our reactions to nature are often conditioned by culture and history. Differing spiritual attitudes can be related to differences in economics, traditions and social organization. To examine what is sacred in our world today, it is necessary to understand that advancements in science and technology have fundamentally transformed our relationship to nature and thusly have changed individual attitudes toward spirituality. The Machine Age in America directly influenced the spiritual behavior and position of American culture. The machine dominated all areas of life from the household to the American landscape. The machine became a symbol of independence; and ownership was a status symbol for the working class representing total democratic freedom. Everything from household objects to the automobile bound man more and more directly to the machine. Industrial designers, artist and architects alike sought a visual harmonious relationship at all scales of the human dimension. Throughout the course of modernity optimism grew in the belief that a better life was made possible through the machine. Credited for the victory of World War I, the machine established a role of authority and power within history and within world culture. Highways, bridges and dams became a
new form of art. These sublime geological figures within the landscape represented man’s control over the natural order. Artist Paul Strand during the 1920s photographed the working parts of machines, claiming that man has “a new trinity: god the machine, materialistic empiricism of the son, and the science of the “holy ghost.” Strand recognized the fascination and beauty in the machine, but also realized its threat in “dehumanizing” our culture. Another artist, Charles Scheeler, records the shift in man’s spiritual experience when he states, “our factories are new substitutes for religious expression.” During this period in history the evolution of the machine challenged man's perceptions of both the individual self and his relation to the cosmos. The modern man has since assumed the role of the "operator" and under this influence has been repositioned to be in control of his world.

Religion has throughout history viewed mystery as that which is undiscoverable, however advancements in science and technology reestablished mystery as that which is not yet discovered. According to the philosopher Eliade Mircea, this condition is responsible for the modern man desacralizing his world and assuming a profane existence. In traditional societies, the religious man has always felt the need to exist in a total organized world, in a cosmos. Thus the cosmos, “our world,” is that which is familiar. Everything outside our world, that which is foreign is described as chaos. The religious man has continually searched for the center of the cosmos, defining a place that serves as a
threshold between the sacred and the profane. This central axis symbolized the passage between the cosmic region of the gods and their own. It is a sacred place where communication with the gods is made possible and future orientation is revealed.

Mircea defines the sacred and the profane through the understanding of homogenous space. For the profane experience, space is neutral. No break qualitatively differentiates itself from the mass. Both the religious and nonreligious man cannot deny that they have experienced a qualitative difference in space in which they received a reality other than that of their daily ordinary experience. This can be equated to a memory or recollection of some place that revealed an order higher than that of himself. Through these breaks or interruptions in ordinary routine, man is able to understand his place within the cosmos. Therefore the sacred manifests itself as a reality of a different order than that of the "natural" condition.

Places of worship have been throughout history sacred places representing the threshold between the two modes of being, distancing the sacred from the profane. It is from within the sacred enclosure that the profane world is transcendened. However, if we assume the modern man is no longer a religious man (in the traditional sense) then we must reexamine what
sacred space can be in today's society. There is a need to address the number of people who are moving away from organized communal religion in our current culture. It is the machine and the industrial society that is claimed to be responsible for this transformation in man's attitude towards spirituality. If we consider the idea of the machine as an enabling device providing individual freedom, then can we examine how architecture can serve in a similar fashion? The question then becomes how architecture can act as a prosthetic, enabling man to connect to one's own spirituality.

