

architecture of a muted intensity

Michael Szczerepa

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Michael Szczerepa
Tampere University
School of Architecture

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Supervisors: Ilmari Lahdelma, Pekka Passinmäki

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Abstract

Today, we as architects have a growing challenge where we must redefine architectural meaning in our heterogenous, diverse, unrelated, yet ever-connected global society. Architecture of a muted intensity is a response directed at challenging the current conditions of our postmodern world with various concepts that together create an emotionally stimulating dialogue between space, individual, and context. The goal is to return to the basic human condition and produce architecture that is universally appealing and engaging, regardless of the background of the individual experiencing it.

The postmodern world in which we live today challenges the projection of universal ideologies. As there is no consensus of values and beliefs in our world, few universally accepted truths exist. Architects often tend to rely on metaphors and symbols in their work, though within the present global situation, these are no longer valid justifications for architecture. We must today consciously refuse the projection of extra-architectural meaning onto the spaces we design and

instead focus on our primal human condition as the basis for architecture.

This thesis includes an overview of Swiss culture and values, which contain several themes that align with the goals of the architecture of a muted intensity. In order to accurately express the need for a shift in present architectural discourse, explorations of the concepts of responsibility and honesty, along with their relationships to architecture are required. These concepts, together with a modified definition of non-referentiality, are the preconditions for a muted intensity in architecture. The key principles exist in physical and phenomenological qualities relating to singularity, essentiality, sensation, atmosphere, and anatomy. The utilization of these elements works to enhance characteristics of the built environment that will result in a more universally engaging architecture.

Architecture of a muted intensity is not a critique of the technological, economical, and ecological themes present in today's architectural discourse, but rather a personal definition and reflection on particular themes that challenge the mundane and strive for the extraordinary.

architecture of a muted intensity:

an architectural response to the postmodern
world that results in a stimulating dialogue
between space, individual, and context

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“A great building must begin with the unmeasurable, must go through measurable means when it is being designed and in the end must be unmeasurable.”

-Louis Kahn

Preface

This document is an attempt at defining an architectural response to the challenges within the postmodern world of today. As a collection of ideas, concepts, and strategies, it serves as an exploration in pursuit of defining an effective architectural identity. At its core, a muted intensity is an individual and personal model for addressing and interpreting the current needs and trends of society and investigated through architectural means. The framework for this topic has been laid out with the understanding and belief in an architecture that strives not for a “brand name” architecture or a grand representation of an architect’s ego, but rather an architecture that engages an audience in a personal and self-reflective manner through the employment of several defined architectural principles.

A muted intensity is in part a critical response to populist architecture that is focused primarily on form or massing as its defining feature. The goal is producing spaces that leave a lasting impression on visitors and users rather than simply making a strong first impression, something that is characteristic of much of contemporary architecture today. A muted intensity should not be

explicit, but rather contemplative. Rather than answering questions, it should pose new ones without providing definitive answers; it should allow individuals to find their own meaning and understanding of the space they are engaging with. As soon as a building fails to pose questions, it fails to hold our interest and ultimately renders itself static. The fundamental benefit of an architecture of muted intensity is that it encourages the visitor, the user, the viewer, to interpret and define their own meaning of a space. The result is a building and visitor that engage in a conversation based on feeling and emotion initiated by the formal qualities of the building.

There are many concepts and related themes that we as architects, when striving for a universally engaging architecture, can learn from Switzerland. In particular—the restraint, attention to detail, and honesty utilized by Swiss architects as a result of their self-reliance and active protection of tradition should be studied and promoted in present architectural discourse and design. These are universal principles that facilitate the process of designing high-quality architecture and sets a solid foundation for creating a powerful and stimulating built environment.

The concept of non-referentiality, as discussed by Valerio Olgiati and Markus Breitschmid in their book

titled “Non-Referential Architecture” is formatted as an argument for an architectural response to the present condition of our world. Their argument stems from the understanding that there is no longer a consensus of values and beliefs in our heterogenous world, and that ultimately the only architectural meaning that holds any value is that of the language being expressed by a building.¹ An architecture of a muted intensity, as its fundamental condition, must also respond to the non-referential world. An additional understanding and response to local architectural traditions should be studied to ground a building in its context. This helps avoid an acontextual architecture while at the same time rejecting sentimentality for tradition as a tool for architectural design.

Following an evaluation and study of several particularly important and valuable concepts present in Swiss architecture, paired with the understanding of the present postmodern world, several responsibilities for the role of an architect are established. We as architects have the obligation of defining a course of direction within our work and gearing our focus towards a specific interest.

¹ Valerio Olgiati, and Markus Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture* (Basel: Simonett & Baer, 2018), 22.

Without a designated goal in our work, we are ultimately left to rely on predefined understandings of the social, economic, and ecological factors of our world. Defining the parameters of our work allows us to achieve a focus in our methods that facilitates the design development process and results in work that contains an underlying clarity. The development of projects without a predefined intent on the side of the designer leads to finished work that is bleak and arbitrary. Every architect must know their strengths and interests and utilize this understanding to create work that satisfies both the needs of the designer and the final user.

Architecture that successfully achieves a muted intensity is honest—architecture should never be characterized by deceit. Dishonesty in architecture results in a strained relationship between designer and visitor that can only lead to a feeling of distrust and discomfort. This is not beneficial to the idea of a muted intensity as it leads to a certain hostility between the designer and the visitor rather than a dialogue between the space and the visitor.

The topics of singularity, sensation, atmosphere, and essentiality determine what is crucial for achieving a muted intensity. Singularity of a work encourages the

development of an individual identity and allows for a sense of newness to be instilled. A building without individuality permits replicability and fails in the eyes of innovation. The atmosphere of a muted intensity must meet the goal of allowing for interpretation through a certain modesty and focus on essentiality and clarity. The simplification of design should be considered as a major benefit to enhancing a visitor's experience of space and allowing for individual contemplation.

The anatomy or formal qualities of a building should also raise questions. The progression of spaces, organization, and composition of designed architectural elements must be so that they stimulate the minds of visitors and leads to individual answers to questions such as *how?* and *why?* This often can be achieved with a conscious and methodical employment of contradiction that creates a delicate balance and dialogue among various architectural elements as well as with the viewer, user, and its context. Without a space posing questions to the viewer, a feeling of indifference is instilled rather than the engagement which a muted intensity is striving for.

Subtleties in Swiss Architecture

A photographic journey through the
subtleties of Swiss architecture





2



An attention to detail, a clarity, a gentle and expressive tectonic language, a broken symmetry

3

Haus K, Alpnach, Switzerland
2018, Seiler Linhart Architekten

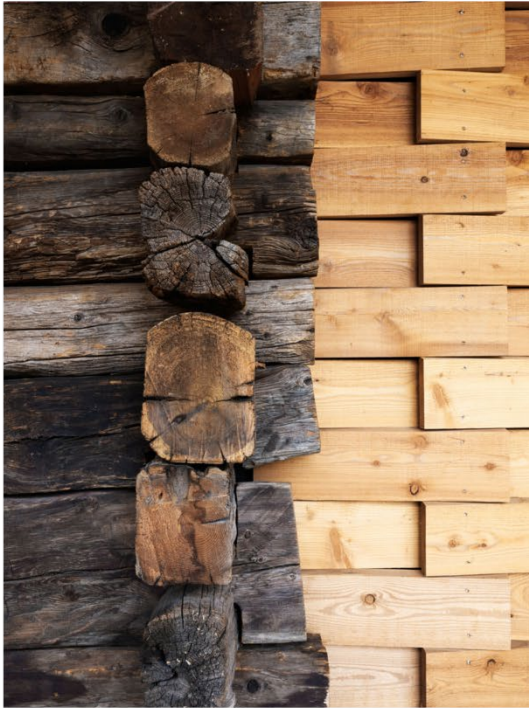


4



A dichotomy between new and old, a reanimation of texture and pattern

5



6





A dedication to material and color, a vibrant yet contained façade, a simplicity

8



9

Schulhaus Ballwil, Ballwil, Switzerland
2012, Fiechter & Salzmänn Architekten



A light, delicate, and tactile
wooden palette, a contrast to
context, an elegant curvature



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Werdenberg Castle Extension, Werdenberg, Switzerland
2015, BBK Architekten



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A simplicity of form, a delicate material application, a broken rhythm within a balanced façade



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A conscious color palette, a gentle intervention, an expression of age, a multi-layered texture

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A tension between verticality and context, a devotion to materials, a contrast between a strong form and playful fenestration



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Villa Garbald, Castasegna, Switzerland
2010, Miller & Maranta



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A simple and strong form, a
focus on essentiality,
conscious inconsistency

School in Paspels, Paspels, Switzerland
1998, Valerio Olgiati



26



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A strong symmetry, an
exaggerated entrance,
moments of broken
repetition

Cantonal Museum of Fine Arts, Chur, Switzerland
2016, Barozzi / Veiga

Part I: Preconditions

Learning from Switzerland

We as architects have much we can learn from Switzerland. Let us learn from its unique qualities, that as a product of the country's diversity and historical development, have manifest themselves in a powerful yet modest architecture. As a nation, one aspect that makes Switzerland particularly interesting and exceptional is the cultural diversity within its political and geographic boundaries. The nation consists of 26 cantons (states), has four official languages, and contains a vastly diverse landscape. This makes it difficult to image a common ground for the Swiss. Although this can expectedly result in tension both locally and abroad—the Swiss are particularly protective of their diversity while also embracing the idea of being unified by it.

The fact of a nation being defined by its political boundaries rather than a unified culture and language creates the dilemma of defining what exactly “Swissness” means. The multiculturalism of Switzerland has in the past drawn a number of responses, notably with the artist Ben Vautier writing “La Suisse n'existe pas!...Switzerland

does not exist!” on the wall of the Swiss Pavilion during the 1992 Seville World Exposition.² Though relatively blatant and simplistic, this statement does raise an interesting question concerning culture. After all, how can a nation exist and prosper without having a unified individual culture? How can it be considered a “whole” when in fact, it is a collection of seemingly unrelated parts? If this is the case, what then, can be characterized as being uniquely Swiss, beyond a simple definition of the nation’s geographical and linguistic boundaries?

The difficulty in defining “Swissness” thus requires an exploration of current and historical conditions of politics, customs, and landscape, among other topics. Perhaps due to its cultural heterogeneity, as opposed to most other western nations, Switzerland does not believe in, but rather has a disdain for centralized power.³ The Swiss political system is founded on the principle of no single individual holding the highest political position, but rather it being shared between seven elected individuals from various political parties,

² Cary Steinmann, “Switzerland as a Brand,” *COMPETENCE*, International Edition, (2012).

