

The Relationship of the Space and the Sacred

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Abstract

The word sacred brings to mind, a space that is holy and religious. Although in the current generation, sacred is not just about the holy and religious but more about the mental peace of the mind. A sacred space thrives to answer questions we cannot find in our normal lives. Some religious post positivist believe the sacred sometimes cannot always be generalized as sacred by everyone. The idea that what is sacred is only unique and calls upon oneself under individualism. But in some way, through religious positivism maybe there is something, an element, a hierarchy, a sense of repetitious, a symbol that can produce a sense of sacredness. The answer of such arguments, may only be revealed by inductive reasoning with some type of simulation. The simulation of a designed enclosed space, where the user has no knowledge of the typology of the building, and tested to see how they feel in the space.

Intention

The motivation behind this research project is the need to maintain sacred spaces in our communities through architecture. The project will study how architecture creates spaces that are sacred for all cultures. The use and inhabitation of sacred spaces span a wide range of ages and types of people. The young use it as a hangout space, where they create friendships, bands, study groups, etc. Middle aged people go there for comfort, socialization, release, absolution, etc. And older people, they go there to observe the new generation, to teach, to give their wisdom, and some for amnesty. The potential impact of the research is to use the information obtained to design spaces that require a sacred environment, and also to enhance spaces that are meant to be a sacred space. The underlying theory would be Normative Theory because of its need to compare the norm of all sacred spaces in different types of cultures.

Core Elements

The main research question would be, how does architecture address sacred spaces in different cultures? What sacred spaces do not require architecture? How do people designate a sacred space and what can the sacred tell us about architecture?

The main research strategies will be Case Studies, Qualitative Data Collecting, Historical Research, Correlational Research, and Simulation Research. The case studies will be on a timeline of works, ranging from the Greeks to present day sacred spaces. Historical research will be needed through visual comparisons and the use of documents. Qualitative data collecting of the case studies and historical research will be needed as they will be used in the correlational research. When all the data is collected a simulation of the data formed space will be made on a design computer program. The space will then be presented to participants and ask what they feel in the specific space. By the results of the test, the answers to the project may be revealed.

Methodology

The methodology of my research project will consist of three important milestones. The first is to create a pattern language for sacred spaces. The pattern language will direct me towards the norm for all sacred spaces and give me the components to create such spaces. The components will come from literature references and case studies of precedent typologies. The second milestone will transfer the language to a design. I will design a building or space accordingly to the pattern language I have created. Once I am done, the third step will be carried through by simulation, using a tool called Oculus Rift. I will simulate the space and run through the space as an individual to study and experience I have created through my research.

1. Pattern Language
 - Literature Reference
 - Case Studies
2. Design of Space
3. Simulation

Literature Review

Cannon, J. (2013) examines the different types of sacred spaces in all cultures, ranging from the ancient world, Judaism, Christianity, Taoism, to Shinto. He based his work on a timeline starting from the oldest religions to the newest. He examines how each has their own space they call sacred and their own rituals that call for specifications in a space. He found extensive evidence of sacred spaces around the world and composed them through photos and essays. Each expressing its own sense of uniqueness in four themes, the enclosure, the manmade mountain, the hall and the axial and centralized plans. But maybe the sacred space is more than just the physical elements, the metaphysical world is just as important.

Bermudez, Julio expresses the contemporary view of architecture through the lenses of sacredness. He argues there is a relationship between the sacred space and the design of architecture. The idea that man can create these divine and holy spaces through their mental power. He reveals the elements that are used to manipulate these spaces to produce a sense of transcendence. He does so by examining the many perspectives that encompass this argument. Each perspective coming from a different view, field, and time. He concludes there is a need to examine these spaces and the relevance of it to architecture. As these spaces reveal to us not just the connections to the gods, but mostly to ourselves. This understanding will help us in our choices we make in the world and help us maintain the health of the earth.

