

# EXPERIENCING THE SACRED

A phenomenological exploration of architecture as sentient space

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**Abstract**

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Experiencing the Sacred considers how a sense of sacredness in architecture comes from lived, embodied experience, rather than the presence of religious symbols or functions. Utilizing phenomenological thinkers such as Merleau-Ponty, Bachelard, Pallasmaa, and Norberg-Schulz, this thesis investigates how spatial atmosphere, sensory perception, material quality, and movement all contribute to experiences of the sacred.

The thesis compares three notable projects – the Lotus Temple in New Delhi, the Chapel of St. Ignatius in Seattle, and the Water Temple in Awaji. In this examination, it draws attention the ways in which architecture can activate an experience of contemplation, stillness, and transcendence via sensory engagement, and elemental forces. Central themes include light and shadow, the notion of ritual movement, spatial thresholds, and the evolving relationship between interior spaces and the natural world.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that sacredness is not restricted to religious buildings, and that sacredness can be awakened in any given architecture with the potential for deep attention, presence, and emotional connection.

# Acknowledgement

This thesis encapsulates a highly personal and academic journey made possible by the wisdom, support, and inspiration inspired through many individuals.

To begin, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my thesis advisors, Ken Tadashi Oshima and Jennifer Dee, for your astute critiques, enduring patience, and never wavering support that profoundly influenced the direction of and depth of this research. In combination with your encouragement, both of you provided an exemplar of the potential of architecture as an experiential process and product that guided this endeavor throughout.

I also want to thank the faculty and mentors at the University of Washington. The instruction and enlightening conversations encouraged my ideas of architecture beyond materials to engage perception, signification, and atmospheres.

I would like to give a special thanks to my family and friends for their steadfast support, patience, and gentle nudges during my times of ambiguity and exhaustion. Your presence has been an anchor during this journey.

I would also like to recognize the architects and thinkers that provided the influences for this thesis, including Tadao Ando, Steven Holl, and Fariborz Sahba, as well as the phenomenological perspectives of Merleau-Ponty, Bachelard, Tanizaki, Pallasmaa, and Norberg-Schulz. Thank you for showing me that architecture can resonate both with the eye and the spirit.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the quiet places, sacred silences, and still moments that brought me back to my purpose— to search for meaning in space and spirit in structure.

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# Preface

Experiencing the Sacred is a thesis that has emerged from both personal and professional inquiry into how architecture may deliver experiences beyond function and form and create a deeper sense of awareness—implying a knowing or feeling rather than seeing. Through my academic and design experiences, I have experienced spaces that encourage stillness, awe, and introspection. These various experiences generated some basic questions: What makes a space feel sacred? Can architecture facilitate a sense of the transcendent without religious imagery? What role does the body, as well as the senses, and surrounding elements play in these experiences?

To assist in pondering these questions, I turned to the phenomenological literature, which considers the ontology of architecture in terms of both study and experience. The philosophical works of individuals like Merleau-Ponty and Bachelard, as well as architects like Tadao Ando, Steven Holl, and Fariborz Sahba, gave me insight into how we might understand the sacred as a type of experience—instead of just as a description of a religious place.

This thesis is, essentially, an attempt to demonstrate that sacred experiences do not need to be confined to places of worship and may occur wherever architecture creates experiences of heightened awareness, silence, and connection—with self, with others, and with the nature world.

Writing this work has been as much a process of intellectual realization as it has been a journey of personal reflection. It has expanded my horizon of thinking about architecture as a medium that has the potential to uplift the human spirit.

I hope this work invites readers to think about sacredness not as something inherent, but as a quality of experience that architecture can softly awaken.

# Chapter 1 Introduction

*"The sacred is not a state of mind, but a state of being-in-the-world."*  
— Gaston Bachelard<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 Sacred Architecture

Architecture involves more than the organization of space and form, it is the vehicle through which the sacred can be engaged, perceived, and embodied. This thesis, "Experiencing the Sacred," seeks to investigate how sacred architecture embodies elemental convergence, earth, water, and sky, as experiential thresholds for reverence, contemplation, and attunement. The thesis argues that certain spaces are not only limited to their physical construction, but through fundamental alignments with the natural elements, engage our human sensorium and psyche as threshold, or lamina to the sacred.

### Defining Sacred Beyond Symbolism

The term of sacred has generally been associated with religion, rituals and something deeper than the ordinary. For this thesis, we will expand the notion of the sacred beyond simply institutionalized religion or symbolic icons. Instead, we will define it as a heightened state of presence and resonance, characterized by an atmosphere of stillness and wonder and the potential for introspection. We will express the sacred not through representations, but rather through the poetic dimension of spatial experience, expressed in silence, shadow, light, and the elemental aspects of being.

This qualified awareness resonates with Christian Norberg-Schulz's ideas of sacred spaces. He suggests that sacred places arise from our awareness of dwelling

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<sup>1</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 22.

and positionality in the world.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, being sacred allows us to locate ourselves (not just geographically) in the world of things and sounds. It allows us to be grounded in the rhythm of nature, to feel the solidity of the earth, to acknowledge the passage of time, and to appreciate the sky we are surrounded by.

Even in today's secular societies, the desire for sacred experiences endures but the typologies of architecture have morphed. In our contemporary world, the sacred often takes place outside religious settings—environments that enable intimacy, elemental presence, and depth of meaning. As this thesis demonstrates, architecture can manifest the sacred, not through themes of doctrine, but by braiding elemental forces that awaken our ability to perceive, feel and remember.

## **Embodied Experience and Perception in Sacred Spaces**

Architecture is essentially a bodily experience. Our experience of a building is not just passive but involves our engagement in it as an environment that rests upon and generates sensory information. We do not engage the sacred as an abstract idea, but rather as a bodily experience, wherein the sacred arises from deep bodily implication. Moreover, this view of the sacred is based on the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in which the body is where we generate knowledge of our interactions within the world.<sup>3</sup>

Sacred spaces invite us to deepen our sensory awareness. The feel of texture, the coolness of stone, the suturing of light and shadow, and the possibility of silence are not taken for granted, but shape how we ultimately emotionally and spiritually

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<sup>2</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 18–19.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012), 94–95.

respond. As Juhani Pallasmaa notes, architecture that transcends mere visual dominance, "enhances our sense of reality, the grounded, and the existential".<sup>4</sup>

The concept of embodiment entails more than just bodily sensation, it also entails an emotional state and a psychological sense of self. The sacredness comes to life when architecture gives voice to our memories, imagination, and moments of inward stillness. This lived experience will stir sensations prompted by natural elements in the environment: bare feet on cold stone; being enveloped in the gentle sound of water flowing somewhere in a quiet courtyard; gazing upwards through the oculus--noticing the sky. It is these moments that invite stillness and reverence and thereby ties the visitor to both their bodily experience and the cosmos.

## **Architecture as Temporal Unfolding**

Sacred architecture unfolds through time; it is never formed in a moment. The engagement of sacred space is inherently sequential in time, inviting the body into a procession of motion, pause, transition, and revelation. When architecture is imbued with elemental presence, it opens a doorway for ritualized perception, permeating the work to troubleshoot personal identities through layers of experience in earth, water, and sky.

This unfolding is reflected in the traditional and historic rituals of pilgrimage and contemplation, where the journey through the outward space of pilgrimage represents an inward change. In (sacred) buildings, for example, descending a stairwell into shadow may represent introspection, or the slow turn into a sunlit space while walking into a slowly revealed vision may connote clarification or transcendence. The sacred is not held in momentariness—it is discovered, approached, and revealed through choreographed space in architecture.

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<sup>4</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. (Chichester: Wiley-Academy, 2005), 29

The elemental forces are manageably important in this journey. Earth offers us gravitational and ground-ness, as it connects us to the place, through its materiality and weight. Water conveys reflection and stillness, acting as a surface against which to contemplate on. Sky provides lightness and openness, capturing transcendence and connection to freedom. The elemental forces in time and movement creates a vessel for architecture as more than the distinct container for the sacred. It comes alive as a medium of unfolding.

This perspective is partly on the concepts put forth by Gaston Bachelard on the poetics of space, and Jun'ichirō Tanizaki's embrace of shadow, silence, and temporality.<sup>5</sup> As Bachelard states, "space that has been experienced is not an amorphous space... it has been lived, in its own way, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination".<sup>6</sup> Thus, sacred architecture becomes a temporal art that composes time through the senses, designing an experience that takes the visitor into a deep encounter of the sacred, woven through elemental experiences.