Site and Program

A sacred place in the contemporary sense teaches man that sacredness is inside us and is therefore portable. Sacred space is a place of nurture and refuge, a place of transition, and a place of transformation. It is a place of hindsight, insight and foresight. Mystery may be redefined through science, but science has not yet limited that which is undiscoverable. Man is still in need of a place to go for meditation, for reflection and for remembrance. A place that is private for the individual and not necessarily for the communal. A sacred space cannot be defined through a program however it must address the historical context of origin, procession, ritual, iconography, and symbol. The program is a space that establishes "place," a space that distances the realm of the sacred from that of the profane. A place that serves to break the homogeneity of normative space and seeks to reveal orientation within the chaos transcending a reality that is other than that of the natural order.
This investigation explores nondenominational private sacred space at the scale of the individual. It is a private place for prayer, meditation and personal reflection that interacts with the participant at the scale of a confessional, a prayer mat, a headstone or a threshold. The project is not site specific but has been studied in various environments. The varying sites ranging from public transportation terminals to places of waiting to urban landscapes allowed the design to draw cues from the surrounding environment in order to create a place for the individual to withdraw.

This project has attempted to define some commonality within spiritual practice in order to address this idea of "universality." The most common considerations for defining a place for prayer/meditation are to provide a quiet place, a focal field and accommodate comfortable postures. The project invites the occupant to participate in the assembly of his/her own environment as a means of ritual preparation, transitioning the mind and body prior to the act of prayer and/or meditation. Other related issues that have been investigated are interiority, orientation, privacy, manipulation of light and color, and sensorial phenomena of sight, sound, touch and smell. This thesis was an exploration in defining space that heightens one's awareness and consciousness through sensorial space.
research
CHAPEL OF NOTRE-DAME-DU-HAUT
Ronchamp, France.
BRION MONUMENTAL TOMB
San Vito d'Altivole (Treviso) Italy.
THE CHAPEL OF SAINT IGNATIUS
Seattle University. Seattle, Washington.

Phenomenology of architecture argues for a heightened development of spatial and experiential dimensions through individual reflection on the senses and perception. To open ourselves to perception, we must transcend the mundane urgency of "things to do." We must try to access that inner life that reveals the luminous intensity of the world. Only through solitude can we begin to penetrate the secrets around us. An awareness of one's unique existence in space is essential in developing a consciousness of perception. The everyday act of pressing a door handle and entering into a light washed room can become profound when experienced through sensitized consciousness.

-Stephen Holl

Pedagogical growth requires change and consequently the chapel is filled with sites of shifting identity demonstrating that a destabilized symbol is in general is a more engaging symbol.

-Stephen Holl

project references
ROTHKO CHAPEL
Architect Philip Johnson/Barnstone & Aubry
Artist Mark Rothko 1964-1971

LIVE OAKS FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
Architect Leslie K. Elkins
Artist James Turrell 1995-1999

PERCEPTUAL CELLS
Artist James Turrell 1993
religion & spirituality

People of a particular religion can be described in three ways; they believe because they have had a direct experience in with God (God has "revealed" himself to them), some have looked at all the evidence and concluded that there must be a God (natural phenomena or rational thought theology) and others believe because they have been told to believe. In general, religion describes a community of people who share a common set of beliefs about a God, and participate in a common practice of celebrating or worshipping that God. Primal religions describe not only a set of beliefs, but also a more integral participation between the individual and the culture/society confining their activities to the members of that society.

One’s spiritual attitude is more directly linked to the individual. The spirit is an animated force within living beings associated with mind, will and feelings. It is the soul, an active and dynamic aspect of the psyche independent of forms, and yet is an essence which seeks expression in and through the world.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Principal Beliefs</th>
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<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>India</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>The concept of a Supreme Being and various deities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Natural Elements**

- Water
- Fire
- Earth
- Air

**Symbols**

- Cross
- Star and Crescent
- Ankh

**Ritual/Auxiliary Arts**

- Sacred script
- Sacred music
- Sacred dance

**Prayer/Devotion Technique**

- Mantras
- Meditations
- Prayers

**Adaptational Notes**

- Hinduism's beliefs are influenced by the concept of karma and reincarnation.
- Judaism's beliefs are influenced by the concept of the covenant.
- Christianity's beliefs are influenced by the concept of the Holy Spirit.
World Religions

Additional Notes:
Free of Community in America
Roman Catholic Church: Home and summarized by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, also the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, as well as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.
Orthodox Church: Greek Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, and Eastern Orthodox Church.