A pattern language for spaced spaces

The pattern language of spaced spaces covers the elements required to create a space such as sacred. These spaces have been with us from the beginning of human kind, as early as the Mesopotamia's. In the olden days, a sacred space was based on faith, a space dedicated to some type of higher being(s), but in the modern age, not all people are religious. This leads us to explore what elements truly create these sacred spaces people use for meditation and relaxation. Jon Cannon, states in his book *The Secret Language of Sacred Spaces* five very important elements of sacred spaces:

- The Enclosure
- The Manmade Mountain



Buddhist Cave Temples



America Ziggurats

A pattern language for spaced spaces

These two elements help create the very basis of sacred spaces from examples such as the Ziggurats of the Americas and the Khao Luang Caves in Thailand. They are usually created by nature or either by humans. They can be something as simple as a drawn circle, the importance is to emphasize and designate the space to people. Inside these spaces consist of other three important elements:

- The Hall
- Axial and Centralized Plans
- Platforms and Entrances



Church Hall



Japanese Torii

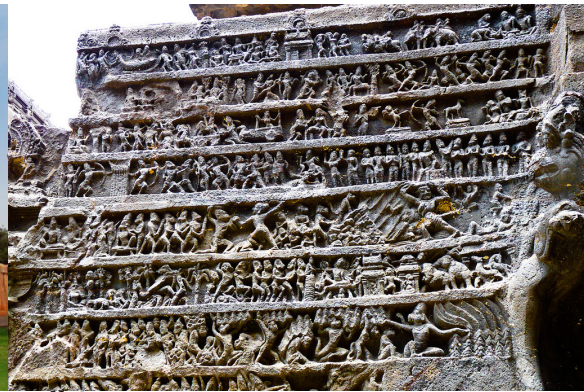
A pattern language for spaced spaces

These three elements are present in the last two and help strengthen the sense of sacred in the spaces. The truest example we can find in modern day would be the church. The church, if taken to the perspective of the floor plan can be seen to have a long hall leading to an altar. The floor plan also has an axial and centralized plan, mimicking a cross. Sometimes even, the churches bring you towards the altar through a series of platforms to bring you higher and closer to god as you ascend to communicate with him. Within these elements comes the small details that help strengthen the sacred senses through touch, vision, hearing, and sometimes even taste.

- Holiness of Imagery
- Iconography of the Deities
- A Sublime Aesthetic
- Divine Scriptures



Stupa Temple in Sanchi



Wall Scriptures

A pattern language for spaced spaces

Of course, these elements may not be present in all cultures but either one or two are always present. Each individual element serves the purpose to solidify the sacredness of the space. Within these elements, there exist participation, without people there would not be such a space, or more so even need for such a space. The activities of the people become just as important as what is tangible and immovable.

- Procession
- Congregation
- Priesthood and Power
- Divine Kings

The people, or more so the practitioner of the sacred spaces help create these spaces and help continue the usage. There are people such as priest and kings who help lead rituals in these spaces. All activities help build the psychological foundation for practitioners and followers. The deepness of the sacred spaces extend inwards towards ourselves. The sacred reveals not just the



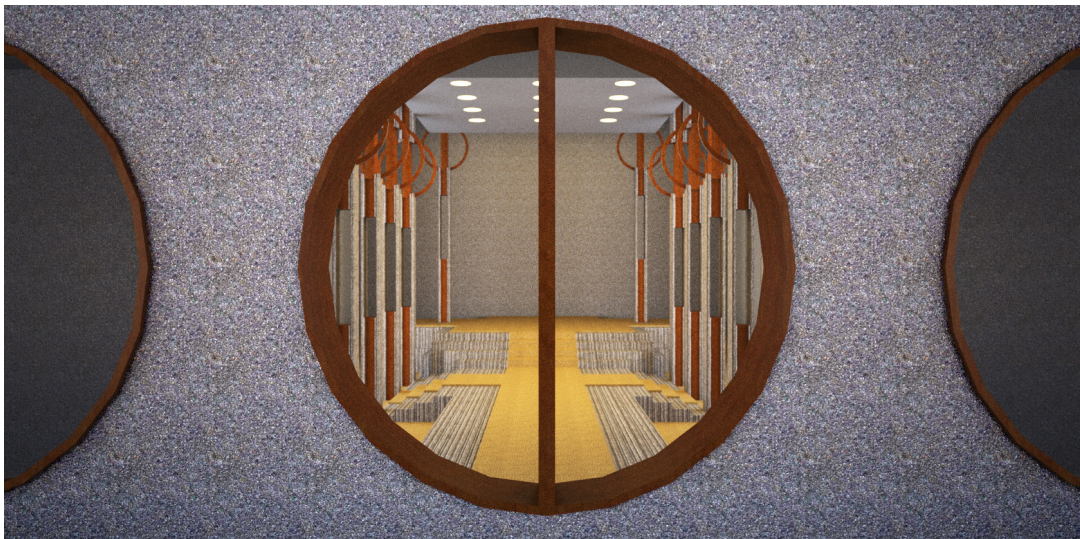
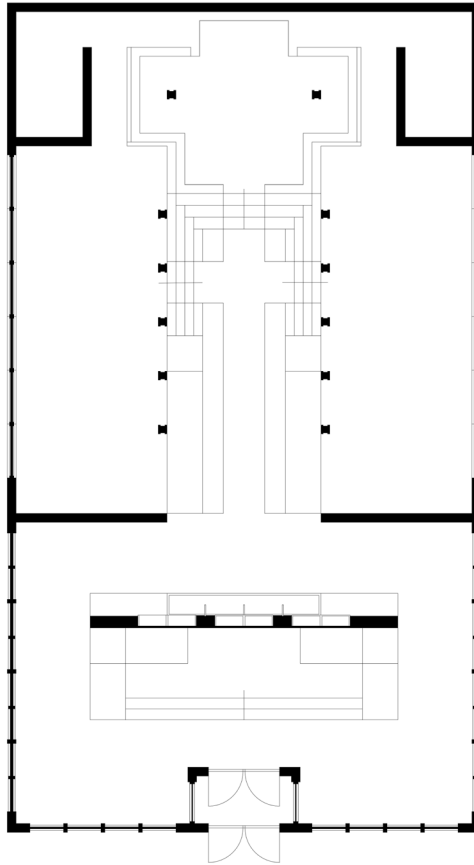
Gathering at Funeral