## 1.2 Reframing the Architectural Gaze

In modern architecture, the tendency is often to focus on formal, functional, or technological aspects, emphasizing building shape, rather than on the experiences that structure enables. But architecture will only matter to its occupants when it goes beyond building materials or building forms; architecture should engage people on an emotional level! Architecture should stimulate our senses, stoke our passions, and connect us with our understanding of time. In the end, architecture should be an experience we engage ourselves in!

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<sup>5</sup> Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, trans. Thomas J. Harper and Edward G. Seidensticker (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1977)

<sup>6</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 47.

As Paul Goldberger so nicely phrases it, "Architecture begins to matter when it brings emotional gratification as well as spatial accommodation."<sup>7</sup>

This research is concerned with a fundamental question:

***How can sacred architecture be understood and practiced as a medium of lived, embodied, emotional, and sensory experience?***

This thesis proposes a fundamental paradigm shift--re-gearing our architectural psyche--from an object-based focus to one of presence. Rather than looking at space as a static context, it asks us to think of architecture as a dynamic sensory experience sourced in perception, memory and mood. In this new paradigm, architecture is less about what it looks like and more about how it acts upon our experience.

To interrogate the inquiry above, the research work posed a group of related secondary research questions each acting as a lens to reflect back on the primary inquiry.

- How can atmosphere, spatial rhythm, and multisensory perception condition architectural experience?
- How can space be perceived as a temporal unfolding rather than a static whole?
- What spatial strategies (for example, procession, pause, layering, or contrast) condition the unfolding of architectural experience?

If we tie these questions to the themes of sacredness, and elemental experience we can begin to think differently about asking these questions:

- How can sacred architecture help us feel grounded to this world?

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Goldberger, *Why Architecture Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 6.

- How can sacred architecture guide our gaze toward the sky and the transcendent?
- In what way can water - literally and metaphorically - be an invitation to reflection, as well as the passage of journey in sacred architecture?

The best way to think of these questions is not just providing a framework for the thesis as a theoretical query, but that they greet us on a voyage, a trajectory around various layers of awareness, attention and perception. For this perspective, architecture is not a fixed form; it is a temporal unfolding; a tempo of light, sound, material and atmosphere that invites the body to pause, linger, and perceive.

## **A Shift in Perspective**

In reframing the architectural gaze, we invite ourselves to emphasis an engaged point of view or a perspective of lived experience, rather than disembodied view or distant objectivity. Ceasing to focus on architecture from a visual vantage point, we focus on what it means to be in, to dwell in and to be in motion through the experience of those places. In this newly engaged standpoint, elements of temporality and materiality, and elemental resonance become key features, understanding the sacredness is not simply in what is seen, but also in what is experienced- in the atmosphere, or the rhythm, or light and silence, which often cannot be viewed or understood, but rather enacted and experienced.

This reversal in perspective aligns with the notions put forward by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who states that perception is not only the observation and response of visual data, but an embodied experience with our surroundings. Merleau-Ponty suggests instead of thinking about our body as simply being in space, it is more a

matter of inhabiting space.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, sacred architecture is not a product; it is an experience, in that the sacred experiences of architecture take form through the act of perception by the one who enters.

## **Reframing the Lens: Phenomenology and Elemental Encounter**

Reframing the architectural gaze is to adopt a fundamental poetics of space, where one can experience earth, water, and sky as realities— rather than metaphors. The earth stabilizes our bodies, providing a sense of enclosure. Water reflects and purifies and often elicits feelings of stasis or passage. Similarly, the sky elevates the spirit to the transcendent in terms of verticality, light, or openness. Therefore, sacred architecture has the potential to be reconceived as a threshold that attaches the material to the immaterial, the tangible to the spiritual, and the temporality of the moment to the eternity of existence.

This thesis advocates for a phenomenological and elemental turn in architectural thinking. It is an invitation to do things differently, to look beyond architecture as an object and to experience it as a place where architecture is active and lived, as a vessel to collectively curate sacred experiences through movement, materiality, memory, and mood.

### **1.3 Orientation and Methodology: Listening to the Space**

This thesis presents a phenomenological perspective, exchanging analytical detachment for more embodied engagement. This phrase; 'listening to the space,' will serve as both a metaphor and methodological device: it proposes to give full, sensory,

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<sup>8</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 139.

and empathetic embodiment to the ways spaces express themselves; in atmosphere, light, sound, materiality, and in the rhythm of their layouts.

## **Phenomenology as a Method of Attunement**

Phenomenology sees perception as key to all knowledge, while exploring the inseparability of the body from the world in which it exists. Architecture is not experienced as direct observation, but rather through a body in a shared space, where meaning emerges from movement, sensation and memory. In this case we are not asking what the building stands for in abstract, but how does it feel? How does it affect the body, the breath, and sense of time?

This approach encourages experiential immersion, recognizes subjective experience as a legitimate way of knowing, and asks for a slow process of letting go of what is preconceived and letting the space reveal itself through its matter, space, and elements. Sacredness does not mean a rigid doctrine, it is an experience—a sense of an occurrence where architecture meets the body, ignites the imagination, and resonates with the world.

## **Listening as Method: Experiencing the Sacred**

Listening to space means more than just observing; it regards the multi-sensory ways to engage with its physical nature and consider its rhythms, silences, textures, and atmospheres. Böhme's idea of atmosphere—the essence of place felt in the agency of a subject-object relationship<sup>9</sup>—expands the ways we can use “listening” in this conflict with our senses.

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<sup>9</sup> Gernot Böhme, “Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics,” *Thesis Eleven* 36, no. 1 (1993): 114.

Only by putting our phenomenological methodology to practice can we feel and experience each site more fully through sensory awareness and narrative. This practice includes:

- Embodied site visits or virtual explorations in the absence of being at an actual site, with an acknowledgment of how space takes on movement and time.
- Participatory phenomenological mapping, in observing how light changes, at what distance and pitch sounds resonate, and how textures invite or deter the act of touch.
- Elemental analysis around feelings of earth, water, and sky expressed spatially that contribute to the sacred.
- Reflective writing around memory, moods, and episodes of observation, relating to an awareness of the affective sights.
- Photographs and diagrams not to depict accuracy, but to document moments of experience, like light exposing shadow, stone eliciting water, or sky framed and still.

### **Architectural Study Strategy and Thematic Analysis**

This thesis explores the sacredness of lived experience through three architectural case studies across a range of cultural and spiritual traditions:

1. The Lotus Temple (New Delhi, India)
2. The Chapel of St. Ignatius (Seattle, USA)
3. The Water Temple (Awaji Island, Japan)

Each of these architectural endeavors goes beyond mere religious iconography. They engage the spiritual nature of sacred architecture in its basic physicality and in its environmental contexts. Rather than dictating beliefs, they give presence to an environment that allows for quiet contemplation, meditative behavior, or awareness of

the surrounding elements while honoring the constraints of sentient space - Multisensory Engagement, Temporality & Movement, Atmosphere, Gestalt and Threshold.

The three elemental criteria will guide our interpretation of these sacred sites:

- Earth, meaning grounding, enclosure, materiality, and gravitational spatiality
- Water, meaning reflective, movement, purification, and flow in time
- Sky, meaning openness light, orientation, and transcendence

These elements are presented not as mere allegories but as enacted realities which create a sense of sacred space. The case studies will be examined, not through the lens of theological dogma, but as approaches to carry threshold experiences of what it might mean to sense a sacred presence through personal experience.

## **1.4 Thesis Structure**

The thesis embarks on a progressive and experiential exploration of spatial sentience, interweaving theoretical depth with lived experience. Suited to the phenomenological nature of the inquiry, the structure moves from fundamental concepts to thematic inquiries, ultimately leading to conclusions derived from embodied architectural examples. The successive chapters move in sequence through solutions to questions posed: How is sacred space experienced? How does sacred architecture influence the body, the senses, and the psyche? What starts as an abstract question is continually anchored in perceptual, emotional, and poetic realities.

The organization of the thesis is crafted not as a rigid technical sequence, but as an evolving narrative—one that reflects the experiential essence of architecture itself.

### **Chapter 1: Introduction – Setting the Stage for Inquiry**

The introductory chapter outlines the foundational ideas and rationale for the study. It defines the sacred not as a static or purely symbolic category, but as an embodied and temporal phenomena we encounter through architecture. The chapter critiques the visual-centric mode of architectural thinking as dominant and proposes a reframed gaze towards sentient space—space that engages the body, senses, and the forces of nature. It outlines the phenomenological orientation in the thesis overall, and importantly, explores embodied perception, processual temporality, and elemental experience as frames of reference for sacred architecture. The chapter also provides an outline of the case studies and the elemental criteria (earth, water, and sky) to aid in the analysis that follows.