³ R. James Breiding, “Beautiful Business,” in *Swiss Sensibility: The Culture of Architecture in Switzerland*, ed. Anna Roos (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2017), 47.

holding diverse, varied, and at times opposing agendas.⁴ This political structure allows for the representation of various groups containing diverse beliefs to have a stake in the decision-making process, creating a structure where the values and goals of the collective are held to a higher regard than those of any single individual. This has allowed for distinct cultures, dialects, customs, and a certain level of autonomy to remain within the various regions and cantons. By allowing for a shared political system, finding a balance is crucial. This requires compromise and understanding from those holding political positions as well as residents alike.

As the political system balances various agendas, and at times has been criticized for its resulting slow decision-making, perhaps this has played a role in influencing the historical neutrality of the nation. Switzerland has after all taken an official neutral stance in foreign affairs since signing of the Paris Agreement in 1815.⁵ This independent and relative self-reliant nature has created a proud yet somewhat isolating mentality. Though at times detrimental within the ever-globalizing

⁴ Steinmann, "Switzerland as a Brand."

⁵ Kate Morris and Timothy J. White, "Neutrality and the European Union: The case of Switzerland" in *Journal of Law and Conflict Resolution* Vol. 3(7), (2011), 104-111.

society in which we live, having this level of independence and reluctance to change has been rather successful in helping to preserve local customs and traditions. The traditions that become preserved with this mentality being engrained in its population results in the architecture of Switzerland having a similar unique, relatively stubborn, and individual language. Throughout centuries of developing and defining Swiss values and representing them in architecture, it is of no surprise that it can be at times challenging for new ideas and concepts to be accepted by the local population.

This mentality has been in question with regards to Switzerland and its relationship to the globalizing world. In the absence of involvement in international affairs, particularly during the World Wars—the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and technology between Switzerland and its surrounding nations suffered. As an example, rather than embracing modernism as a product and result of the great advances in innovation, technology, and development following the Second World War, as the majority of their European neighbors had, Switzerland looked back to their own heritage and history. Rather than focusing their architectural discourse on industrialization, innovation of materials, and building

technology, the Swiss made a conscious decision to protect their own individual heritage. The shift of focusing attention to preserving local customs, traditions, and values and exploring them through architectural means reinforces the fact of Switzerland being a highly individualistic nation.

This current condition of Switzerland is also complimented by a sense of modesty. This in part is attributed to the Protestant reform of the 16th century that began in Switzerland. As a response to the beliefs of the Catholic Church, a large following of Calvinist teachings took hold in Switzerland. Being dissatisfied with the beliefs of the Catholic Church, a following of supporters of the reform established their own views and teachings. Contrary to the Catholic Church at the time, Calvinism preached modesty and quality. As designs and commissions for religious spaces for the Catholic Church were given to those of high artistic skill, capable of achieving grand designs that exuded wealth and prosperity, leaders of the Calvinist church had a different vision—a vision founded on the understanding that true quality was based on measurable factors of efficiency, resiliency, and superior engineering.⁶

⁶ R. James Breiding, “Beautiful Business,” 47.

Understanding the protection of tradition, reinforced by political and religious structures, leads to a better understanding of how Swiss values have been established and the effects this has had on the mentality of the Swiss, and in turn, the built environment. An additional and crucial value of the Swiss, specifically with regards to architecture, is that of dedication towards craftsmanship. The value of local craft, particularly in rural regions, is highly valued. Even in today's contemporary Swiss architectural practices, there is a very close relationship with and collaboration between architects, artists, and craftsmen. As preserving the local identities and traditions of the various and diverse regions of Switzerland is important for the Swiss, representing unique crafts of individuals of these regions is greatly valued. Having a physical representation of local identity solidified within a work of architecture, is crucial for preservation of its identity.

The handcraft and skill of artisans extends further, into the construction industry. With the vast network of roads, bridges, and tunnels, and the need for this infrastructure in the Swiss terrain, an affinity for concrete as a robust, adaptable, and dependable construction material has been established. In the diverse

yet unpredictable landscape of Switzerland—the need for precision in the development and conception of dependable infrastructure has created a high level of skill within the construction industry. This skillful handling of the material is something which architects have also grown to rely on.⁷ With the precision and attention to detail of the skilled workers within the industry—it is of no surprise that concrete has become a significant and popular construction material that has come to define Switzerland. The quality and skill of those working within the Swiss concrete industry is undeniable, ultimately allowing for an architectural heritage being defined by a certain robustness. This has created an architectural culture that is often characterized as unique due to the superior quality of construction rather than any experimental, visual, or technological measures.

Swiss architecture has been in the past reduced to, and at times criticized for focusing more on detailed construction and reliability in lieu of experimentation and visually dominating architecture, but how did this become the defining quality of Swiss architecture? Switzerland,

⁷ Irina Davidovici, “A Cultivated Ordinarity: Cultural Models in Recent Swiss Architecture,” in *Swiss Sensibility: The Culture of Architecture in Switzerland*, ed. Anna Roos (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2017), 185.

after all, is comprised of a landscape painted with mountains, glaciers, unforgiving terrain, and unpredictable weather. As negative consequence due to climate, environment, and terrain are not infrequent and rather expected, a relatively high level of uncertainty exists among the population and results in residents taking a cautious stance within their daily lives, and architects within their work. With the unpredictability and uncertainty that comes from living in such challenging alpine conditions, the Swiss remain conservative in their understanding that “reliability is measured during times of hardship, not under fair weather conditions.”⁸ Conservativeness as a response to unpredictability is as a result, ingrained in the Swiss mentality. In an unforgiving environment of inevitable and ever-present adversity, an overcompensation is made with regards to the built environment, with bridges, tunnels, buildings, etc. being meticulously detailed and engineered. This allows for a sense of security and safety in an otherwise unpredictable environment.

Honesty regarding construction materials and their applications can be defined as a quality that is heavily associated with Swiss architecture. As Switzerland is not

⁸ R. James Breiding, “Beautiful Business,” 48.

particularly abundant in natural resources, the Swiss have typically built with what was readily available—primarily concrete and wood. The repeated use of few available materials has led to a very high understanding and skill of working with them. The development of a material culture in Switzerland, reinforced by the existing themes of modesty and a need for reliability—has created an affinity for these materials to the extent that very few foreign materials are ever used in construction. Simplicity of form and dedication towards fewer and higher quality materials are a few of the defining elements of Swiss architecture.

This devotion towards simplicity and honesty has created a basic and simplistic definition of Swiss architecture as that of the “concrete box”. Though not entirely incorrect, the Swiss “concrete box” needs to be understood beyond its visual representation. In the visual society in which we live, it is not adequate to rely solely on visual cues to determine quality. What you see is no longer what you get. The concrete box, as an example, is not merely just that. It is centuries of development, of trial and error, of learning and adapting to environmental conditions. It is the culmination of all factors that, only

together, have played a role in developing the strong Swiss architectural language, as it is known today.

Through this brief exploration of how external factors have influenced the architectural language of Switzerland, we can understand that the architectural heritage of Switzerland has been a result not of a conscious functional or formal exploration, but a direct result of cultural, environmental and historical factors that have collectively worked to define Swiss architecture today. What can be learned through this exploration is that in order to properly understand a specific building, an analysis and synthesis of the history and conditions of its context must be undertaken. A building is never simply just a building, but always a reflection of values, beliefs, history, and context. Though this investigation is focused on a uniquely specific architectural culture, the lessons of detail, devotion to material, and modesty are universal concepts that are crucial to architecture, independent of context or function, and crucial for the development of an architectural language that is above all else, a response to present conditions of the world we live in.

Non-Referentiality

Architecture today must respond to its immediate context as well as to its global context. A precondition for an architecture founded on the principle of a contextual response requires an understanding of the current global condition. It is a fact that today we are living in an ever-increasing global society, a postmodern society—one in which the exchange of cultures, ideas, and concepts has reached a certain level of familiarity and expectation. If this is the current condition that we are living in, how do we find an appropriate architectural response and how do we ultimately define ‘value’ in the built environment? Should we be responding with architecture stemming from general historical reference, that requires a certain level of nostalgia for the past? Should we be responding to local customs that embody particular traditions and characteristic nuance? Or should we be formulating a response to the current situation—a diverse, postmodern and global world?

Valerio Olgiati and Markus Breidschmid, in their book titled “Non-Referential Architecture” argue for a response in architecture that reacts to the current condition of our world, that is, the society of a non-

referential world. The concept they define is understood as the non-referential world existing in a state of heterogeneity rather than any collective uniformity or homogeneity, which leads to the conclusion that assigning meaning to an individual work of architecture is ultimately ineffective.⁹ This is so because as architects frequently strive to project a meaning through their work, it needs to be understood that we live in an incredibly diverse society, and thus an architectural meaning is rarely universally and culturally independent. It is typically a response to an individual worldview, one that is rarely shared by the entirety of the world. The meaning thus becomes lost to individuals belonging to different cultural backgrounds than that of the designer.

This concept of non-referentiality is further understood as a work of architecture no longer being a representation of anything other than itself. The topic has rather recently entered architectural discourse and stems from the understanding that in today's global society, there is no longer any consensus of common social ideals. Thus, architecture should be evaluated by means of its architectonic language and be representative of nothing other than itself.

⁹ Olgiati, and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*. 13.

Historically, the world has been repeatedly divided by values and beliefs. Hostility and conflict have stemmed from opposing values and justified on individual principles. Values and goals have been debated, established, and enforced—creating relative unity and homogeneity among respective regions within defined political boundaries. As the global population grew, developed, and industrialized—reliance on trade became inevitable. Alongside the trade of goods and services, great intellectual exchange followed; with new ideas, methods, and concepts being shared globally. This ultimately contributed to widespread and intercontinental migration, a topic of debate and discussion still in our present world. The result of this is that we now are inhabitants of a multicultural, multilingual, and incredibly diverse society. Considering an architectural response to a specific group or culture is argued by Olgiati and Breidschmid as no longer being valid.¹⁰ The ambiguity that results from an unrelated, yet ever-connected global society is the foundation of non-referential architecture.

As ideals and values are in fact not ‘universally understood’, and may never be, architects can no longer respond to a single specific understanding, value, or

¹⁰ Ibid., 16

associated meaning within our society. The population that today comprises our society is diverse—with unique and individual backgrounds, beliefs, and values. Thus, an architectural response must have an understanding of this as the present condition rather than being based on a predefined set of individual principles. The postmodern world no longer accepts architecture as a representation of a single individual's or group's worldview. Every building affects a larger population than that of its immediate context, and non-referential architecture has the ability of resonating to some degree, with all individuals rather than the select few.

For the non-referential world, Olgiati and Breidschmid believe in an architectural response of “realism without an interpretation”.¹¹ In this sense, they argue that a building is to focus on the tangible physical architectonic elements that compose our built environment rather than the metaphors or symbols that often accompany architecture today. This is valid in that the physical existence of a building should be founded in clarity and concentrating on the architectonic language expressed by a building, however this statement is problematic. A building's architectonic logic should in

¹¹ Ibid.

fact, stimulate interpretation rather than being free from it. A space that allows for individual interpretation allows also for individual connection and stimulation and results in engaging architecture. If a space does not allow for interpretation, the individual engaging with it will never find an individual connection to it. It will, as a result, always feel as a foreign and unrelated space.