Theological Mechanics, Inc.: A group of Christians who believe in the supernatural, the mystical, and the spiritual. They believe in the power of prayer, the power of faith, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Other Sects and Denominations:
- Vatican: Based on religious traditions of Europe brought from Africa. Arts include music, dance, and other forms of classical music.
- Transcendental Meditation: Based on religious traditions of India brought from Africa. Arts include yoga, meditation, and other forms of spiritual practices.
- Hinduism: A religion that believes in the eternity of the soul. Arts include dance, music, and other forms of spiritual practices.
- Buddhism: A religion that believes in the eternity of the soul. Arts include dance, music, and other forms of spiritual practices.
- Soka Gakkai: Based on religious traditions of Japan brought from Africa. Arts include music, dance, and other forms of spiritual practices.
- Judaism: A religion that believes in the eternity of the soul. Arts include dance, music, and other forms of spiritual practices.
- Islam: A religion that believes in the eternity of the soul. Arts include dance, music, and other forms of spiritual practices.
- Orthodoxy: A religion that believes in the eternity of the soul. Arts include dance, music, and other forms of spiritual practices.
- Pentecostals: A religion that believes in the eternity of the soul. Arts include dance, music, and other forms of spiritual practices.
- Roman Catholic Church: Based on religious traditions of Europe brought from Africa. Arts include music, dance, and other forms of classical music.
- Eastern Orthodox Church: Based on religious traditions of Europe brought from Africa. Arts include music, dance, and other forms of classical music.
ritual
Preparation
preparatory action related to worship and/or self reflection
Transition
transitions the mind and body between levels of consciousness
Attenuation
heightened sense of awareness through attenuation of the senses
Repetition
the rhythmic repetition of words/sounds
Announcement
a calling to the inner-self or community announcing the will to engage
in act of prayer/meditation
Offering
to leave behind the presence of the material world
Atmosphere
creates an atmosphere in which one can project their own beliefs
spacial and time dimension is increased

announcement
Communication device that calls to the community, the individual and the gods.
Deep sounds resonate within the center of the body and fill the depths of space.
It is an announcement that forms a new language signaling both the mind and body.

prayer wheel: mani wheel
The prayer wheel is a spiritual technology, a cylinder mounted on a handle that spins freely on the handle’s base. The pendulum attached to the side of the cylinder helps in the rotation. Larger wheels can be found at the entry to a shrine or along pilgrimage paths around sacred sites forming a spiritual practice called circumambulation. Wheels are also placed where they can be spun by the various states of wind, fire or water. The clockwise rotation is ordered in the direction that it would be read, it follows the direction of the sun and it
matches the clockwise circumambulation of stupas. Practitioners of Bon, the pre Buddhist spiritual tradition of Tibet, spin their prayer wheels counterclockwise to match the direction they use in circumambulation.

-\textit{mantra-} "\textit{mani}" \textbf{Om Mani Peme Hung} \textit{ohm-mah-nee-pahd-may-hum (hung)}

The cylinder is wound with thin paper and this handwritten mantra is repeated over the length of the spool. Tibetan Buddhists believe that saying this mantra, out loud or silently to oneself, invokes the powerful benevolent attention and blessings of Chenrezig, the embodiment of compassion. Viewing a written copy of the mantra (mani stones found along pilgrimage paths) or spinning the written form around a mani wheel are believed to have the same effect. We create pleasure and pain through our fundamental clinging to sound and speech. The mantra is an enlightened sound, it has no intrinsic reality, but is simply the manifestation of pure sound, experienced simultaneously with its emptiness. The union of sound and emptiness is simply an intellectual concept of what our meditation should be.
repetition: prayer beads