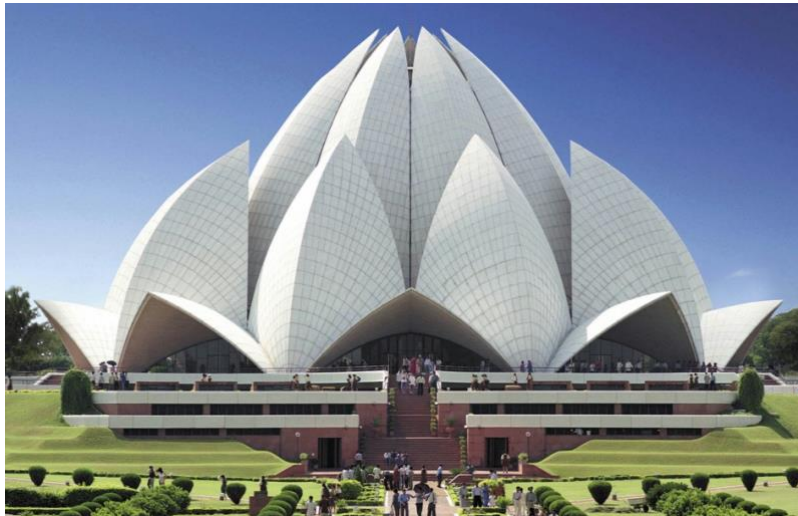
## **Chapter 2: Phenomenology and Elemental Encounter**

This chapter explores the conceptual background of this thesis and provides a comprehensive review of phenomenological philosophy relating to architecture. Specifically, it addresses the key ideas of embodiment, temporality, and multisensory experience developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gaston Bachelard, and Juhani Pallasmaa and how these ideas contribute to our lived experience of space. Lastly, the chapter considers the notion of elemental convergence and philosophical and architectural debates about earth, water, and sky as elemental forces that shape the very atmosphere of a space into a unitary experience that is sacred, or meaningful.

## **Chapter 3: Lotus Temple, New Delhi, India**

The first site study delves into the Lotus Temple, designed by Fariborz Sahba, serving as a prime example of sacred architecture that beautifully embodies the concept of elemental convergence. This chapter examines the temple's symbolic connection to the lotus flower and its harmonious interaction with both earth and sky.

By focusing on the petal-like structures and the expansive interior space, the analysis highlights how the temple inspires feelings of transcendence while also keeping visitors grounded. Through site observations, vivid spatial descriptions, and the interplay of elemental dynamics, it becomes clear how the temple nurtures a meditative and welcoming sacred environment.



*Image 1.1 Lotus Temple, New Delhi, India (Source: Bahá'í World News Service)*

## **Chapter 4: Chapel of St. Ignatius, Seattle, USA**

This chapter explores Steven Holl's Chapel of St. Ignatius, highlighting how expertly he orchestrates light, materials, and spatial sequences to evoke a sense of the sacred through unfolding time and elemental interaction. It focuses on the way natural light streams through the sculpted openings, the tactile qualities of stone and wood, and the chapel's integration with the surrounding landscape. By examining these elements, the chapter illustrates how the design fosters a dynamic dialogue between earth, sky, and the human body, crafting a sacred environment that comes alive through movement and sensory experience.



*Image 1.2 Chapel of St Ignatius, Seattle, USA (Source: ArchDaily)*

## **Chapter 5: Water Temple, Awaji Island, Japan**

The third site study delves into the Water Temple designed by Tadao Ando, highlighting the significant roles of water and earth in weaving a sacred spatial narrative. This chapter examines the temple's incorporation of reflective pools, submerged pathways, and concrete surfaces, which foster a profound sense of purification, transition, and tranquility. By focusing on these elemental aspects, we see how water serves as both a physical and symbolic element, seamlessly blending architecture with the natural landscape and encouraging a meditative engagement. The analysis also investigates the ritualized movements through various thresholds that shape the sacred experience.



*Image 1.3 Water Temple, Awaji Island, Japan (Source: HIC Arquitectura)*

## **Chapter 6: Reflection and Synthesis**

This chapter brings together insights from the three architectural studies to draw broader conclusions about the significance of elemental convergence in sacred architecture. It explores how earth, water, and sky operate not just as symbolic elements, but as active forces that shape our spatial awareness and the progression of time. Furthermore, the chapter examines the implications of these findings for contemporary architectural practices and theories, suggesting design strategies that emphasize the importance of embodied, elemental, and atmospheric qualities in the creation of sacred spaces.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion and Future Directions**

The concluding chapter summarizes the main argument of the thesis: that sacred architecture is best perceived as a sentient and elemental experience that unfolds over time and through individual perception. It explores how this phenomenological and elemental approach offers fresh insights into the meanings and

design of architecture. Additionally, the chapter highlights potential directions for future research, suggesting the expansion of the elemental framework to include diverse typologies and the incorporation of digital technologies to deepen sensory and temporal engagement with sacred spaces.

# Chapter 2 Phenomenology and Elemental Encounter

*"We come to see not by looking at the world but by being in it."  
— Maurice Merleau-Ponty<sup>10</sup>*

## 2.1 Introduction

Architecture extends beyond materials and form and function; it is about the quality of presence. To experience space, in the most honest sense of that term, is to be moved, to remember, and to experience our multiple senses. This chapter allows phenomenology to emerge as a primary lens through which we can reconceive how we experience architecture—not merely a figural, visual, and abstract practice but rather as an immersive and embodied experience.

Architecture in the 21st century, through a focus on advanced digital methodologies, has prioritized visual drama and flat abstraction. The phenomenological lens, however, encourages renewal of meaningful place and space; the valence of experience, the riches of memory, and the poetics of dwelling. This chapter builds together the philosophic framework of Merleau-Ponty, Bachelard, Tanizaki, Pallasmaa, and Norberg-Schulz within the context of articulated five phenomenological experiential themes: Multisensory; Temporality and Movement; Atmosphere; Gestalt; and Threshold.

## 2.2 Phenomenological Foundations in Architecture

Phenomenology is a fundamental philosophical perspective for architecture, emphasizing experience, perception, and embodiment, as opposed to abstract

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<sup>10</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 353.

formalism or functional criteria. It resists an understanding of architecture as a visual object, while recognizing it as an experiential field—a lived reality that unfolds through bodies, senses, memories, and imaginations. This phenomenological account relates architecture to the fullness and complexity of human existence, placing dwelling, place, atmosphere, and memory at the heart of spatial experience.

Many various thinkers have broadened architectural phenomenology by drawing our attention to the interiority of experience and evocative strength of space.

### **Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Embodiment and Lived Perception**

In Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "*Phenomenology of Perception*", the body is presented as the first way in which we know the world. Merleau-Ponty argues that perception is more than a mental reading of sensory stimuli; it is a bodily relationship to space.<sup>11</sup> From this perspective, architecture changes from an object to a bodily phenomenon that acts upon and is acted upon by the movement, gestures, and emotions of the perceiver.

Merleau-Ponty's the notion of the "lived body" (*le corps propre*) challenges Cartesian dualism, saying that our idea of space arises from our kinesthetic perception of spatial experience through movement in rooms, walking upstairs, walking around corners. In "*The Visible and the Invisible*", Merleau-Ponty introduces a metaphysical notion of "flesh," which suggests that the perceiving body is engaged with the world it perceives.<sup>12</sup> In architectural terms, this suggests that materials, surfaces, and proportions act, respond and resonate in perception and are not passive.

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<sup>11</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 203.

<sup>12</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 147.

## Gaston Bachelard: The Poetics of Space and Imaginative Resonance

In “*The Poetics of Space*”, Gaston Bachelard expresses a phenomenology of space as resonance, intimacy, and imagination throughout our lived experience of space.<sup>13</sup> Rather than assess the architecture based on functionality or technicality, Bachelard explores the imaginative weight of forms of the home—attics, cellars, drawers, thresholds; they are manifest as poetic images not as architectural elements, these spaces leverage us into reverie, resonance, memory, and symbol.

Bachelard describes “intimate immensity”, how sense of magnitude can emerge from very small, enclosed spaces.<sup>14</sup> For Bachelard, space is not only what we occupy, but what we dream about, what we remember, and how we psychically inhabit space. In “*Water and Dreams*” and “*Air and Dreams*”, Bachelard expanded on these insights to link material elements—water, fire and air—to specific moods and forms of consciousness.<sup>15</sup>

Bachelard develops the capacity to show that architecture can exist beyond its external form and begin to encompass the inner experience of life. The warmth of the hearth, the dark of a corner, and stillness of the pond, conjure imaginative atmospheres that we continue to hold after we leave. His poetics allows us to deepen our understanding of how architecture can become lived recollection and imaginative extension of our experiences.