A building or space that focuses on realism can, and should, be valid in an interpretable sense. If architecture cannot stand for, be a manifestation of, or represent anything but itself, it must facilitate interpretation as a tool of engagement. Olgiati and Breidschmid also write:

“For non-referential architecture, the following question arises: how can a building make sense? Less broadly: in our extremely unrelated, heterogenous, polyvalent, unconventional, informal, decentralized, and spread-out world, which is increasingly freed of ideologies, how can we design, or again, project buildings that possess a general validity and common value beyond the

particular meaning they might have for one private individual?”¹²

With these challenges within our present postmodern or non-referential world, contrary to what Olgiati and Breidschmid write, interpretation is indeed the answer. We as architects have the new responsibility today of finding and defining what in our heterogenous world is in fact universal and what can be established as stimulating in a universally interpretable sense. Stimulation and universal interpretability can be achieved when a space is engaging, psychological stimulating, and thought-provoking. The spaces that are thought provoking should also allow for individual evaluation and understanding. Designing spaces that are universally stimulating must consider and challenge the aspects of our being that are believed to be universal, regardless of an individual's background. What unifies us all, what is in fact universal, is our basic human condition. All humans are capable of feeling emotion, of loving, crying, laughing, of feeling happy, sad, angry, or lonely. We are however, all individuals of unrelated backgrounds and experiences

¹² Ibid.,19

and are thus capable of individual interpretation and understanding.

Valerio Olgiati and Peter Zumthor, with their offices in close proximity to each other, located at just over 20km apart in the canton of Graubünden, Switzerland, their namesake indeed have very opposing understandings of architectural quality. Though the list of ideological differences between these architects is vast and substantial, and no attempt will be made to document them here, the list of similarities and beliefs is comparatively brief. Both architects firmly believe in an architectural response to a global society without relying on symbols as justification of meaning. Compared to Olgiati's belief in non-referential architecture, Zumthor also has an aversion to symbolism and metaphorical meaning in architecture. He writes:

“Everything merges into everything else, and mass communication creates an artificial world of signs. Arbitrariness prevails...The world is full of signs and information, which stand for things that no one fully understands because they, too, turn out to be mere signs for other things. The real

thing remains hidden. No one ever gets to see it.”¹³

In a similar fashion to Olgiati, Zumthor’s distrust of symbols is clear. The main difference between their concepts is that for Zumthor, the failure of symbols is in their masking of reality, that they are hiding real architectural qualities, characteristics, and experiences by the symbolic or verbal justification for its being. Olgiati’s concern with symbols, as he understands them, is that they are unnecessary, superfluous, and ultimately misleading. Though these are slight variations of a similar concept, both understandings are important to consider and understand for an architecture containing a muted intensity.

We must make a conscious effort to find the ‘real’ within the ‘hidden’. This means that if we remove all symbols and signs from our work, all metaphorical explanation, and free it from all extra-architectural meaning and associations, we are left with stripped-down, bare, and pure version of architecture. This results in an architecture that holds value and speaks truths through its universally valid conditions of material, form, and

¹³ Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1999), 16-17.

context. We should not be masking truth with symbols and signs and false metaphors and relationships. A building that focuses on truths of architecture and our universal human condition of emotion and sensation will always result in an engaging and honest architecture.

For Olgiati and Breidschmid, non-referential architecture, as it cannot rely on extra-architectural sources for meaning, also finds meaning in itself. The argument they make is to free a building of symbols and images and rely solely on the architectonic means of a space. This leads to a building that makes sense by means of its presence and is thus sense-making.¹⁴ Without relying on justification from extra-architectural sources, a building is for the first time allowed to be simply that—a building.

Alberto Pérez-Gómez, in his essay titled “The Space of Architecture: Meaning as Presence and Representation”, expands on this idea with a more in-depth explanation of defining meaning within architecture, he writes:

“The work of architecture, properly speaking, preserves its meaning within itself. It is not an

¹⁴ Olgiati, and Breitschmid, *Non-Referential Architecture*. 24.

allegory in the sense that it says one thing and gives us to understand something else. What the work has to say can be found only within itself, grounded in language, and yet beyond it. Experiencing and participating in a work of architecture has a fundamental temporal dimension.”¹⁵

It is important to make the distinction that Pérez-Gómez links architectonic language with the experiential qualities of architecture, while Olgiati and Breidschmid focus on architecture only in an architectural realm—creating an argument that architecture should stand for and affect architecture and nothing beyond it. Architecture cannot be however, solely for architecture’s sake, it must connect with and focus on human experience. Pérez-Gómez’s phenomenological definition of architectural language is distinct in that he defines architecture as finding meaning within itself and that it is critical that we relate it to our human condition and our ability to experience it. This is the definition that best

¹⁵ Alberto Pérez-Gómez, “The Space of Architecture: Meaning as Presence and Representation” in *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture* (San Francisco: William Stout, 2006), 22-23

describes architecture and its relationship to meaning and our human condition. This is the definition that best relates to a muted intensity to architecture.

The concept of a work of architecture expressing its voice though its formal language can be understood as self-referentiality, or a building only referring to itself rather than to any extra-architectural themes. Self-referentiality stands for architecture finding meaning within itself, in its own individual composition, conditions, rules, and restrictions, and leads to an architecture that is also self-reliant rather than reliant on extra-architectural means. No longer is architecture a response to any political, social, cultural, or religious themes. It must now be a response to our human condition and our experience of the world around us. No longer is architectural quality defined by its symbols and false metaphors, it is now a pure architecture; architecture that is honest, expressive, and engaging our human condition.

We can engage with and experience space. We can be moved and affected by it. But what about the space itself? Does it not exist as an element within a larger context? Does it not affect its surroundings, and in turn, is it not affected by it? Without considering and

understanding that a space must be connected to its surroundings, an inauthenticity and unwelcoming language is projected by the space itself.

The validity of the argument for a non-referential architecture is justified by an understanding of our postmodern world, though a particular question regarding context begins to arise. How does a belief in a non-referential world engage a building's local context? Without conscious decision-making and analysis that grounds a work in its context—does a building not fail if it holds value only in the global society of the world and not when considering local tradition and culture? Does this not lead to an acceptance of globalization and a disregard for its effects on diminishing local culture? This is the major challenge of responding to a postmodern world.

We can accept non-referential architecture as a valid response to our postmodern world. The universality of the concept leads to architecture that, regardless of location, can have a significant effect on visitors as well as the local community. A building can, and should, be a response to both the local and global community. Without considering the local traditions and techniques of a culture in which a building will stand, the result is an

architecture that is uninformed and oblivious to the value of history and tradition.

A building considering only the global situation of society, while existing, affecting, and ultimately neglecting the unique qualities of a local community, does not lead to a successful architecture. A balance between introducing a new language, considering local tradition, and being sensitive to its surrounding context is the major challenge that architecture of muted intensity must overcome. A mutedly intense architecture accepts that we live in a postmodern world to which we must respond with non-referentiality, with the meaning of space being defined by the ethereal qualities of a space, by relating to our human condition, and by grounding a building in its context.

Responsibility & Honesty

We as architects must find our individual voice. We cannot be quiet and fall into the mundane. We cannot be passive, but rather critical of current trends and the current global environment. We need a message—one of morality and ambition. Architects of today's postmodern world have the challenging undertaking of accepting the fact that the only architecture that will hold value and be resilient—is one that does not rely on metaphors and symbols for justification. In this sense, the definition of resiliency is rather ambiguous. Do we focus on sustainability, the technologically-advanced, the robust, or something different entirely? This question is one that each individual architect has the duty of answering for themselves. As the main responsibility of architects is to design meaningful spaces that resonate with and satisfy the needs of the user, it is important to evaluate different methods with which this can be achieved.

When speaking towards responsibility, it is important to first evaluate and understand ourselves as designers and to interpret our personal interests as an aggregate of our individual experiences. What this does is allow for every building to have a uniquely individual

character, as a manifestation of the designer's experiences. This creates a language that objects to buildings embodying qualities that are associated with themes related to impersonation or reproduction, of mimicry or continuity of existing established norms. Zumthor is interested in exactly this, in understanding how a building came to exist in a deeper sense, independent from the purely rational physical condition of a space, but founded on the designers themselves, he writes:

“When architects talk about their buildings, what they say is often at odds with the statements of the buildings themselves. This is probably connected with the fact that they tend to talk a great deal about the rational, thought-out aspects of their work and less about the secret passion which inspires it.”¹⁶

This statement is valid as we are indeed living in a world that believes that architectural quality is defined by measurable means. Even though a building may be intriguing due to its symbolic justification, we may never

¹⁶ Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture*. 20.

quite understand what the inspiration behind it may have been. Zumthor is intrigued by how architects have been influenced by their past and their upbringing, as this has the largest influence on the way we think, design, construct, and engage with the built environment. The responsibility of an architect then, to expand on Zumthor's statement, is in digging into our past and consciously synthesizing our memories and experiences and understanding the effect they have on the way we think as architects. This allows for an architectural language that relates to our passions and individual interests, allowing for the architecture that we design and create to be original and irreplicable. As no two architects share the same exact experiences, every architect has a uniquely individual story to tell through the spaces that they design.

Zumthor also writes, "A building must be autonomous, it must embody a personal interpretation of the brief."¹⁷ This is the first step to understanding the value that architects bring to the construction and development of the built environment. Even though we understand that a work of architecture to be a product

¹⁷ Peter Zumthor, "Body and Image," in *Archipelago: Essays on Architecture*, ed. Peter MacKeith (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2006), 205.

intended to satisfy other individuals' needs, having a clear and conscious understand of our personal goals and beliefs is critical to creating architecture that is unique and individual. Before thinking about who or what we are designing for, we must analyze how our personal interests align with the needs of the postmodern world. To produce a unique space, one of the key tools we can rely on is that of our individuality, our backgrounds and experiences that have influenced our being and in turn, our decision-making.

Though the origins or our ideas are valuable, the space being designed of course cannot be purely based on a single architect's values and beliefs, as is unfortunately found to be the case with numerous architects that have influenced and shaped our common built environment. A building that is founded solely on the goals of an architect does not engage the population of our present postmodern world. It only engages an architect's ego and ultimately holds validity only in the eyes of the designer.