Bead Count
Hindu, Buddhist 108
Muslim, Sufi 99
Christian 150

Common Handheld
(vary 33,45,66) derived from 99

- atmosphere: candle/incense

An atmospheric condition is expressed through the use of candles and incense.
The depth field is increased through changing light and observance of air movement, allowing one to be fully aware of the spacial volume they occupy. This atmospheric presence allows for one to observe natural phenomena and the projection of one’s own personal beliefs onto the natural order.
One also enters a new dimension of time through observing the flow of nature.
**Prayer & Meditation**

Quiet Environment

*turn off external stimuli & exterior distractions*

Object to dwell upon

*word/sound repetition, gaze upon a symbol*

Passive Attitude

*emptying of all thought & distractions from one’s mind, allow thoughts to drift but do not dwell upon them*

Comfortable Position

*position/posture that can be comfortably maintained for an extended amount of time allowing one to separate the self from the body*

---

**Meditation**

Meditation is broadly defined as any activity that keeps the attention pleasantly anchored in the present moment. During meditation the body gains a state of profound rest, at the same time, the brain and mind become more alert. Often reactions are faster, creativity greater and comprehension broader. When the mind is calm and focused in the present, it is neither reacting to memories from the past nor being preoccupied with plans for the future; two major sources of chronic stress known to impact health.

*East*

Meditation is viewed as an act to suppress the mind. Meditation holds a more pervasive role in religions and cultural traditions. The emphasis of eastern mysticism on pure sole consciousness, annihilate flesh and deny its reality in order to achieve absolute freedom.

*West*

Meditation is viewed as an act of the mind. Western mysticism stems from the Greek delight in natural beauty and reaches fullest development with teachings of Christianity. Western mystical thought has embodied all that is human and natural, of human love and intellect and of the natural world.
**Techniques**

- **Mantras**: words/phrases to be repeated several times daily
- **Yantras**: concentrating your eyes for hours on a geometric figure
- **Visualization**: visualize a scene for hours
- **Koans**: riddle that is impossible to solve
- **Body Postures**: physical movements/exercises used to increase focus and suppress the physical body by staying in a difficult position until experience numbness

*Studies in Transcendental Meditation Reveal*

- Fall in metabolic rate
  - drop in oxygen consumption. less breaths with less air per minute
- Decrease heart rate

- **Blood Pressure**: maintains low levels
- **Higher Levels Skin Resistance**: failed skin resistance characterizes anxiety and tension states
- **Decreased Blood Lactate**: rise in blood lactate relate to anxiety and tension states.
- Increase Blood Flow

**Postures**

- **Seated**
- **Kneeling**
- **Cross Legged**
- **Lotus/Half Lotus**
- **Supine** (Lying Straight)
- **Sideways Lying**
- **Standing**
- **Walking**

*Muslim Prayer Postures - Salaah*

how to perform Islamic prayer - namaz
The tea ceremony was imported from China over the course of several hundred years. The ceremony became an art of Chanoyu from which developed Chado primarily focused on a teaching discipline and instilling respect for others. Tea eventually became a custom to the common people and during the Higashiyama Era, when Japanese art and culture began to flourish, tea was formalized centering upon Chinese utensils and procedures. Maturo Shuko set tea apart from the excessive display of utensils and united tea and spirituality. A practice of Tea and Zen as one idea. The custom created an atmosphere and intimacy of a small room where people could communicate through the medium of tea. Many Christian missionaries were befriended by teachers of tea. Rikyu synthesized the unique way of life combining the everyday aspects of living with the highest spiritual and philosophical tenants. Under the study of Zen, Rikyu rediscovered the essence of the tea ceremony dividing the practice into Utensil Tea and Wabi Tea. Tea contains a system of symbolic relations with the outside world. Rituals symbolize a large cultural context by multivocal symbols that allowed the individual periodically to readapt to the basic condition and axiomatic values of human social life. Symbols of ritual create a common understanding of reality. Tea is seen as ideal way of communication and through the arts of cultivating the human mind. The tea ceremony captures the basic principles of many religions and hopes that the individual and collective peace can be achieved through the making and sharing of a bowl of tea.
The tea ceremony consists of two parts and an intermission. The host and guest perform a highly ritualized series of actions, carrying on nearly wordless dialogue of symbolism and feeling.