## Jun’ichirō Tanizaki: Shadows, Silence, and Cultural Sensibility

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<sup>13</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, xvii.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>15</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Edith R. Farrell (Dallas: Pegasus Foundation, 1983); and *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*, trans. Edith R. Farrell and C. Frederick Farrell (Dallas: Dallas Institute Publications, 1988).

In his essay “*In Praise of Shadows*”, Jun’ichirō Tanizaki presents a culturally ingrained discourse that critiques the Western emphasis on light, clarity and control of architecture.<sup>16</sup> Tanizaki, who is rooted in Japanese aesthetic tradition, values shadow, patina, stillness, and transience. He points out that often it is what is not present, or what is hidden or veiled, or simply implied that is beautiful about architecture.

He writes about such materials as lacquerware, paper screens (shoji), and weathered wood, which are shown to be more beautiful under low light, and with the passage of time. His writing is a device to invite personal reflection about a culture's attitudes toward impermanence, silence, and subtlety. For example, the alcove (tokonoma) is cherished not for its adornments, but for its restraint, which he argues asks for contemplation rather than stimulation.

In this way, Tanizaki expands a phenomenological conversation to encompass an aesthetic relativism and urges us to remember that how we experience space is made possible not only by how we bodily experience it, but also by our cultural imagination. Tanizaki's writing is a demonstration of how architecture sometimes should step back into silence to create a spatial depth, mystery or intimacy.

## **Christian Norberg-Schulz: Place, Atmosphere, and Dwelling**

Christian Norberg-Schulz's “*Genius Loci*” serves as a phenomenology of place, asserting that architecture must manifest the spirit of the place where it is built; he recognizes three building blocks that create our experience of place: space, character, and identity.<sup>17</sup> A meaningful building is not just a building that is dropped into the landscape but rather a building that interprets the complex relationship between: topography, climate, culture, and collective memory.

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<sup>16</sup> Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*.

<sup>17</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 5.

Objectively, while Norberg-Schulz is informed by Heidegger, his distinction comes from applying these theories to contemporary architecture, calling for a distance from placelessness and return to place-based identity. In *“Intentions in Architecture”*, Norberg-Schulz examines the nature of meaning as it arises from spatial organization, and ways in which architects might influence the psychological orientation of a site through thresholds, paths and centers of space.<sup>18</sup> The result is an architecture of specific dwelling - belonging to place not just occupying place.

## **Juhani Pallasmaa: The Multisensory and Ethical Dimension of Architecture**

In *“The Eyes of the Skin”*, Juhani Pallasmaa contests the visual survey in contemporary architecture and laments that design has become "an architecture of the eye" that ignores the fullness of sensory experience.<sup>19</sup> He argues our interaction with architecture is much richer and accessible than simply relying on the sense of sight alone. We recognize that we encounter architecture through interacting with objects, surfaces, environmental textures, reverberations, and temperature, amongst other sensory interfaces. We do not solely rely upon our sense of vision.

Drawing from Merleau-Ponty and Bachelard, Juhani Pallasmaa advocates for an architecture of the skin, ear, and breath. He writes, "the door handle is the handshake of the building",<sup>20</sup> indicating that architectural design is a craft in touch and feelings of presence, not aesthetic via the eye.

Pallasmaa continues to advance his views into the moral realm in *“Encounters: Architectural Essays”*, stating that architecture should provide existential nourishment

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<sup>18</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Intentions in Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965), 179.

<sup>19</sup> Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

in an increasingly disembodied world.<sup>21</sup> Pallasmaa is interested in discussing architectural success not through its novelty but through its atmospheric fidelity—permission and opportunity for reflection, memory, and community.

## 2.3 Parameters of Sentient Space

Architectural experience encompasses a wealth of experience beyond visuality, as it occurs as a rich, embodied event in which individuals engage with spatial, material, and atmospheric dimensions. Grounded in the phenomenological groundwork already described, this section extends to five thematic issues—Multisensory Experience, Temporalities, Atmosphere, Gestalt, Threshold—that integrate to build a more nuanced phenomenology of spatial sensing.

### Multisensory Engagement

Architecture is, by its nature, multisensory. As Juhani Pallasmaa writes, "The door handle is the handshake of the building,"<sup>22</sup> reminding us that our experience of space starts with physical contact - not simply with sight. What he calls "retinal architecture", an issue rooted in a predominant visual culture, is characterized by superficiality, neglecting the haptic, the acoustical, the olfactory, and the thermal.<sup>23</sup>

This idea is compatible with Merleau-Ponty's "lived body" which does not perceive individual senses but sees as a whole.<sup>24</sup> Here is the basis for Pallasmaa's claim that significant architecture is one that engages all our senses and enhances our experience of living. The affective qualities of rough stone, the chill of marble, the

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<sup>21</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, *Encounters: Architectural Essays* (Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 12

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>24</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 203

acoustics of a vaulted dome have the power to invoke a unique emotional and perceptual response.

Similarly, Tanizaki's investigation of shadow and dimness in "*In Praise of Shadows*" provides an insightful critique of too much light. "We find beauty not in the thing itself but in the patterns of shadows, the light and the darkness."<sup>25</sup> It is the ability to summon tactile imagination and cultural sensibilities from light-manipulating phenomenological experience through visual nuance that gives our worlds significance.

## Temporality and Movement

Phenomenological space is necessarily dynamic not static; it is temporal, and unfolds through movement, as well as memory. Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that perception is temporal and that our experience of time is intertwined with the movement of the body as it engages space.<sup>26</sup>

As a result, there is a kinetic quality to architecture since it cannot only be said to be the thing that we see, but also a thing that we experience, navigate, enter, leave, remember. The forms of the phenomenological experiences of architecture - climbing a stair, the verging evocation of space when entering a nave, or the constraint of spatial experience in a narrow alley - all ultimately are moments perceived in phenomenological relationships to one another and each moment denotes a change in our spatial experience. In "*The Poetics of Space*", Bachelard states that "the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories, and dreams of mankind," reflecting the capacity for even things that are considered to be still, are rather remembered with a degree of dynamism.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, 247.

<sup>27</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 6.

In the “*Genius Loci*”, Christian Norberg-Schulz offers that the sense of a place (or genius loci) cannot be told only in spatial terms, but it also has temporal spatial conditions; the character of a location is responsive to the seasons, what is illuminated, how light and shadow, and what is altered within the rhythms of our rituals.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the experience of architecture is given to us as an experience of duration, with each duration felt through felt sequences of events, and we crossed thresholds and movements of transition during the architecture.

## Atmosphere

Architecture is thick with atmosphere, creating an emotional habitat for all that enter. Bachelard states, atmosphere pertains to what is present and, at the same time, offers a poetic contribution. For example, there is the soft glow of a fireplace, the calmness of a chapel, and the sound of feet on wood—each produces an emotional response that we haven't entirely pinned down yet.<sup>29</sup>

Pallasmaa describes the emotion that occupies space as the emotional presence of space; he suggests that great architecture makes you feel something and leaves one at awe, rather than simply awed.<sup>30</sup> But in the same way Merleau-Ponty describes “the world as an expressive field,” architectural forms convey intentions and moods that forever predate our acknowledgement and interpretation.<sup>31</sup>

We don't just attach atmospheres to buildings; the atmosphere is architecture. As Tanizaki suggests, it is the warm glow of the paper lantern, not the unforgiving bulb, that carries the emotional weight.<sup>32</sup> Ultimately, the mood is addressed through the nooks and crannies of the architecture, not merely adhered to any afterthoughts.

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<sup>28</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 19.

<sup>29</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 50.

<sup>30</sup> Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 34.

<sup>31</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 215.

<sup>32</sup> Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, 32.

## Gestalt

As Merleau-Ponty notes, perception is inherently gestaltic; we perceive wholes, not parts.<sup>33</sup> This is fundamentally important in architecture, which asserts its essence as wholes, not as parts.

The house is described by Bachelard as "a body of images that gives mankind proofs or illusions of stability,"<sup>34</sup> highlighting how built forms can provide a structural whole that has both a physical role as a shelter and a symbol of our being. A property of architecture is to provide both the discursive and perceptual conditions of spatial order, proportion, materials and light: all of which combines to provide a situation of what Pallasmaa calls "sensory integration," an important property of architectural integrity that positively enhances the human experience.