The challenging undertaking and responsibility of an architect in today's world is to balance their individual values and beliefs with the values and beliefs of the user of the space within the postmodern world of today. As an ability of an architect is to visualize a finished

product or atmosphere, balancing their personal goals with the goals of the user is paramount. This is achieved by the architect “internalizing the needs of the final user”.¹⁸ This begins by an architect asking questions such as: *would I enjoy this space? And would I be comfortable here?* The way these questions can be answered, the way an architect can in fact internalize the needs of the user, is by allowing themselves to understand the universal human ability to feel sensation. Sensation here can be linked to emotion, and in the best case, a personal enjoyment of space. This can be brought out by expression of the atmospheric qualities of a space; the elements of architecture that evoke real human emotional responses. As few things are in fact universal and transcend cultural boundaries, internalizing the needs of the final user is related to internalizing the needs of any human regardless of their background.

For Juhani Pallasmaa, a different though complimentary definition of architectural responsibility exists. To achieve a powerful and moving architecture, Pallasmaa elaborates on the idea that uncertainty and

¹⁸ Klaske Kavik, and Gus Tielens, “Atmosphere, Compassion and Embodied Experience: A Conversation about Atmosphere with Juhani Pallasmaa,” *OASE Building Atmospheres*, no. 91 (2013): 41-43.

slowness are crucial for designers of spaces that contain an atmospheric language.¹⁹ He explains that clear decision-making and a “behavior of knowing” are cultural constructs, and that uncertainty is “of the highest importance in the process of creativity”.²⁰ His argument is founded on the understanding that a process of discovery is necessary. A behavior of knowing is in this sense related to confidence. We can be confident in our abilities, we can be confident in our design solutions, though in order to make accurate and indeed correct decisions, we must use exploration as a design tool. Rarely is our first idea our best, regardless of how much confidence we may have in it. As we may stubbornly focus our attention on realizing a specific design decision, we eliminate the possibility to be surprised and to discover new and potentially better possibilities. This is something that ultimately will have a direct effect on the atmospheric quality of the space being designed. Certainty stems from confidence, which leads to arrogance and results in uninformed decisions, as informed decisions must always go through a process of trial and error and exploration. Without spending the

¹⁹ Ibid., 37-41

²⁰ Ibid.

time to evaluate possibilities, and to draw conclusions from them, how can we be certain that they are indeed the right decisions?

This can be understood as being a conscious slowness. Both Pallasmaa and Zumthor believe in a 'slow architecture'. Though not an opposition to utilizing modern digital design tools, there is a clear benefit to slowing down the design process to achieve a better understanding of what we are designing. Slowing down allows the designer to spend more time thinking, contemplating, evaluating, and understanding what is being drawn and designed, enabling connections and relationships to be made, to consider multiple ideas simultaneously. To produce a truly moving atmospheric quality in our works, a 'fast architecture' will never suffice. Fast architecture, which is increasingly becoming the norm, produces spaces that may be economical, but the result of this is spaces and architecture that are in fact not engaging, not contemplative, and not stimulating.

Slowing down during the design process helps avoid compromise, while fast architecture cannot avoid it. If our goal is to produce spaces that evoke an emotional response or express a strong atmosphere, we must slow down to be able to understand our work and

goals and allow for discovery and uncertainty. Slowing down during the design process also allows the designer to better understand a space, and to be more critical of the overall quality of the final product.

Unrelated yet equally as crucial as slowness, a responsibility and goal for an architect should be honesty. Though honesty does in part rely on an architect's understanding of materials and organization of space—architectural honesty, in today's postmodern world, has a deeper meaning beyond the utilization of materials in an honest manner. The ethical dimension of the work of an architect relates to the critical, though indirect connection between designer and user. A visitor of a space must be able to trust the designer. One of the basic human needs, after all, is the need for safety. With the amount of time individuals spend engaging with the built environment, we must be able to trust it. And how can we trust the built environment if we cannot trust those who are in charge of designing it, those who are collectively affecting our daily lives, our rhythm, and our actions? A feeling of safety in architecture stems from honesty, results in trust and begins with the architect. Gion A. Caminada writes:

“When one has trust one can stay alert, watch carefully, remain open. This become especially important in view of the huge outside forces affecting us today — the obvious is no longer enough. This obliges us to reflect very carefully. We’ve wandered from the path, our earlier self-confidence has worn thin, ‘keep on going’ is no longer an option.”²¹

What Caminada is writing about here is the idea that once we have satisfied our primal need for safety, we allow ourselves to absorb our surroundings and open ourselves to be affected by it. We have however, lost a great deal of trust in the world surrounding us. We are increasingly living in a state of skepticism and suspicion, leading inevitably to an ever-present feeling of uncertainty. A perpetual uncertainty has of course never been a goal, though an unfortunate consequence. We are permanently surrounded by, and also rely on, the built environment, and if we cannot trust it or those who are in charge of shaping it, what or who can we trust? We need to redefine the role of an architect, founded on

²¹ Gion A. Caminada, *On the Path to Building: A Discussion on Architecture with Florian Aicher* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2018), 60.

honesty and challenging the skepticism and suspicion within the we world we presently inhabit. We need to win back trust in an untrustworthy world.

The architect's role is that of an author, not an illusionist. Leslie Van Duzer makes this comparison by writing,

“if we don't remember, we guess; if we don't see, we imagine. The illusionist depends on our willingness and capability to trust in truth without proof; he relies upon our tendency to make dangerous leaps of faith.”²²

An architect and illusionist may hold similar responsibilities, though with opposing goals. Both must engage with their audience, both predict and expect a response. While illusionists compose acts to challenge our expectations, their responsibility falls in first evaluating and defining universally established truths. The same responsibility exists for architects—to define universally human truths that hold true regardless of cultural background. With a defined ‘truth’, the illusionist finds

²² Leslie Van Duzer, “In Wonder,” in *Archipelago: Essays on Architecture*, ed. Peter MacKeith (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2006), 23-27.

success when an act is composed that contradicts an expected truth. An architect, however, finds success if a space is able to reinforce a truth. This is where the topic of material honesty plays a significant role. With experience and skill, any material can be deceptively honest. With expertise and good material handling abilities, visual cues do not suffice in revealing the truth. With reliance on our perception, if a material looks and feels honest, then we will inevitably perceive it as such. An architect must not act as an illusionist.

An architect holds the power and has the ability to influence our lives, to operate our focus and regulate our movement. Ultimately, the architect influences our emotions the moment we engage with a building or space. Though the ability to control perception is not particularly challenging for an architect, why should an architect be honest rather than misleading in their representation?

If an architect is to engage with visitors through their architecture in a personal level, it must be done so with the understanding that a connection and relationship can be translated only through the space itself. After all, a space is a direct reflection of its architect's morals and values. If a building is dishonest and deceptive, the

architect in turn, is also understood as such. If a space is to be trusted, the architect must have the integrity to not allow individuals to believe in false truths, to be misled, misguided, or misdirected.

It takes little understanding thus, to see that a building ultimately exists to satisfy human needs and desires. It does not exist to satisfy the desires of its architect. An architect does not live in a realm of their own creations. It needs to be understood that an architect needs to consider the user, the context, and their connections to society as a whole. Architecture in the postmodern world, in its rejection of symbols and metaphors, finds meaning in its connection to human beings rather than in misleading and false metaphors. As a good building satisfies our basic human need of safety, it thus allows for individual exploration and self-actualization from those engaging with it. An architecture of a muted intensity understands its place. It understands where it exists, how it exists, and ultimately why it exists.

An honest contextual response in architecture looks towards its surroundings, as all architecture should, and looks beyond the physical elements that comprise its surrounding environment. When looking at the context in which a building will exist, we see explicit colors,

proportions, and materials. We see forms. We see textures and we begin to make associations and relationships regarding them and their context. By simply looking, we understand the existing state, the existing situation, but we do not understand how or why it came to be.

We rely on visual cues within our environment to make associations, but this can be misleading and quite problematic as well. As an example, critical regionalism as a movement can be evaluated with regards to its visual dimension. Critical regionalism was established as an architectural movement during the 20th century. It rejected the universal principles of modernist architecture and looked at the globalizing world with skepticism. Kenneth Frampton, a key individual of the movement, writes:

“The fundamental strategy of Critical Regionalism is to mediate the impact of universal civilization with elements derived *indirectly* from the peculiarities of a particular place... Critical

Regionalism depends on maintaining a high level of critical self-consciousness.”²³

In other words, critical regionalism attempted to preserve the nuance of local tradition. It was a failed attempt at battling against inevitable globalization. Notable individuals of the movement saw modernism as threatening to local cultures and their architectural identities. Though with arguably good intentions of somehow mediating between a globalizing world and local architectural tradition, critical regionalism was conclusively dishonest in its physical representation. While looking towards local architectural identities in an attempt to preserve them and call attention back to them, the movement focused primarily on the physical attributes of local traditions. The movement failed to understand why and how certain traditions came to exist and instead sought out the simple acknowledgement of existence of these particularities. Understanding the origins and process of how and why something was established has significantly more value than

²³ Kenneth Frampton, “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: The New Press, 1998) 23.

acknowledging that a particularity or nuance of its being exists in the first place.

While the loss of certain local traditions is tragic, it is however, inevitable. We cannot preserve every idea, tradition, or international style. Architecture today should not fall victim to sentimentality for the past or for local tradition. At the same time, architecture today should avoid purely aesthetic rhetoric founded on visual cues of its surroundings. Doing so for the sake of effectiveness that mimicking familiar qualities can have on a building are detrimental to an effective architecture of a muted intensity.

For a contextual response, architecture must be careful and attentive, yet deliberate. A contextual response requires careful understanding and subtle redefinition. This does not mean that new construction must blend into its surroundings, but rather that architecture must be sensitive to its surroundings while not falsely impersonating tradition. An honest building does not impersonate nor imitate. It is unique, it is individual, yet sensitive to its location.

Part II: Principles of a Muted Intensity

Singularity & Identity

In the postmodern world that contains the heterogenous qualities of a global society, where urban landscapes are a composition of a multitude of cultural and ideological views—we can no longer strive for a singular or uniform language within the built environment. As a result, every building must be a manifestation of its designer’s response to the current state of affairs. What then, is singularity in architecture?

One definition of architectural singularity is an individuality or newness of a building or space that goes beyond its physical image; a uniqueness that produces a strong and easily understood identity. This definition relies on the feelings and emotive qualities of a space that allow a visitor to sense that they have engaged with something truly unique, something particular, something extraordinary.

Experiencing a muted intensity, as any architecture does, begins with an impression. The impression is an important tool to immediately express a building’s values and instill either a sense of belonging to

or withdrawal from of its immediate context. As a building is approached, it must allow the visitor to contemplate what the building stands for, what its values are, and begin a conversation with the visitor. Is the building meant to be modest and simple, not trying to call attention to itself and ultimately blending into its surroundings? Is it meant to stand out, acting as a singular entity, symbolically removing itself from its context, with an apparent disregard for it? Or is the building creating a dialogue between where it is, why it is there, and what it is trying to accomplish by the nature of its existence?