-Act I  Guests enter Chashitsu from Roji and are served a light meal (kaiseki). Following the meal, the host prepares the charcoal for the first time (shozumi). After shozumi, the guest retires to the garden for a short intermission.

-Act II  Host prepares thick tea "koicha," then prepares coals for the second time (gozumi). Then thin tea "usucha" is made and shared. When all is finished, host and guests silently and respectfully acknowledge each other one last time and the guests leave.

Typical sequence

The Chashitsu is a room or building for the tea ceremony, allowing the host to express utmost hospitality. Together the tea garden "Roji" and preparation room "Mizuya" should provide an optimum physical and spiritual setting for expressing such hospitality.
-tea room
Structured strictly to the forces of yin and yang and the five elements. Portions of the room are either yin or yang and utensils people occupying such space are identified with these elements: wood used to build the fire, fire used to boil water, iron kettle use to make tea in a bowl (earth). The earth is represented in the ashes surrounding charcoal. Tea is made with harmony of these elements as it becomes the essence of the universe.

-tea utensils
The tea utensils mediate between man and the sacred. They draw their value from their nature as ritual implements without which the ritual can not be carried out.
Japanese garden

The Japanese garden is an aesthetic exploitation of a small space that fascinates the mind and body. Like a painting the feeling of far mountains and the distant lake are conveyed in limited area. The landscape garden mirrors nature. However the Japanese garden reflects and recreates the effects of natural scenery in order to evoke some of the same feelings experienced in the natural setting. Japanese priests set forth to bring the fruits of Chinese culture and religion to their own land. Along this journey by sea, islands and crags along the coast were observed. Recreations of these far away scenes recall the power and emotion in gardens. Selected qualities of the natural environment are preserved so to nurture the hopes and needs of the occupant. Aesthetic principles governing the art are according to natural categories of human perception: scenic effects, sensory effects and cultural values. The various types of Japanese gardens are pond-island garden, dry landscape garden, tea garden and stroll garden.

Laws of visual perception

Frontal Dimension \( S = \frac{1}{D} \)
(measured along a line parallel to the picture plane)

is projected onto the picture plane as a size (S) that is the reciprocal of the distance (D)

Longitudinal Dimension \( A = \frac{1}{D^2} \)
(measured along a line perpendicular to the picture plane)

is projected onto the picture plane as an altitude (A) that is a negatively accelerated of the distance (D)
Laws of visual perception

Increasing the distance from the viewer toward the horizon a frontal dimension such as width/height of a rock decreases in a linear fashion as the object moves from the bottom to the top of the picture plane; while a longitudinal dimension of the same size measured along a horizontal surface from the front to back of the rock is compressed relative to the frontal dimension, foreshortened. The longitudinal dimensions should decrease, toward the horizon or up the picture plane, at an accelerated rate which frontal dimensions decrease at a constant rate. The horizontal and vertical planes are set in balance, a faraway rock must be proportioned right to compliment the nearby rock.

Two dimensions of meaning

The horizontal dimension is the field of human action. Movement is observed with the greatest freedom and ease. The vertical dimension corresponds to earth's gravitational field. These two different planes and their sensory effects in the garden correspond to the two types of rock compositions.

- horizontal triad  three rocks forming triangle in horizontal plane
- vertical triad  three rocks in triangle in vertical plane
- third axis  diagonal dynamic quality

Horizonal Triad
common height ratios 1:3 2:3 ratios
proportion system Golden Mean, fibonacci series (1,2,3,5,8,...)