Norberg-Schulz adds to this notion with the concept of spatial structure, which is a quality that architecture possesses to shape our existential disposition of orientation: that is to distinguish here, not there, inside, not outside, above, not below, when we encounter architecture.<sup>35</sup> Architectural meaning emerges when spatial aspects come together, providing a perceptual gesture that anchors our being.

## Threshold

Phenomenological architecture is composed of thresholds, the space of transition, transformation, and uncertainty. Liminal spaces, such as porches, hallways, and courtyards, are thresholds that operate as points of passage. A threshold is the transitional space between more than just physical locations. It is the transition

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<sup>33</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 17.

<sup>35</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 26.

between moods, it is the transition between identities, and it is the transition between states of being.

Thresholds are great paradoxes: The closet is an opening closure, and a beginning end. Bachelard writes about thresholds as moments of contemplation: windows can intimate the world outside and be the mirror of the self.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Tanizaki endorses blurry boundaries between inside and outside, light and shadow, being and non-being.

Pallasmaa argues that the best architecture conveys such uncertainties and includes layers of interpretation and dynamic readings.<sup>37</sup> Norberg-Schulz elaborated, “To dwell is to leave and return,” this journey is always discerning a threshold.<sup>38</sup>

## 2.4 Elemental Convergences: Earth, Sky and Water

Architecture, in its meanings most profound and sacred, has always sought its foundations in the Elements. Earth, sky and water are no more a backdrop to buildings than ineluctable participants, forces that resonate with our very being. A sentient architecture encompasses an engaging with these fundamental realities as experiences—not as symbols or representations—in the very pulse of our spaces. When architecture corresponds to the elements it can give a palpable sense of the sacred presence embodied.

### Grounding Presence – Earth as Anchor and Memory

Earth is the horizon of stability, the ground of all architecture, and the gravity that anchors it. In a phenomenological sense, the earth is not merely a physical surface;

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<sup>36</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 185.

<sup>37</sup> Pallasmaa, *Encounters: Architectural Essays*, 115.

<sup>38</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 28.

it is a weight of existence that makes dwelling possible. Christian Norberg-Schulz discusses the ways in which “the earth gives things their identity,” oftentimes embodying a sense of permanence and grounded-ness.<sup>39</sup>

Having architecture that is rooted in the earth creates feelings of gravitas, humility, and silence. Take the Lotus Temple where poise is enacted through the broad foundation of red sandstone, anchoring the ethereal white petals to the ground while creating a meditative sense of the terrain below. Gaston Bachelard describes the cellar or cave as a space of interior depth, “the dark entity of the house,” which houses the unconscious.<sup>40</sup> It is where the sacred occurs through weight, stillness, and containment.

In a sentient architectural practice, the earth is not a flat surface; it is a body, manifested in textures, materials, and forms, sympathetic to the body’s desire for support and the soul’s desire for home.

## **Vertical Reach – Sky as Orientation and Transcendence**

The earth roots us, while the sky lifts us. It extends the vertical axis as we bring our perception upward and our consciousness outward toward infinity. Here the influence of the sky is conveyed in architecture through light, rhythm, and openness. Merleau-Ponty perceived that light is there, “one illuminates being without imposing.” It is an invisible presence illuminating that which is visible.<sup>41</sup>

Light conveys materials into an atmosphere. For instance, in Chapel of St. Ignatius, light is drawn in as “seven bottles of light in a stone box,” producing a spiritual temporality through color, movement, and orientation.<sup>42</sup> Sacredness is

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<sup>39</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 23.

<sup>40</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 18–19.

<sup>41</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 270.

<sup>42</sup> Holl, *Anchoring*, 76–79.

welcomed, as opposed to imposed upon, through the fleeting dance of light and shadow.

Tanizaki oscillates between noticing the layers of subtle and passive light and recognizing its potential richness and depth.<sup>43</sup> He exemplifies that the sky or that essential quality does not necessarily unravel itself into a magnificent dome, but perhaps into a glow on a paper screen, or a gentle dimness in a shaded alcove.

In sentient architecture, the sky becomes a condition of openness, wonder, and release. It speaks not only of ascension but also of presence—of the breath between walls and the void that gives form its meaning.

## **Fluid Thresholds – Water as Reflection and Convergence**

Water ranks highest among the elements in terms of fluidity, elusiveness, and resonance. Water reflects, flows, and it cleanses. In architecture, water offers a sense of reflection and rhythm, adding literal and metaphorical depth.

Bachelard devotes an entire meditation on water, calling it the “substance of dreams.”<sup>44</sup> He sees water as interconnection with memory, reverie, and maternal roots. Water is frequently a threshold in sacred space, a pool at the entrance, a basin for purification, or a mirror that brings calm to mind.

In Water Temple, water is a surface and a barrier, obscuring and revealing the sacred beneath. The visitor descends through a path that takes them under a pool of lilies to the heart of the temple, an inversion of the elements.<sup>45</sup> Water is much more than a decorative element here, water exists as a veil, and an entry into meaningful space.

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<sup>43</sup> Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, 9–14.

<sup>44</sup> Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 6.

<sup>45</sup> Philip Jodidio, *Tadao Ando: Recent Projects*. (Cologne: Taschen, 2012), 54–57.

Water's fluidity expresses the ephemeral nature of the sacred. It allows architecture to change over time, flowing with the changing skies, while still embodying disparate states of calm and motion at once. Water gives an architecture of openness—it illustrates how built environments can absorb, respond, and resonate, rather than just present.

## 2.5 Elemental Triad and Sentient Wholeness

The elements of earth, sky, and water do more than act as signs; they embody a vast sensory and emotional vocabulary through which we experience sacred space. When used in this way, these elements connect the position of architecture to the rhythms and processes of nature and to the depths of the human psyche. They root the spatial in the existential and the material in the metaphysical, in a phenomenological sense.

To design sentient architecture is to listen to the elements, to work with them, not against them. To listen to the earth stability; to the sky to encourage an openness; to water to provide reflection. While these meetings in themselves do not create sacredness; they produce a sacred experience by aligning our constructed environments with the bedrock sentences of existence.

As Norberg-Schulz argues, sacred architecture "makes the invisible visible."<sup>46</sup> It does not happen through loud proclamations; it is subtle how we tune into what is always there! With their simplicity, the elements become the ways we experience the sacred, not an analysis; we inhabit, not define.

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<sup>46</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci*, 31.

# Chapter 3 Lotus Temple, New Delhi, India

*“The building should not dominate the landscape but grow from it — like a flower rising from water.” – Fariborz Sabha<sup>47</sup>*

## 3.1. A blossom amidst the city

The Lotus Temple, situated in one of India's greatest cities, New Delhi, is more than a site of worship; it is a breathing, reflective space amidst the city chaos. Designed by Iranian architect, Fariborz Sahba, and completed in 1986, the Lotus Temple serves as a House of Worship for the Bahá'í community for the Indian subcontinent. The petal-shaped building is modeled after the lotus flower, a potent symbol of spiritual purity and transcendence in Indian culture and invites everyone and anyone to come together to reflect in silence, minister global peace and community, and manifest the sacred in the everyday.



Image 3.1 Aerial View of Lotus Temple, New Delhi, India (Source: Incredible Asia)

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<sup>47</sup> Fariborz Sahba, interview by Mithaq Kazimi, *In Conversation with Fariborz Sahba*, (Medium, 2015)

The poetic abstraction and natural form of the structure bring to mind what Juhani Pallasmaa refers to as “sensuous architecture,” which enhances perception instead of imposing meaning.<sup>48</sup> Rather than enforcing rigid doctrines or religious symbols, the Lotus Temple invites individuals to engage with the sacred through their senses. The building’s architecture communicates through its shapes, the interplay of light, and a fundamental harmony—reflecting what can be described as an awareness of space. From a phenomenological perspective, this unique structure serves as a site for experience, fostering a connection between the self and the other, stillness and movement, as well as the material and the spiritual.

## **3.2. Architecture Analysis**

### **Formal Geometry and Concept Abstraction**

The lotus flower (*Nelumbo nucifera*) is sacred in many Indian and Eastern Traditions, representing purity, spiritual awakening, and transcendence. The architect Fariborz Sahba chose this form not only with significance from a cultural perspective but also from a geometric perspective that could be embraced by people of all faiths. The design does not reference a specific tradition or sect but instead reflects core Bahá’í principles of unity and inclusivity.