This is a frequently reoccurring topic of debate in architecture and has strong support for either position—whether a building should conform to or be independent from its surroundings. From the perspective of Gion A. Caminada—a balance between both is necessary. Though mainly focused on the particularities of architecture within rural Graubünden villages in Switzerland, he speaks towards his experience with the idea of the ‘almost identical’ and explains:

“Identical simply means: congruent, an exact copy. That would be monotony, that would be bad. The ‘almost identical’, on the other hand

fascinates, shapes a place, has a powerful effect. This creates identity. And there's no identity without difference.”²⁴

An interesting topic is introduced here, when considering Caminada's statement that “there's no identity without difference.” There is an important distinction that needs to be made between individual identity and collective identity. Individual identity can be defined as the character of a singular building or space in relation to its surrounding immediate context. Only when a clear and directly defined distinction is made from a building's immediate context can a unique identity be instilled. The identity of a region, neighborhood, or community as a whole however, requires repetition and continuity of an architectural language within its boundaries. For Caminada, who works primarily within culturally sensitive and architecturally unique Swiss communities, only an “almost identical” approach is appropriate. In Graubünden villages, architecture is a critical element that relates to local culture, history, and customs. In more heterogenous environments such as in major metropolitan areas, there is not always a present, or

²⁴ Gion A. Caminada, *On the Path to Building*, 105.

preexisting visible local identity; a result and reflection of the diversity of the inhabitants residing there. The architectural language of cities is often as diverse and independent as the residents themselves. Therefore, a building containing an individual identity is more appropriate and better accepted in these environments.

When a building is an “exact copy” of its surroundings, it becomes simply an extension of the existing situation. It concedes to the ideals set forth by its context and in a postmodern world, holds value only in an immediate local context and only when upholding tradition is of critical importance. To work this way is to be agreeable to the existing situation and fails in having a unique identity and fails in achieving the singularity that a muted intensity is striving for. This means that in order to define how a building should exist in its environment, an analysis of the surrounding context is necessary. This helps in finding an appropriate response based on what is valued, what is necessary, what is superfluous, and what is ill-fitting to its context.

Caminada’s ‘almost identical’ concept leads, however, to another rather interesting topic of tension between a building and its surrounding situation. In the postmodern world, this approach shows a certain

recognition of a local context, without being merely an imitation of it. This approach instills a particular unique identity in a building, especially among its surrounding built environment. This is one approach that leads to a defined singularity of the work of architecture, though it is not the only valid method of achieving it.

Architecture of singularity must be critical of the current trends of society, and thus a response containing an independent language to that of its surrounding is the language that will consistently be successful in creating a powerful and unique character. Utilizing this response to a building within its surroundings allows for a certain language of resistance and tension to be expressed. The dialogue of tension created here between the building and its context allows for it to be read and appreciated individually. The contrasting language serves to heighten the emotional experience for the visitor, creating a narrative for the visitor to follow. This of course has some limitations as a building that fails to contain any language that relates it to its context will result in a completely foreign entity which can often lead to feeling of discomfort or even rejection of it by its community. Thus, a carefully orchestrated balance between newness, familiarity, and similarity must be utilized.

A distinct belief that a muted intensity supports, is that design decisions or quality of space are not defined simply by their technological solution. Just as the specifics of tools of design and production do not define the quality of an architect, technology does not define the quality of a space. As an example, we can take the standardization concepts of the khrushchyovka of the soviet era. The khrushchyovka was the product of Nikita Khrushchev, the leader of the Soviet Union from 1953 until 1964. During this major industrialization era of the Soviet Union, Khrushchev argued against architectural superfluity and ornament of distinctly individual designs. Instead, he argued for the use of reinforced concrete elements and structures with the primary goal of minimizing cost and material waste. The product of Soviet-era ideals—this standardization of the building process using prefabricated concrete elements for the optimization and replicability of architecture was a technological innovation that worked to solve the post-war housing crisis.²⁵ Initially developed as method to construct quick and temporary housing, it had indeed

²⁵ Reinier de Graaf, *Four Walls and a Roof: The Complex Nature of a Simple Profession* (Cambridge, Mass, United States: Harvard University Press, 2017), 304.

solved the need for housing built in a replicable, economical, and efficient fashion. Though this was an important development within the construction industry, the product, as was the goal, was to produce replicable and uniform housing blocks. The quality of this prefabricated construction method can be evaluated only in a singular dimension. It cannot be understood or evaluated in an experiential context, only in a technological one. As each khrushchyovka is related to the next, we cannot begin to appreciate each building individually. The system must be thus evaluated as the collection of all khrushchyovka's—as the entire system itself. The system itself failed to produce meaningful, stimulating, or experientially interesting spaces, and it can only be evaluated as such—as technologically innovative, though lacking entirely in distinct character.

The unique individualistic aspects of what makes powerful architecture can hardly be achieved by relying on technological solutions or by re-investigating the principles of the khrushchyovka. When speaking of a muted intensity, innovation in technology is supported when understanding the notion that a “one size fits all” approach to architecture consistently fails in reinforcing individuality and singularity. As the decisions made

during this era, characterized by prefabrication, modularity, and optimization worked to solve a larger problem, its goals do not align with the goals of a muted intensity. This is because architecture of a muted intensity values individual experience over any technological solution. Though architecture of a muted intensity does not reject modern technological solutions, it looks beyond them, to find the particularity of a space, its singularity, its individuality, and its identity. Technological solutions do not define the quality of a work of architecture.

The singularity and unique identity of a work of architecture breeds intrigue when the visitor is able to distinguish a narrative. This can be a narrative based in the relationship between the visitor and building, building and context, or context and visitor.

Architecture of a muted intensity provides an alternative to the “broad brush” architectural approach, as Steven Holl explains, that is characterized by single grand architectural gestures or simple abstractions of form.²⁶ This kind of approach lacks a complete narrative due to the fact that these building’s qualities do indeed

²⁶ Steven Holl, “The Poetic Detail,” in *Archipelago: Essays on Architecture*, ed. Peter MacKeith (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2006), 95.

create a strong first impression, but they tend to fail to maintain the same level of interest in the viewer when explored further. This simply artistic approach to architecture—with its reliance on massing as its primary distinctive characteristic, carries value solely as a novelty and fails to possess any intriguing architectural narrative that is necessary to hold an individual’s attention.

As soon as the first impression is established, we become interested, intrigued, emotionally stimulated, and psychologically invested, but how can this interest be perpetuated and maintained? If a building succeeds in making a grand first impression, but then fails in maintaining our individual interest or attention once explored further, it cannot be defined as a successful work of architecture, and we must be critical of these works and their incomplete narratives. A building must make a statement, yes, but it also has the responsibility of creating environments that are meaningful and moving, rather than spaces that only call attention back to themselves. Only once this is understood, can they begin to influence and connect with individuals.

Reinier de Graaf, of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), makes a comparison between the ‘box’ and the ‘antibox’ in his book “Four Walls and a

Roof.”. The box, he explains, is characteristic of having clarity and simplicity, while the antibox is a response to the box, and is critical of its apparent replicability and familiarity. Characterized by architecture that focuses on manipulation of form simply to avoid the ‘box’, the ‘antibox’ is unsuccessful in its goal of producing engaging spaces. As de Graaf is critical of architecture that focuses primarily on its image, he writes that: “the antibox doesn’t solicit debate, only its simulation.”²⁷ In this sense, the ‘antibox’ and ‘broad brush’ architecture are related. Both present themselves as being innovative, or as pushing the definition and physical limits of contemporary architecture, though the discourse surrounding them is decisively empty. This can be understood as the ‘antibox’ that creates interesting compositions as visually stimulating but lacking in any deeper meaning or valid reasoning. The building presents itself as if it has a message, though this is rarely the case, as these works tend to be a simple manifestation of the architect’s desires, and it lacks any form of coherent reasoning. Neither form for form’s sake nor form for metaphor’s

²⁷ Reinier de Graaf, *Four Walls and a Roof: The Complex Nature of a Simple Profession* (Cambridge, Mass, United States: Harvard University Press, 2017), 86.

sake are acceptable for an architecture that has a goal of being emotionally stimulating.

Architecture that has the singular goal of creating a strong image can never be considered as achieving a muted intensity as it does not value the experiential, contemplative, or explorative aspects that a space should embody. Though the rise in popularity of an architectural approach founded on establishing an image through a building's form does challenge the notion of what architecture is, or can be, it tends to neglect any understanding of atmosphere or stimulating experiential quality. Though form is an important characteristic of a building, it should be used only complementarily to instigating an emotional response or to establishing a distinguishable narrative. There must always be a deeper reasoning to form than the simple need for visual prominence. An "I can, therefore I do" attitude is destructive to the experience of users of a space. It diminishes the importance of the user's or visitor's experience in lieu of grandeur.

The spaces of a muted intensity are experientially complex; they cannot be simplified and reduced to a single diagram or sketch; they must be seen, touched, smelled, and heard. This leads to a need for spaces to be

relatively abstract and also experientially flexible. Any individual that visits such a space should be moved by what they experience. These spaces should evoke a response, but how an individual should in fact respond to it, what they should sense or feel, and how they should react, must be individually interpretable rather than defined. This means that the response varies from individual to individual, and there is no predefined or “correct” response.

A building needs to be considered as a composition. It is a singular entity that joins spaces, functions, qualities, and experiences, and must be designed as such. The same attention to detail must thus be paid to a first impression as to the experience of a building’s interior. An intriguing exterior creates interest and excitement, it makes the visitor question and go searching for answers; it makes the visitor eager to explore further, to delve deeper. But not often is this successful if it is not understood that a powerful facade is meaningless without an equally powerful interior to compliment it. Failure to understand this results in buildings that are easily forgotten. Philip Tidwell is critical of architecture that is focused primarily on its image,

particularly with its relationship to affecting our memory. He writes:

“...the limits of visual methods in the creation of meaningful environments deserves our attention because it suggests that the failure of visually dominated concepts of design to embody social, cultural, and human values relates not simply to a lack of stimulation, but more specifically to an inability to affect memory.”²⁸

The most valuable concept that Tidwell brings up is the inability for certain works to affect our memory. Memory is in fact an incredibly powerful tool and also a measure of good architecture. If a building has a strong image, it will briefly disrupt our rhythm, momentarily making us ponder over it, and then we move on. A building that provides the visitor with an experience, a journey, or a narrative to follow will initially hold our attention, but also will be ingrained in our memory. We will return to it in our thoughts, question it, and continue

²⁸ Philip Tidwell, “Place, Memory and the Architectural Image,” in *Archipelago: Essays on Architecture*, ed. Peter MacKeith (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2006), 155.

to decipher and ultimately understand and absorb what we experienced. We tend to remember significant events that we have experienced in the past, and good architecture is no different. If we have a narrative, a story, a journey to follow and to decipher, we will ultimately remember it as a unique and significant moment in our lives that has shaped who we are today.