Principle of the three forces
horizontal - earth
vertical - heaven
diagonal - man

composition which embody the three forces, directed tension of an object or visual pattern
-aspect ratio
Proportion width to height
accommodate the human visual field
1.65:1
1.85:1
2.35:1 (cinematic scope)

Cinema attempts to increase sense of
realization by increasing picture plane so
that it dominates the vision of the observ-
er completely by filling the whole visual
field and removing the frame of reference
of the edges of the screen.

-principle of narrow and wider
This principle produces the effect of spaciousness immersing in a limited area; making
a stream valley appear to go on and on while at the same time reduce it to a small size.
Levels of contrast are introduced between the narrows where water is constricted or
enclosed by projecting fingers of land while expansive areas are dominated by the level
surface of water.

-"s" curve shoreline
This principle carries the eye back and forth up the pictoral plane and introduce depth
into the composition. Points along the zig zag are intentionally hidden so that the point
must be imagined.

-sensory effects
Create illusion of physical reality by teasing our perceptual systems into belief.
hearing       waterfalls, leaves & wind
smell         fragrant wisteria, pine needles
touch         tactile sensations through skin
             visual ques of texture, shape and line
taste         water

moments of pause

Throughout our daily routine we encounter many activities that offer moments for potential inner reflection. These experiences are often transitional breaks between activities or moments within an activity that can be characterized as "pauses" allowing the mind to stray from the immediate task and open itself for drifting thoughts of clarity. These thoughts may or may not be transcendental in their nature, but they do offer the ability to center oneself. Places were we encounter extended periods of waiting; such as medical facilities, educational institutions and public transportation terminals often designate a private place for the individual to reflect upon their experiences.
-the machine and the human scale
The machine served as a study model for this project as an enabler for the individual to perform a specific task or activity. The encounter with such devices has become part of our ordinary daily routine, and in many cases has developed into a spatial experience removing the individual from the immediate context. This experience effectively defines a personal space within the public realm. The telephone booth is a prime example of private activity occurring within the public domain.

This project has examined the potential for sacred space to act as a prosthetic to the body. The prayer mat is such a device, enabling the individual to define a personal space within the immediate context and drawing a clear distinction between the sacred and the profane. Within this limited area the body is able to perform various prayer and meditation postures and provides a specific orientation to be defined based on spiritual beliefs.
-transitioning moments

traveling/commuting
waiting/standing in line
exercise
grooming

-grooming

Grooming is a ritual of cleansing. Our senses are attenuated through sound and fragrance while an atmosphere of repetitive action increases our focus.

-commuting

Many people define their own personal space within a crowd by reading a book, listening to a walkman/discman, talking on the phone, or simply by avoiding eye contact with others in order to maintain their personal field. When gathered in a crowd of unknown people we are often put into this position of inner reflection. These moments are often the most intimate in one's daily routine.
exercises
measurement

-postures

The first exercise examines the various positions performed during basic prayer and meditation techniques. A control box filled with sand was used as a means for measuring pressure points and weight distribution for each of the positions.

Through scanned and scaled photography the information was graphed in plan and elevational drawings, providing a base system for proportioning the spatial constraints of the individual.
STANDING

CROSS-LEGGED

KNEELING

PROSTRATE

LOTUS MEDITATION

COLLAPSED COMPOSITE

MULTIPLE POSITIONS VS COLLAPSED SET I

MULTIPLE POSITIONS VS COLLAPSED SET II

COLLAPSED SET I VS COLLAPSED SET II

MULTIPLE POSITIONS VS COLLAPSED ALL

 measurement
point

A 13' diameter circle was circumscribed in order to better understand the proportion of an individual space. The power in this exercise was in the act of marking a space and explored the notion of interiority as defined by the participant.
point. line. plane

**line**

For this exercise two lines divide the space of the circle to provide individual sections of space within the same enclosure. Multiple orientations are allowed and can be individually defined by the participant.
plane