Young Buddhist Monk

Simulated Space

After creating the building accordingly to the pattern language I created for sacred spaces, I investigated the space with the Oculus Rift goggles. The space started with a straight view from the entrance into the elevated altar space. The procession of the spaces require you to weave and wind yourself through the space tying and binding the senses to the environment. Once you reach the altar space, the columns and elements of the building have a coalescent scripture and aesthetic. The space is small but it provides a comfortable and intimate space for users. The windows provide natural lighting into the building from the sides and the sun roof. The combination of the lighting and the design exhibits a sense of transcendence.

But even though the building holds all the elements necessary for a sacred space, the Oculus Rift goggles cannot truly produce a sense of transcendence without actual experience. The absence of sound and sense is what takes away from the true sacred space. The only way to experience a sacred space is with the physical body. One must be breathing in the air of the space and feeling the temperature of the heat radiating from the natural lighting coming into the space to truly comprehend a sense of transcendence. Although the Oculus Rift does not produce what I want it to, it does aid in the process of designing the building. The space needs it be proportionate and human size. The goggles allow the user to envision their body through a space as if their mind is in a dream. The simulation overall was a great experience and although doesn't provide for all the senses, it does provide visually the aesthetics of the design in a proportioned view.



Conclusion

The main research question would be, how does architecture address sacred spaces in different cultures? What sacred spaces do not require architecture? How do people designate a sacred space and what can the sacred tell us about architecture?

Through all the research I have found some answers to my questions, I have posed at the beginning. Architecture addresses sacred spaces in many ways in different cultures, through minuscule details that rely on interpretation. Most of the sacred architecture in each culture rely on a centralized design or an enclosed space but once you pass those two categories they diverge and separate into their own metaphorical details to tell their own cultures. The only sacred spaces that do not require architecture is those that are created through nature. The saying "Nature can create wonders" is real, mountains, waterfalls, etc. all fit into this category because they bring the mind into a state of peace and serenity. The sound and the enormous visuals engulf the viewer forcing their mind to retract and find themselves. Because we are nature just as much as we view it. When we come upon something as beautiful and as great created by nature cannot stop ourselves from aweing the process that created the product, created us. That is what is so sacred about nature because it is out of our control, it is unknown and it exhibits powers beyond ourselves. People have always designated sacred based on their experiences and what they are taught. The books and the voices of those before us tell us what is sacred and what is not. Although some things may come to us sacred without the experience and history, I believe those are spaces are the ones that is truly sacred because these spaces point to not anyone but ourselves. Transcendence is when one truly accepts one for who they are and come into a state of bliss; that is what truly creates a space of sacredness. The sacred has been telling us about architecture from the beginning of time, as nature is just as much a part architecture is a part of nature. We study architecture from the proportions of those spaces we deem pleasing to our senses. If they may be sacred that is what we design our architecture towards. Nothing is completely new and comes out of thin air, everything has an origin. As our idea of sacred spaces has always originated from nature and ourselves. What is truly sacred may be based upon an individual's mind, but the real beauty is to find beauty in other people's minds and their works.

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