Memory is indeed a powerful tool for architecture. Entering a space that feels familiar can be welcoming but does not leave a lasting impression based on its individual being. If a space is consciously designed to express a sense of nostalgia, it is inherently relating to something else—to a different place, an alternate context, and an unrelated occasion. Though this works in stimulating some of our senses, the lasting impression will only remain in our preexisting associations to a foreign reference rather than the present moment. The importance of stimulating our current condition with architecture is that in order to achieve true individuality or singularity, the building or space must be the entity to leave a lasting impression, rather than its association to a previously experienced one. We can be physically located in a particular place, though if it reminds us of something else, we are temporarily transported to somewhere else,

to the past and not the present. We become emotionally and psychologically disconnected, present only in our physical being. The most successful spaces make us aware of our current condition, of the present, and the memory of these spaces follows us eternally.

Essentiality & Clarity

The most powerful and intense spaces that an architect can design are those that have been designed with an understanding of the atmospheric qualities that a space can exude. The most moving atmospheres are achieved through a concentration on few specific elements and by consciously expressing a certain connection or relationship between them. A space containing, and exuding excess makes a statement and can contain certain interesting qualities, however it will often result in over-stimulating, decisively complex, and obscure spaces.

A simplicity within architecture and the built environment does not lead to meaninglessness, but on the contrary, it allows for, as Pallasmaa calls it, “a concentration of significance.”²⁹ It allows for an expression of focus on individual elements, elements that are crucial for representation of an idea, concept, or atmosphere.

²⁹ Juhani Pallasmaa, “Architecture and the Obsessions of our Time: A View of the Nihilism of Building” in *Encounters: Architectural Essays*, ed. Peter MacKeith (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2013), 56.

Architecture of a muted intensity must employ a sense of restraint in design. This comes with a great deal of courage and skill from the designer—to strip a building of superfluity to focus on the essential. Above all else, a stripped-down form of architecture, focusing only on the necessary elements, leads to an undisputable clarity that in turn becomes understood easier, and allows for more individuals to find a connection to it. The simpler and more abstract a space is presented, the easier it is to allow for a variety of individually generated emotional responses and understandings of the space.

The need for clarity in architecture is that it allows for a directional focus in design. Utilizing fewer colors, textures, forms, and materials, linked with a clear and conscious composition of space, can work to direct a visitor's focus. Knowing what atmosphere is being orchestrated and what emotions will be provoked within a space, facilitates the process of simplifying a building and space. A very dark room with a single small window will convey and contain an entirely different feeling and atmosphere than a very light room with a large window. Simplifying a space to the extent where expressing the emotive and provocative qualities of its being is

prioritized and should be one of the main tasks when designing engaging architecture.

If we should be focusing on essentiality and clarity in our work, how do we define what is essential and what is superfluous? Zumthor, in “Thinking Architecture”, writes:

“I thus appeal for a kind of architecture of common sense based on the fundamentals that we still know, understand, and feel. I carefully observe the concrete appearance of the world, and in my buildings I try to enhance what seems to be available, to correct what is disturbing, and to create anew what we feel is missing”³⁰

In this approach to architecture, a clear attention to analysis of the existing situation is pertinent. Understanding what the potential of a place and space is will lead to new discoveries and possibilities. Though we know this process is subjective, it nonetheless relies on an evaluative and objective exploration of architectural qualities that are combined and choreographed as a response to their context. “Enhancing what is existing,

³⁰ Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture*. 24

correcting what is disturbing, and creating anew what is missing” is the key to expressing clarity in the built environment. It helps to define what characteristics must be preserved, what elements need to be revisited, and where to introduce something new.

The simplicity and clarity that we must strive for however, is not synonymous with the utility and rationality in the modernist sense. Rather, it is a simplification of elements that allows us to direct the visitor’s attention to that which is pertinent for achieving a specific atmospheric quality. Our attention as architects must be directed thus towards the elements that are essential to the feeling of the space we are designing. With an excessive use of materials, forms, and textures—we are unable to understand the focus of a space or know why the space exists in the first place beyond its functional designation.

Robert Venturi believes in the opposite. He does not support simplicity and essentiality as crucial and fundamental tools for architecture, he argues that simplification of design leads to oversimplification and ultimately results in a bland architecture, that “blatant

simplification means bland architecture. Less is a bore.”³¹ It is true that simplification for simplification sake leads to unspectacular and bland work, though simplification for clarity sake, on the other hand, leads to work that is not overly complex, is easily understood, and with a level of universality. It is a fact of the world today, that we are living in an ever-evolving, ever-diverse, and ever-stimulating world. Venturi believes we need to be designing our buildings that reflect this; that powerful architecture is a manifestation of the world that surrounds us. In a world that never sleeps, that is in constant motion and development; in a world that we are never alone, and always connected to one another—why should we passively surrender to its complexity? Does challenging the norms of society, and creating something unique, not create a profound and engaging dialogue between building and context? Does powerful architecture not need to challenge the current state of affairs? Architecture of a muted intensity does—it needs to embody a certain tension between the everyday and the unique. It needs to respond to, and be critical of the mundane, of the average and the common. Architectural

³¹ Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 17.

clarity in today's world is found as a response to, rather than a representation of, global trends. Clarity today, within the built environment, comes in the form of simplification. Simplification provides us a sort of sanctuary or respite from the overly-complex and diverse world surrounding us.

The spaces that are most interesting and most engaging, are the ones that challenge the current state of the world surrounding us. Creating complex architecture in a decisively complex world is hardly a challenge. We need more spaces that confront this, that create a contrast to the hectic rhetoric of the world that surrounds us. By challenging the current condition of our global society, we create a tension between our surroundings and the spaces that lie within them. This creates architecture that is captivating and engaging, while at the same time being emotionally and psychologically stimulating.

Sensation

Perception is a fundamental architectural tool, with the entirety of the profession of architecture being reliant on it. We perceive, and thus we sense; we sense and thus we feel. The sensations that can be stimulated in humans by the built environment are vast and at times complex. They do however, have an unequal intensity, or more specifically—they exist within a hierarchy.

Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant argue that there are two orders of sensation, with an existing hierarchy between primary and secondary sensation. While primary sensations, they explain, are released from observations of form and primary colors, secondary sensations relate to the multitude of associations and feelings that can be experienced, which vary greatly depending on the individual and their corresponding cultural background.³² This explanation can be expanded and elaborated further as levels of universality. Primary sensations relate to the basic human qualities we all possess and can thus be argued as being universal and

³² Le Corbusier, and Amédée Ozenfant, “Purism [1920]” in *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, ed. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln, Nebraska, United States: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 436-438.

independent of culture or background, while secondary sensations are individual and personal.

The issue with this approach is that the ‘universality’ of a form or color may be universal in its existence, in its definition, though not in its sensation. An object is still an object, regardless of where it is located. The meaning, use, function, expression, connotation, and especially emotional reaction to the object, though universally available, are interpreted individually. As an example, we can take a universally understood object—a sphere. The sphere itself is identified and understood as a sphere, regardless of where it may be located. What the sphere is used for, what it represents, what sort of cultural significance it has, is entirely dependent on the background of the individual engaging with it.

An object is first located or acknowledged, and only then can it be interpreted. The fact that an object exists in a universal realm is not merely sufficient to construe it as having value or relative importance. A sphere simply existing, means nothing. Universality does not correlate with value or importance. The validity of Le Corbusier and Ozenfant’s statement thus needs revision.

A modified and improved explanation of the concept of hierarchy of sensations would be to refer to it

as an inverse relationship with the order of acknowledgement (primary sensation) as being inversely proportional in value to individual interpretation (secondary sensation). The sensations or feeling we perceive as secondary in their order of acknowledgement, are primary in value. Within the built environment, the most ubiquitous sensory stimulus is sight. We are perpetually existing within the built environment, though there is a great deal that we do not experience the sound, smell, taste, or touch of, compared to how much we may see of it. We may first visually locate an object as our initial engagement with it, and only then can we understand or evaluate its meaning. The interpretation, or secondary sensation, ultimately holds more value than the primary sensation of merely locating and acknowledging it.

A muted intensity utilizes both levels of sensation, both levels of universality. The reason why muted intensity relies on simplicity, is because the more simplified a building is, the more universal its expression will be. The simpler the building, the easier it is to emphasize particular elements of it, and thus the clearer the focal points become. This allows the secondary sensation, the emotional response to the building, to be

incredibly varied, diverse, and unexpected. This in turn suggests a rather personal relationship between the building and individual.

The value of an object is not in the acknowledgement of its existence, but rather the response to it. As responses to objects or spaces of the built environment are vast, unmeasurable, intangible, abstract and thus ambiguous, it becomes a challenging quality to define, explain, or quantify. This does not diminish the importance or value of individual responses to a space but does indeed make it a serious undertaking for an architect to prepare for or expect. As the importance of individual interpretation of an object or space is now established as having a higher degree of importance than space itself, an expansion of topics that define the necessary tools for allowing for interpretation, here titled 'atmosphere' and 'anatomy', along with their effects is necessary.

Atmosphere

We all have distinct memories of specific places that have affected us in the past. When describing such places, we tend to initially explain what we saw or what we did. When elaborated further, we explain the feelings and emotions of what we smelled, the sounds that we heard, the things that we ate, what we felt and what we saw. These are the real memories, the ones that affected not only our memories but our emotions and senses as well. These are the memories that will endure, remaining as irreplaceable and irreplicable moments of our past. A stimulation of our senses undeniably leaves the largest impression on us. If this is so, why are we not focusing more on our human senses to produce high-quality spaces that affect the senses of individuals engaging with them?

The fundamental tool of utilizing and understanding atmosphere to produce powerful and moving architecture needs to be revisited as arguably the most important tool that architects can utilize in their work. Designing for the postmodern world must employ a phenomenological approach to architecture. In a world lacking consensus, we must focus more on the

unanalyzable, the innate human qualities that we all possess—emotions.

In the architecture of an ever-globalizing society, within the existing plurality of values, we are consistently spending an increasing amount of time on optimizing spaces and developing new technologies. This begins to question what effect this has on our spatial experiences. The modernist movement was founded on the principle of technological advances; on curtain walls, on reinforced concrete, on steel. A particular attention was paid to improving the configuration of spaces, optimization, and developing construction technologies. But what effects did this have on architecture and society as a whole? Steven Holl asks more specifically, “As our technological means multiply, are we growing—or becoming stunted—perceptually?”³³ As technological means are constantly improving and increasing, a muted intensity believes that individuals of a postmodern world are in fact neither growing nor becoming stunted perceptually. We collectively as a society are instead passively and submissively accepting that architectural value should be

³³ Steven Holl, “Questions of Perception—Phenomenology of Architecture” in *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture* (San Francisco: William Stout, 2006), 40.

measurable. As a result, we are being denied honest engagement with the built environment. We exist in it, though we are not engaging with it. This cannot continue, we must reclaim architecture as a perceptually significant product and insist on its significance beyond measurable means.