The structure is made up of 27 free-standing, marble-clad “petals,” organized in three tiers of nine petals, arranged around the central prayer hall. The number nine is sacred in the Bahá’í faith, representing completeness and unity. The symmetric organization is a reflection of mandala geometry, which is a common design characteristic of many sacred structures of South Asia. Mandalas are said to provide a centering experience for visitors, leading to contemplation and reflection.

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<sup>48</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, 3rd ed. (Chichester: Wiley, 2012), 29



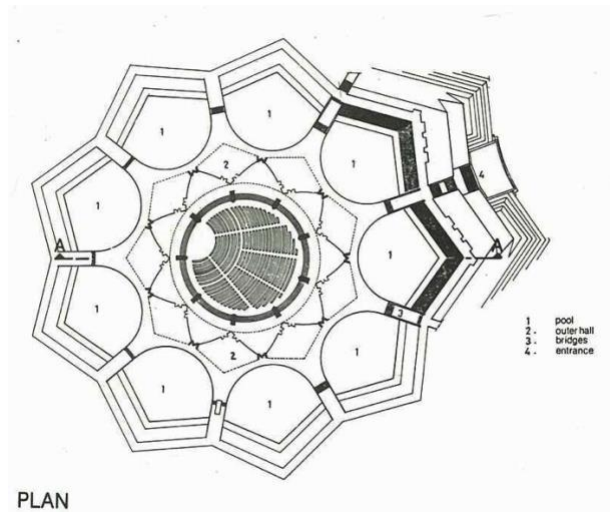


Image 3.4 Plan of the House of Worship. (Source: World Architecture Community)

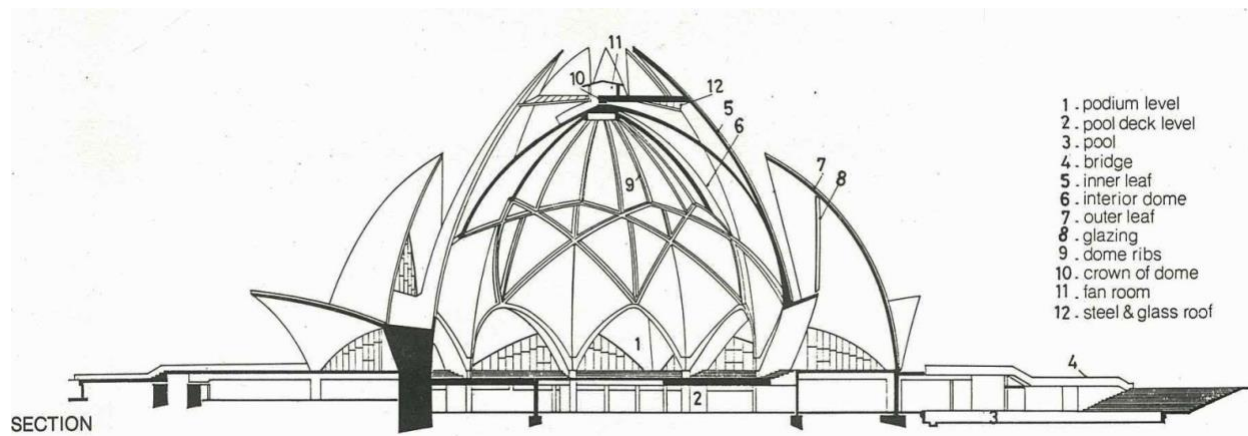


Image 3.5 Section of House of Worship. (Source: World Architecture Community)

## Symbolism and Sacred Typology Reinterpreted

The Lotus Temple reimagines the concept of the sacred architectural by appropriating a universal semiotic symbol, the lotus flower, which implies purity and spiritual awakening—a common theme in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and as an adopted theme by the Bahá'í Faith for its embracing nature. Architect Fariborz Sahba has not used a series of traditional sacred buildings, no domes, altars or steeples. Instead, he drew upon nature to utilize biomorphic forms to evoke transcendence.

The temple has a unique ninefold geometry defined by its nine petals, entrances, and reflecting pools; the ninefold geometry represents spiritual unity or

wholeness. The radial symmetry of the building fractals hierarchical arrangements and formally welcomes all directions, offering open and egalitarian reception. This approach sits beautifully with Bahá'í principles of embracing universal spirituality and realizing the importance of spiritual access for everyone. With a detached view of sacred space as a pre-determined codified system of signs, it has become phenomenological and through presence, not representation, the symbolic.



*Image 3.6 Ninefold geometry depicting mandal (Source: Rajasthan Tours & Drivers)*

## **Structure and Construction**

While its organic form provides an expression of architecture, the Lotus Temple is a triumph of contemporary structural engineering, with an organization of a reinforced concrete frame system, clad in white Pentelic marble from Greece - which is the same marble used in the Parthenon when in Athens, with its classical standards of beauty and proportion.

Each petal is a curved shell structural system supported by ribs and a steel reinforced concrete structure. The petals are designed to self-support without the use of interior columns which creates an uninterrupted space, increasing the openness,

inclusion and unity of the interior. The structure is 34.27 m high and 70 m in diameter, providing seating for 2,500 occupants.

Sahba worked with Flint & Neill Partnership (UK) and Larson & Toubro (India) to complete the structural engineering and construction. The unique use of computer-aided design (CAD) and scaled models aided in developing the difficult curvatures and means to join the petals; an unprecedented exposure for its day.

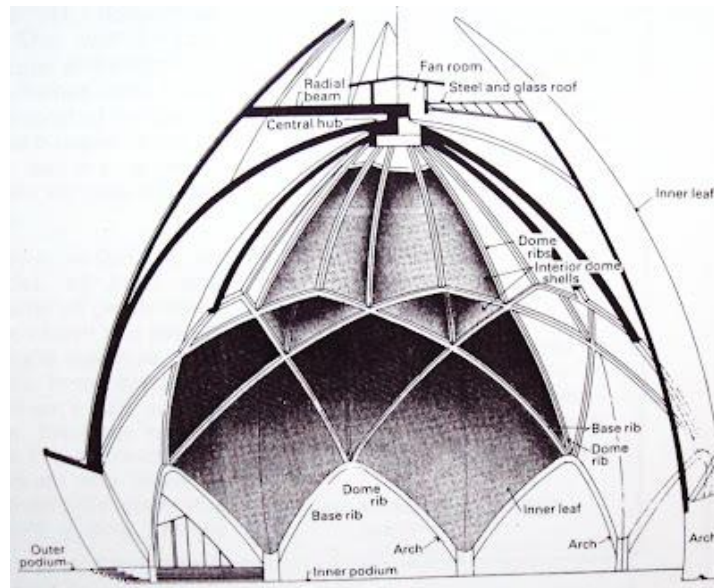


Image 3.7 Section showing interior dome (Source: Architecture Student's Corner)

## Materials and Tactile Atmosphere

The building's material palette is both minimal and intensely sensory:

- White marble as a symbol of purity, light, and timelessness quietly disperses natural light across the room.
- Concrete is a structural element, but it is hidden from view. The spiritual intention is a strong, soft, and supple experience.
- Water, and the landscape, are used both aesthetically and in determining the climate as part of a passive cooling strategy.

The marble's tactile quality, the coolness against the skin, and quiet acoustics resonate with what Pallasmaa calls the "haptic dimensions of architecture" and the activation of bodily awareness and spiritual calm.<sup>49</sup> In the absence of ornamentation, the focus becomes the sensory experience where the material transforms into an atmosphere.

## Environmental Design and Climate Response

The Lotus Temple is located in a semi-arid and tropical climate, where it employs an efficient passive performance design. The surrounding water bodies act as thermal reservoirs to best utilize evaporative cooling. The petal shape allows wind currents to move around the structure and over the design; the airflow would cause natural ventilation in the central prayer hall from operable vents positioned close to the roof apex. Daylight flows into the interiors from the oculus and gaps between petals, eliminating the need for artificial lights. The design strategies utilized follow a bioclimatic design, establishing a sustainable model of sacred architecture where environmental ethics about design align with the spiritual experience of the buildings.



Image 3.8 Oculus and surrounding vents (Source: Architecture Student's Corner)

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<sup>49</sup> Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, 10–13.

## Spatial Experience and Phenomenological Engagement

The temple designed for the Lotus Temple is more than an act of physicality and utility; it is a skilled designed journey through space. In transitioning towards the nine axial paths, one becomes disconnected from their previous resulting context, slowly losing track of themselves and their surroundings. Then entering the grand hall of prayer, with its vast volume, cool and calm atmosphere, and expansive geometry, a ceremonial act begins, one of that of silence and surrender. The diffuse light penetrating from above, plus the designated volume for contemplation, creates a feeling of being held, as if the architecture is embracing you. This is architecture as an event rather than an object; as Merleau-Ponty says, the body is located in space, or rather it is attached to space.<sup>50</sup> The flowing interior of the temple prompts our awareness of movement and towards being-orientation, of pace for reflection, and inner sense of openness. The absence of religious symbols persists in the design for a universal experience of the sacred. In this way, the temple operates at a threshold space: in-between. At the intersection of faiths, between light and matter, and between earth and sky.