In this exercise an assemblage of partitions was configured by the individual as a means of defining an enclosure at the scale of a prayer mat. The vertical planes are divided into three sections to accommodate the various focal fields of different postures.
light, scrim, color

light

This exercise explored the definition of space with the participation of an individual through the use of lumens. Candles marking the boundaries of an interior space exploit the evocative power of contrasting dark and light, while the flickering flame captures an atmospheric presence of movement.
**scrim**

In this exercise a scrim material was introduced to an indirect light source to measure the effectiveness in providing spatial depth and obscuring the edge of enclosure.
color

Color was introduced into the project as a variable, allowing differences to occur within the focal field. Using indirect reflected light, color swatches attached to the rear face of vertical louvers produced an illuminating presence of color that changed over the period of the day and with the degree to which the louvers were opened.
prayer room studies
studies. candle model

![Candle model images](image-url)
threshold transition
offering wall

touch
beaded texture

sight
light box

smell
oil with heated coil
studies. tea room
studies. prayer room
studies. prayer room
representation
enclosure

The enclosure is conceived as a series of vertical acrylic tubes that can rotate independently. Each tube contains a louver with color applied to the back face. As they are opened an array of reflected light and color fills the space based on the desired lighting condition of each user. The color compositions provide focal fields and serve as a positioning device for repetitive prayer similar to a string of prayer beads. Color becomes a variable allowing differences to occur within the environment based on differing lighting conditions or time sequences of visitation. These colored louvers would not only provide a difference in experience form one time to the next but could also be associated more specifically to its site or user group, or even be a cyclical rotation of color based on the seasons.

The vertical composition is divided into three sections to accommodate various prayer postures from sitting to kneeling or standing. The plan configuration allows for various orientations to be self defined. Apperture boxes interrupt this datum becoming moments of pause and reflection between focal fields. Personal objects of worship are intended to placed within these cavities.
A scrim layer of metal fabric can be drawn to enclose the interior from the exterior threshold. As rendered in the following perspectives the enclosure could have pivoting sections to open to the exterior allowing for communal worship to occur within the surrounding site.
The strength of our spirituality is reflected in our own personal character. The sharing of our own thoughts, beliefs, and spiritual attitudes is the means of expression from which this project will radiate and touch the larger community. The aspiration for this project is that communal gathering and discussion would begin to occur in the surrounding setting in which it be placed. Like a candle it is the light marking the center for the surrounding community to congregate.
natural light shadow study

SEPTEMBER - 9am

DECEMBER - 12pm

MARCH - 3pm

JUNE - 6pm
seasonal color study

SUMMER

FALL

WINTER

SPRING
details louver study
Interfaith Sacred Space Competition

Toward the end of my thesis investigation a friend of mine introduced me to the Interfaith Sacred Space Competition. Fortunately the competition's objectives were parallel to my own and I did not have to change the design in order to meet the requirements. The deadline was one week after the final thesis review allowing me the time to assemble the following two boards.

The Interfaith Sacred Space Competition was sponsored by the San Francisco AIA, the EURIMA (Expressing the United Religions Initiative in Music and the Arts), and the Interfaith Center at Presidio. This was an international ideas competition to design sacred space where people from all religions can feel comfortable, safe, and respected. The competition recognizes the need for genuine interfaith dialogue and shared practice, as interfaith diversity is becoming the norm around the globe. They were asking the following questions: *Is genuine interfaith space possible? What might a space designed to accommodate the needs of all faiths look like?*

The competition's challenge was to design sacred space that will inspire people to practice their own faith alone, in a single group or in concert with other faiths; where people from all religious traditions can feel comfortable, welcome, and respected. The competition was not site specific, but rather competitors were asked to select their own sites, to develop hypothetical sites, and/or to design for generic site situations. The sponsors were interested in the functional, spatial and visual qualities of the designs that are proposed to meet the world's faith and interfaith communities.
assembly
assembly. rsa courtyard

Prior to the final review the discussion about this proposal concerned the psychological aspect of entering a private place of prayer and mediation that was sited in these public places of encounter. In order to further understand this proposition, I was encouraged to create an environment that would simulate the experience I had been designing. This would provide a model to further understand how people would respond to the project and how people would react to this personal experience set within the public eye.