If we focus more on economic and technological issues concerning our work, we do indeed lose a great deal of perceptual stimulation. This is not to say that technology has no place in architecture of a muted intensity. On the contrary, we must rely a great deal on technology and innovation in construction when aiming for a muted intensity. It is, however, a tool that should be used to enhance our individual experience of space. It facilitates the process of producing unique atmospheres.

While new technologies are certainly important and must be continuously developed to keep up with the needs of society, and for the sake of new possibilities, discoveries, and solutions, they do often fail to engage us at a personal level. If we want to achieve an architectural language that is capable of moving us on an individual level, and a language that will stand the test of time, we need to focus more on the qualities that affect our senses. Esa Laaksonen writes:

“Without a soul our built environment becomes poorer, something that follows fashionable trends and international orientations, part of a rapidly aging consumerist or disposable phenomenon”³⁴

It is undisputable that we are living in a disposable, consumerist culture. This is an issue that can be challenged with architectural quality and spaces that are timeless, spaces that are flexible and abstract, spaces that relate to our human condition. Architectural experience is the only universally timeless quality that a building can achieve. Without a soul, without spaces that move us, we are simply encouraging the unfavorable and destructive disposable culture of our present world. Spaces that are stimulating will remain protected and valued, challenging the disposable culture that as a society we have become so accustomed to.

Buildings that engage their users are ultimately successful when they call attention back to our lives and

³⁴ Esa Laaksonen, “The Sixth Dimension of Architecture,” in *Archipelago: Essays on Architecture*, ed. Peter MacKeith (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2006), 142.

our human existence. Unsuccessful buildings call attention only to themselves and ultimately stand alone in their existence, empty and shallow. The architecture of a muted intensity reflects qualities that affect the human condition, the universal qualities that we all possess. The qualities that have the greatest effect on us are also the qualities that we can relate to. Pallasmaa writes:

“An architectural experience silences all external noise; it focuses attention on one’s very existence. Architecture, as all art, makes us aware of our fundamental solitude. At the same time, architecture detaches us from the present and allows us to experience the slow, firm flow of time and tradition.”³⁵

This idea of architecture allowing for the focus to be shifted from the space itself to focusing on the individual experiencing it is indeed a challenging undertaking, yet experientially beneficial. Pallasmaa writes that an architectural experience silences all external noise,

³⁵ Juhani Pallasmaa, “An Architecture of the Seven Senses” in *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture* (San Francisco: William Stout, 2006), 31.

this can be understood as a moment of presence. Experiencing something unique in this sense, takes all of our attention away. It draws us to forget everything around us and instead directs us to focus all of our emotions on a singular experience, on the present. A space that moves us, that shifts our state of mind, thus relates to our human existence, and results in intrigue.

Buildings must manipulate, utilize, and present materials that when reading their relationships, allow visitors to make their own connections, understandings, and feelings. This creates spaces that we can connect to and understand the atmosphere of. Zumthor writes:

“to me, buildings can have a beautiful silence that I associate with attributes such as composure, self-evidence, durability, presence, integrity, and with warmth and sensuousness as well; a building that is being itself, being a building, not representing anything, just being.”³⁶

The attributes of buildings that Zumthor explains here are characteristics that work to portray a specific atmosphere. Each of the terms listed are unique and

³⁶ Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture*. 32

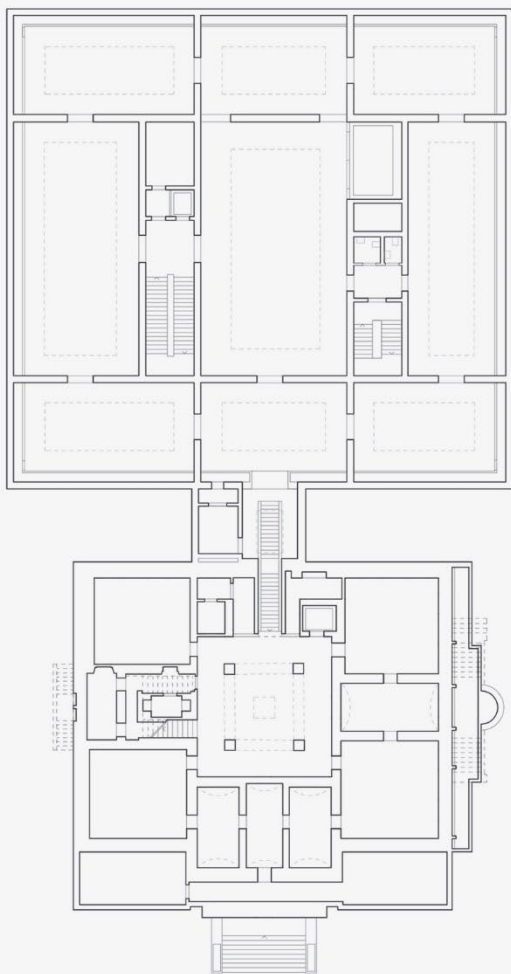
specific to a particular space. Each term is also consciously given a human trait. This is why we connect with such spaces—because they feel familiar, as if they were human themselves. They have emotion, they have feelings, they have quirks, and they move us. A building’s characteristics and the emotions they portray are what make the largest impression on us, particularly the characteristics that engage our senses. The emotional presence of a building in its context can relay a variety of feelings: power, fortitude, composure, playfulness or solitude. An atmosphere must create a complete narrative between an individual and building, building and context, and context to individual. Without this dialogue between these three scales, a dialogue and narrative will ultimately be incomplete.

There is no single correct way, however, of designing a building or space that feels ‘welcoming’ or ‘lively’. What we must rely on is our innate ability as architects to feel and portray an atmosphere rather than attempting to define it. The one truth of atmosphere is that it relies on our senses. It relies on the peeling of layers of paint from an old wall, the echo of invisible footsteps in a large corridor, the smell of fragrant flowers on a spring day. These unmeasurable qualities that affect our

senses are what make establishing atmospheres particularly challenging. It takes a certain level of understanding, sympathy, and sensitivity from the designer to understand the user of the space. Atmosphere is not universal. What is seen as inviting in one place may not be seen as such elsewhere. This is why a close relationship between designer and final user is particularly crucial in the design phase. It is up to the designer to be able to interpret and develop the needs of the user into feelings and emotion.

Tension of Form

An exploration of organizational, functional,
and aesthetic dialogue in architecture