Image 3.9 Inner fold between petals installed with glass for light (Source: Bahá'í House of Worship)

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<sup>50</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012), 171.

### 3.3. Earth – Grounding through Geometry, Path, and Place

The experience of connecting with the element of earth starts long before anyone ever enters the temple itself. Visitors arrive along nine separate landscaped paths that arrive from the central structure, through carefully curated gardens and low boundary walls. This gradual journey, from the busy city into the temple, can be seen as pilgrims making their way into an exploratory or reflective experience.

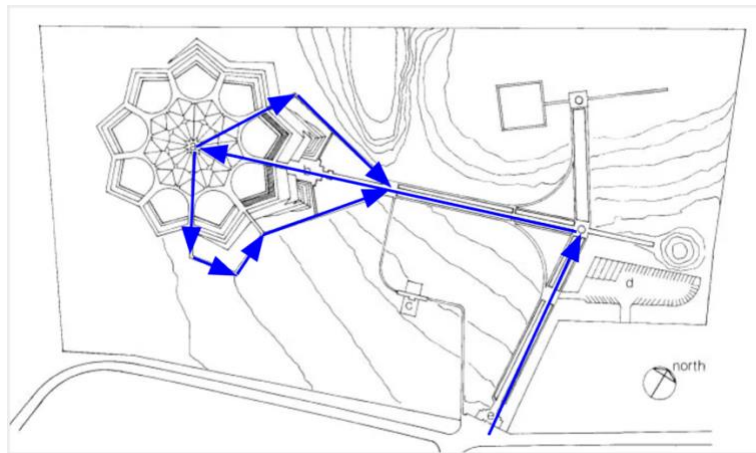


Image 3.10 Procession on Lotus Temple (Source: Author)

The temple does not rise up from the ground as a simply overwhelming monument; it emerges from the landscape on the ground like a flower, which makes the temple humble and holistic. The 27 marble petals as a form within the temple are more than just construction; they exist in a natural pattern. They resemble the layers of matter that provide spaces for dwelling and reverie; as noted by Gaston Bachelard, many natural forms - shells, nests, flowers - produce an architecture that lends itself to similar existence.<sup>51</sup> In the case of the temple, the petal becomes an architecture of embrace and intimacy; an invitation to experience space in a similar way to how one is drawn to experience a metaphor.

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<sup>51</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 12.



Image 3.11 Raised platform and bridges (Source: Apna Yatra)

Aligned with the cardinal directions and situated in the center of a campus of 26 acres of landscaping, the temple is really an embodiment of Norberg-Schulz's "genius loci," or spirit of a place.<sup>52</sup> Rather than dominating the place around it, the temple draws from its surroundings, and grounds the experience of sacred space in cosmic orientation and human scale.



Image 3.12 Lotus Temple with City as a backdrop (Source: Bahá'í House of Worship)

### 3.4. Sky – Light as Revelation and Vertical Ascent

The elemental nature of the sky is depicted by the way the temple relates to light. The central chamber is 34.27 meters high and features an oculus that douses the

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<sup>52</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 5–10.

space in natural light, clearly defining the spaces between the marble petals. This mode and movement of light and shadow reinterprets the construction by shaping a semblance of continuous movement and the need to embrace something transcendent.



*Image 3.13 Oculus as main focus and no ornamentation (Source: Sachin Dutta Photography)*

The inside possesses no icons or ornamentation, granting light the opportunity to be the only medium of the sacred. Light and illumination take precedence over the arrangements of shadows created as sunlight dribbles down the ridges of the petals, evoking Tanizaki's idea of "shadow as substance." Here light is more than a mechanical process. It delivers a drama of transformation that allows the architecture to manifest as something deeper than a physical boundary - it allows the architecture to experience the shaping of a luminous atmosphere, as if through a filtered consciousness.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty tells us that "light is not what we see, but it is that by which we see."<sup>53</sup> In the context of the Lotus Temple, light manifests as a silent voice that echoes the visitor's inner being. It indicates the time of day as it elevates the significance of dawn, noon, and dusk by virtue of its different intervals. Its relationship with the sky transforms the sacred experience from a sensation of enclosure to one of

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<sup>53</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 130.

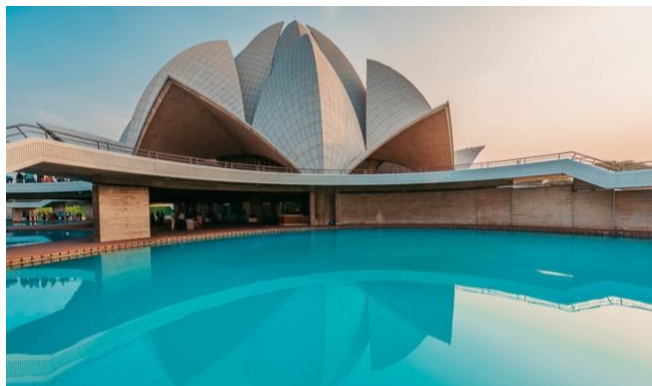
infinity, reminding one that the divine is not captured by the building but passes through it.



*Image 3.14 Diffused light inside the dome as the protagonist (Source: Bahá'í House of Worship)*

### 3.5. Water – Reflection, Stillness, and Emotional Resonance

The nine bodies of water around the Lotus Temple have both environmental and symbolic meanings. They serve a practical purpose for the building as they help cool down the building in Delhi's extreme climate. On a deeper level, they act as mirrors for contemplation, reflecting the form of the structure and erasing the distinctions between real and reflected, and between earth and sky.



*Image 3.15 Reflection of Lotus Temple in one of the Pools (Source: Pando Trip)*

As a visitor moves along the paths adjacent to these pools, the movement of the rippling reflections in the pools, the gentle air flow, and the shimmering light dancing off of the surface of the water creates a multi-sensory experience that adds to what Pallasmaa calls the "multi-sensory experience of space."<sup>54</sup> The water is a sensory phenomenon - not only can it be seen but also heard and felt; its stillness indicates silence, intensifying the ambience of silence, as if creating an acoustic and emotional canvas.

In this context, water signifies the Bahá'í concept of multiplicity and unity. Each pool is different, yet together they create a complete sacred circle. Bachelard's phenomenology tells us that water is reverie and memory.<sup>55</sup> It is both solace and reflection. In the Lotus Temple, water acts as liminal membrane; it stands at the world of scholars and the world of contemplation, bridging the two worlds by offering a threshold act of immersion.

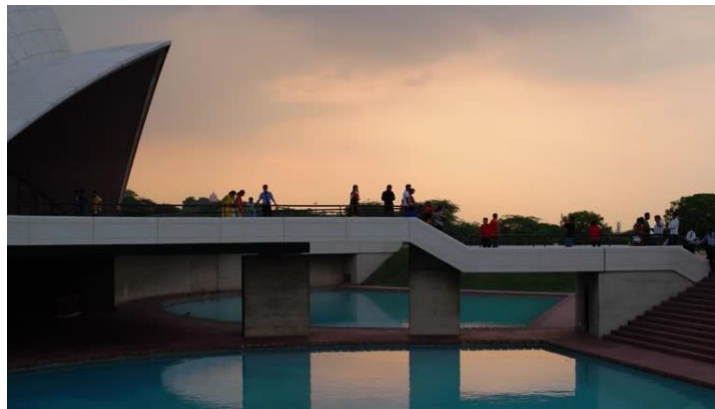


Image 3.16 Interwoven elements at twilight (Source: Getty Images)

### 3.6. Threshold – Sacred Atmosphere and Sentient Space

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<sup>54</sup> Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, 41–45.

<sup>55</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Edith R. Farrell (Dallas: The Pegasus Foundation, 1983), 1–3.

Experiencing the interior of the Lotus Temple is life-altering. The silence, the freshness of the marble, and the quietly diffused vertical light create an intrinsic shift in regarding atmosphere. The sacred is not conveyed through doctrine but is engaged as an abiding experience that will either remain with a sense of non-visible trace urges, demands, or offers—that can't be articulated directly, or will manifest as a felt silence, a type of silence that invites one to tune into oneself.