The first installation was assembled in the Rice School of Architecture courtyard. As the design build process evolved, so too did the ambitions of the project. After receiving some donated materials, the construct was given a complete enclosure similar to the study models. The installation became a representation of the design more so than simply simulating the experience. While under construction the installation gave other students the opportunity to inquire about
the project prior to the thesis final review. I had many curious visitors pass by to ask about the project, both architecture students other affiliates of the university. Once it was completed most comments complimented the use of color. Others recognized that the interior space did offer a complete removal from the surrounding context. Most of all, the installation became a successful mediator for discussion with those who were curious about the proposal. The project remained in the courtyard for three weeks after thesis presentations. It was hard to determine how often it was occupied, but the movement of the bench or kneeler did give me signs that it had been visited periodically.
assembly: prh-xs house

During the construction of the project I spoke with Rice Building Workshop (RBW) Professor, Danny Samuels, about the potential for relocating the project to Project Row Houses (PRH). This community organization located in the Third Ward of Houston sponsors many rotating art installations and has worked with the RBW on several design-build projects in the past. Danny Samuels put me in contact with Rick Lowe, Founder of PRH, who was excited to host the installation. We decided to locate the project in the rear yard of the XS House, a project built by the Rice Building Workshop. This site would be a better placement for the project in terms of its public accessibility and lighting conditions; and here it would really be exposed to the public eye.
Over the course of two days the installation was taken down and reassembled at its current location. The process was relatively easy moving the wall enclosure in four different sections in addition to the floor and ceiling assembly. Two distinctive personalities that live near the new site will keep an eye on the project to protect the project from vandalism. One character goes by the name "Brother in Law" and the other "Flower Man." During its reconstruction "Flower Man" was very curious about the project, he is an eclectic artist that has an extreme appreciation for color. The investigation will continue as I frequent the site to observe how people respond to the project and learn from the neighbors how it is being used. I am most curious about how the structure will be occupied over time and whether or not the project will be respected for its original intentions or take on some new life of its own. At this point there are no signs of abuse. However, the markings of a few footprints show that the occasional curious visitor has explored the project.
final thoughts

The most challenging aspect of this thesis was in attempting to stray away from the immediate association to the chapel. The original ambitions for this project were to develop a model that would act as transportable prosthetic. However, the decision to address a "quiet" environment drove the design into its current direction; defining a space that has a definitive enclosure. This enclosure was developed to provide differing experiential qualities throughout the day and effectively removes us from the immediate context. What I have drawn from this investigation is that the strategies for manifesting the sacred can be found in the subtleties of orchestrating experience. When we engage the senses, the phenomena of texture, aroma, resonance and shadow all have the ability to increase one's level of awareness and have the potential to affect our conscious, our soul and our spirituality. Stepping across uneven ground, the aroma of a burning candle, or capturing the glow of a brilliant color can all displace the self. Even if for a short moment, we can break the homogeneity of our normal existence and visit a reality that is different from the natural condition.
The strength of this investigation is that it has identified places in need of attention within our current condition. In a world where speed is so critical, we must be reminded that quality is so often sacrificed in the process. The projection of media and technology is occurring in almost every arena of our daily routine. The broadcast of monitors along transportation mainstreams, in elevator cabs, attached to our exercise equipment are capturing our attention and becoming focal fields of distraction. This however does not necessarily allow for one to reflect inwardly. Perhaps the next step in this investigation will be to explore how technology can be utilized as an instrument for our personal inward reflection. Never the less, I do feel strongly that providing moments of pause within our daily routine is necessary in the modern world and this may lead us to discover that the sacred is in the ordinary.
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