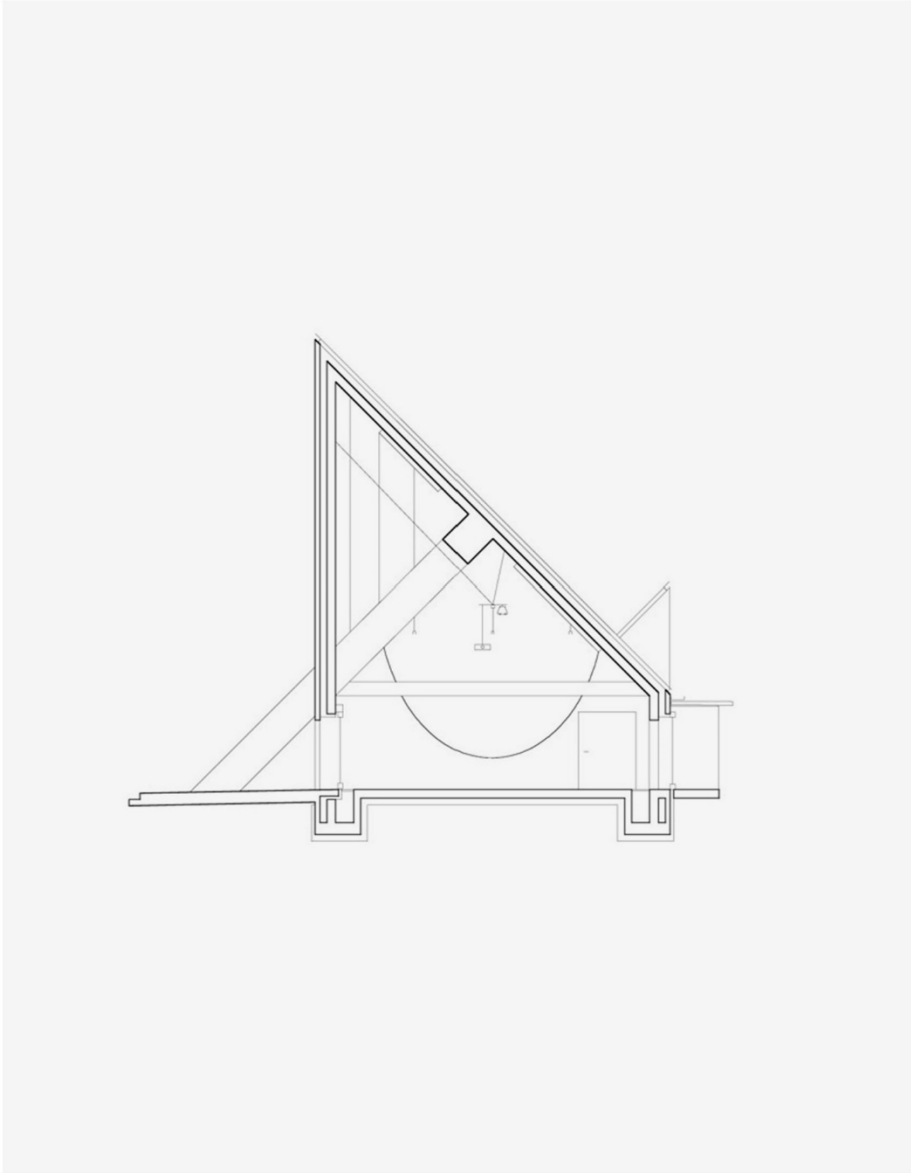


Cantonal Museum of Fine Arts

Chur, Switzerland

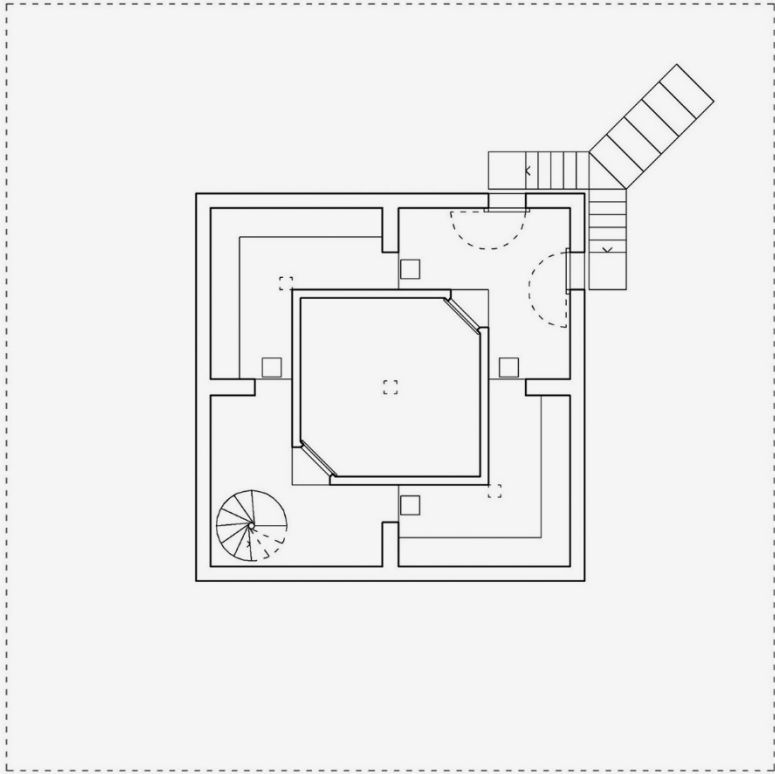
2016, Barozzi / Veiga

A rigid plan, a conversation between new
and old, a near symmetry



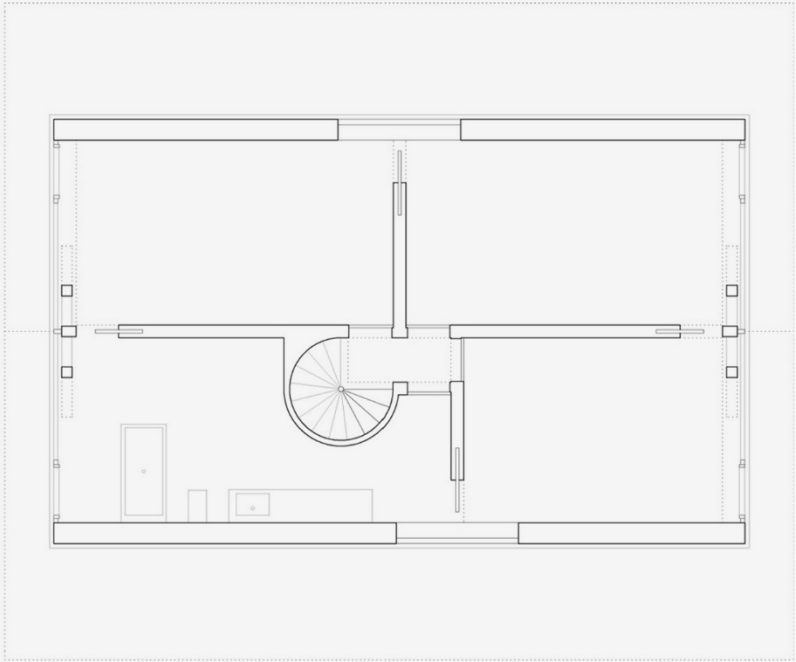
Plantahof Auditorium
Landquart, Switzerland
2010, Valerio Olgiati

A powerful form, an imposing verticality, a
structural bisection, a composed
conversation between inside and outside



Solo House
Cretas, Spain
2013, Pezo von Ellrichshausen

A simplicity of form, an angled approach, a
shift in direction, then another, an entrance



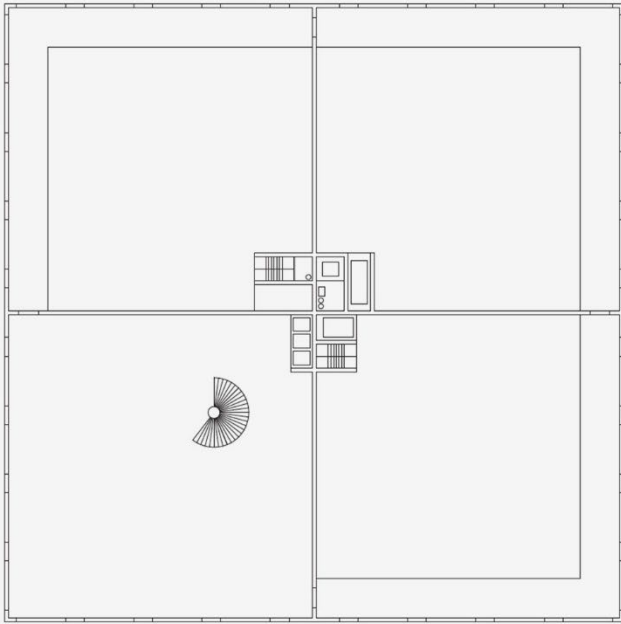
House in Balsthal
Balsthal, Switzerland
2014, Pascal Flammer

Four balanced rooms, contained in a
rectangular shell, a thorough orthogonality, a
circular disruption



Frit01
Samoëns, France
2018, Joachim Fritschy

A delicate façade, a thin roof and oversized
fenestration, a disproportion, a dichotomy



Perm Museum XXI

Perm, Russia

Valerio Olgiati

An ordered plan, an equal division, a defined
core, a floating stair

Anatomy

Stimulating architecture exists in the mind and in the senses of the individual engaging with it. It excites, it calms, it satisfies, and it amazes. It comforts, inspires, encourages, delights—it questions. But of course, we cannot rely on the ethereal qualities of architecture alone, because after all, it is the physical condition of architecture that ultimately generates an emotional response. The formal qualities of a space and the responses they evoke rely on their composition, their relationships, their scale, proportion, their texture. Stimulating architecture is not compatible with the mundane, it requires originality and rejects banality. Rather than producing the expected, a design challenges our expectations and poses questions.

Spaces that are engaging are the spaces that will ultimately stand the test of time; never ageing and perpetually valued. Engaging spaces are unique, they are timeless. Engaging spaces are individual, they are not imitations or copies. What exists and how can it be enhanced? What should we expect and what are we perceiving? Contradictions are crucial. They show immediate relationships and they are direct. They are

thought-provoking, though not explicit—physically, yes, interpretively, no.

Using contradiction within the built environment is one of the main tools that can be utilized to stimulate engagement by creating a narrative or dialogue within a building. It tells a story without relying on one. It does not require verbal explanation, as it speaks for itself. An issue often discussed in architecture is the relationship between concept and reality. When an architect has a vision, or a concept for a design, the words used to describe the project often do not translate explicitly enough following completion and leaves much to be desired. A building must be able to speak for itself, to allow the qualities of the built environment to be thoroughly expressive, enough that verbal descriptions are rendered superfluous. Few tools in architecture can achieve this to the extent that contradictions can.

Like a large, empty space with a single small window, or a hard and intimidating facade with a warm and welcoming interior; contradictions create explicitly clear expressions of ideas without allowing for misinterpretation. They also allow for the viewer, the individual engaging with a space, to define their own

understandings of why such a design decision was made in the first place.

Though the idea of a clear representation allowing for individual interpretation is somewhat contradictory, that is the goal of architecture of muted intensity. Clarity and simplicity in expression do not alone lead to any convincing understanding. The connections and relationships among the formal qualities of a space are to be immediately understood, though the answer to the question of “why” a decision was made, is not, it needs to be thought-provoking and emotionally stimulating.

Contradictions are to the build environment as italics are to writing. They emphasize particular elements and distinguish themselves from their context. They have the same immediate effect of slowing down the reader’s mind and allowing for it to adjust and to decipher, to understand an immediate change in composition.

So how can contradiction be adopted and utilized in our work? It requires an understanding of scale, proportion, repetition, but most importantly, hierarchy. Venturi, though a proponent of an explicit complexity in architecture rather than the simplicity of a mutedly intense architecture, does have an understanding of the

power that contradiction can have on architecture. He developed a definition based on the ‘both-and’ phenomenon, he writes:

“If the source of the both-and phenomenon is contradiction, its basis is hierarchy, which yields several levels of meanings among elements with varying values. It can include elements that are both good and awkward, big and little, closed and open, continuous and articulated, round and square, structural and spatial. An architecture which includes varying levels of meaning breeds ambiguity and tension.”³⁷

The “both-and” phenomenon of which Venturi speaks towards, is the idea that an element or quality of architecture is, can, and should, be read and understood in more than a singular fashion. It requires the reading of the whole to make sense of the part. After all, a building is a collection of materials, spaces, elements, and atmospheres, that together create a complete whole. The elements must be read in the context of the whole. This does indeed require a particular amount of attention and

³⁷ Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 23.

awareness from the viewer, though when integrated thoroughly, can prove to be powerful and have the ability to be truly thought-provoking.

The “both-and” phenomenon needs to be explored in the context of relativity. Every aspect, every element of the built environment is inherently related to its neighboring objects and subjects. No part of the built environment can be read individually. Everything affects and is also affected by, its surroundings. Just as we cannot imagine a building without a context, a building or element of a building cannot be designed as such. There is no such thing as a “clean canvas”.

When considering contradictions in architecture, a study and analysis of cause and effect is crucial. No design decision is independent. No element of a building can be read and understood by removing it from its context. Once again—a building is a composition. Its individual components do not have value independently. They only have value as they relate to the space they engage with, in the building that houses the space, in the individual observing the building, in the society that shaped the individual. What is paint without a canvas, a window without a wall, a roof without a house?

All objects that compose a building within the built environment are related and dependent on each other, their physical relationship, their cultural significance, their particular characteristics. They have characteristics that need to be evaluated and understood in order to express their story, to successfully highlight and call attention to them and to their journey and to the present. The elements of a building have individual forms, scales, proportions, and textures, and their individual characteristics must be utilized such as to create a dialogue between them that stimulate our individual beings and stimulate our senses.

Conclusion

Not every space can generate an emotional response from the individual engaging with it. There is also no one correct way of achieving it. Architecture of a muted intensity is my attempt at defining and calling attention to few specific concepts and themes that can be utilized to achieve a unique language founded on emotion, feeling, and dialogue.

Designing spaces that are universally engaging, rather than focusing on stimulating only those of a particular background, allows for a universally intriguing architecture. As we live in a global society that is constantly growing, developing, and diversifying, muted intensity acts as an opposing force, a sort of respite from a constantly moving world. Modesty, simplicity, and clarity are necessary in order to create a level of intensity within architecture, with the intensity stemming from a dialogue between person, place, and the built environment. As simple spaces alone do not suffice in create intriguing environments, a deliberate and visible conversation between elements of the built environment stimulate our individual emotions and establish a sense

that we have engaged with something out of the ordinary, something unique, something special.

The anatomy, or physical makeup of a space must be carefully crafted to allow for all individuals, regardless of background, to be intrigued by it, to be moved by it. Designing moments within architecture that break our typical rhythm or change the way we typically engage with a building helps us to slow down as individuals and appreciate what we are experiencing. Moments when we are forced to slow down and question why something is the way it is, is the ultimate goal of an architecture of muted intensity. Thus, an architecture of muted intensity is when a window is either too big or too small; a room too long or too narrow, too dark or too light. When a harmony is broken, and a new language is orchestrated. There is nothing intriguing about a perfectly sized window.

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