Bachelard describes sacred interiors alike as having intimate vastness, provoking simultaneous smallness and grandeur. The Lotus Temple can capture this paradox astutely: the visitor is contained within the petals; however, they experience an elevation akin to heaven or heavens. Architecture does not entail meaning but allows for presence.

In the spirit of the sacred, where one is hugged by atmosphere without being contained, uplifted, and satisfied, all comes from the elemental dialogue. Earth weighs one down, sky uplift (spiritual wis short or long term), and water begs reflection. In a sense, the Lotus Temple brings all of this together, as an object of awe, but particularly as a living threshold of potentiality where the sacred can be met.



*Image 3.17 Lotus Temple at Dawn - the ultimate in between (Source: Ultimate Passport - Blogging travel inspiration)*

### 3.7. Conclusion

The Lotus Temple is not only a visual signifier, it is a performable site. There is a qualitative power in the forms ability to create space, to move body through and induce ritual movement in the body, to take experiences to states of affect. The engagement of earth, sky and water as experienced in the temple is not merely metaphorical, but rather, is located in the bodily experience of those entities.

In this regard, the inessential quality of the temple states the essential heart of what we aim to communicate in Experiencing the Sacred: that ultimately architecture is more than form and function; it is the unfolding of presence.

## Chapter 4 Chapel of St. Ignatius, Seattle, USA

*“Space is oblivion without light. A building speaks through the silence of perception orchestrated by light.” – Steven Holl<sup>56</sup>*

### 4.1. A vessel of luminous contemplation

The Chapel of St. Ignatius designed by Steven Holl and open in 1997 at Seattle University is a beautiful work of sacred architecture that embraces a phenomenological approach to experience in the design of the chapel rather than relying solely on more typical forms of sacredness, including symbolic meanings or aesthetic experiences, although in some cases, Holl’s designs are challenging to truly separate for practical analysis. The architectural language of St. Ignatius chapel reservoirs Jesuit spirituality as well as the Ignatian exercises when Holl described the chapel as “seven bottles of light in a stone box” limited rather than ambiguous. The chapel is designed toward perception, revelation transformation.<sup>57</sup>



Image 4.1 Aerial View of Chapel of St Ignatius, Seattle, USA (Source: ArchDaily)

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<sup>56</sup> Steven Holl. *The Chapel of St. Ignatius*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999.

<sup>57</sup> Steven Holl, *Anchoring* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1989), 88.

Unlike an artwork, which might use either iconography or embellishing ornament expressions of holiness, a building relies on light and shadow, materiality and its flow of space to establish a sacred experience. The chapel thus has phenomenological qualities which provoke the involvements with the lived body that Merleau-Ponty<sup>58</sup> theorizes while also capturing the poetic intimacy of space presented by Bachelard.<sup>59</sup> The chapel develops as an elemental sanctuary, invoking elemental forces whereby earth, sky, and the immaterial collide to achieve an effect that is not divine but is felt once removed from the material sensations of a bodily response through analogous experiences achieved in sacrosanct engagements.

## 4.2. Architectural Analysis

### Formal Geometry and Concept Abstraction

The chapel's footprint is that of a rectangle, punctuated by mismatched light sources, abstractly shaped as either curves or angular shapes, giving the building very lively or dynamic qualities from the outside. A church can seem heavy, even solid, imposing a feeling of fortress-like weight on the viewer, but that heavy, solid appearance is what makes the interior feel so light and bright. The heavy, thick concrete walls anchor the chapel firmly into the earth. The roof and light openings seem to reach for the sky, symbolic of our natural desire to reach beyond ourselves.

Inside, the chapel reveals itself in the best possible way as a series of brightly lit spaces where each chamber conjures light seen as welcoming. In the interior ceiling there are seven light vessels which are spatially colored and directed according to where they spatially become aligned in relation to the time of day and worship for the

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<sup>58</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012), 94–100.

<sup>59</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), xviii–xix.

community. All the elements of this chapel bring the light together to choreograph light that signifies the passage of time in this sacred space.

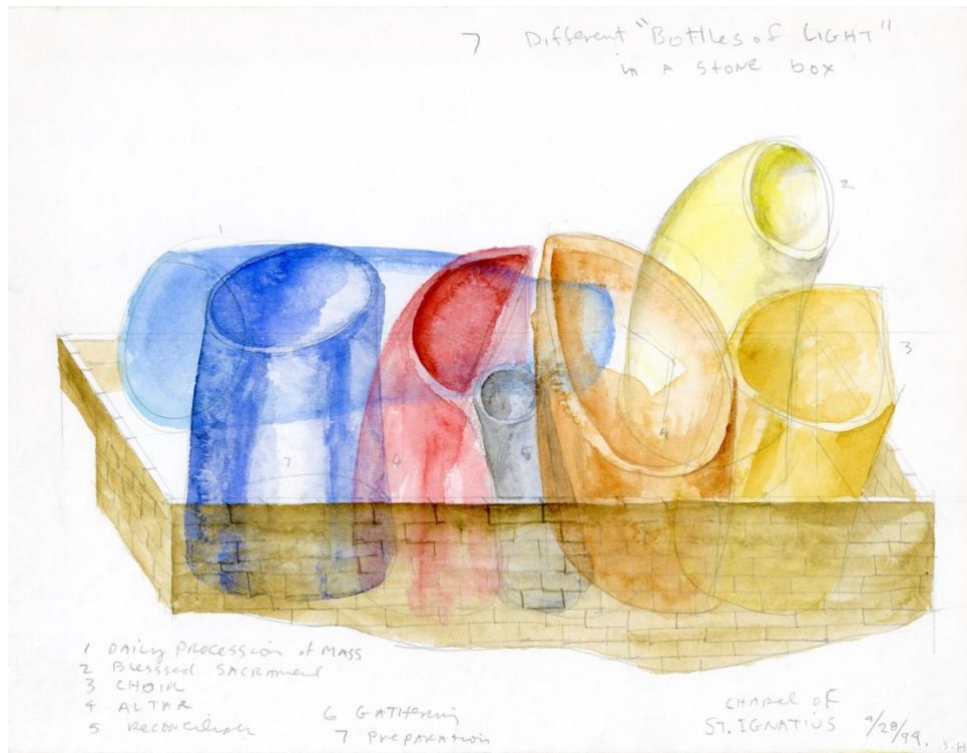


Image 4.2 Concept by Steven Holl (Source: Steven Holl Architects)

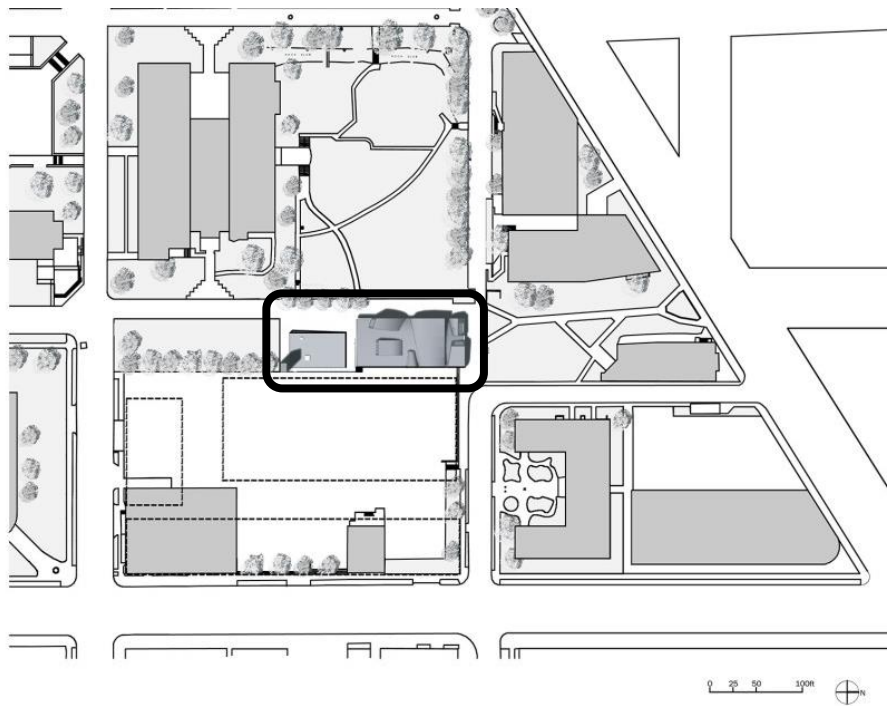


Image 4.3 Chapel of St Ignatius marked on site plan of Seattle University (Source: ArchDaily)

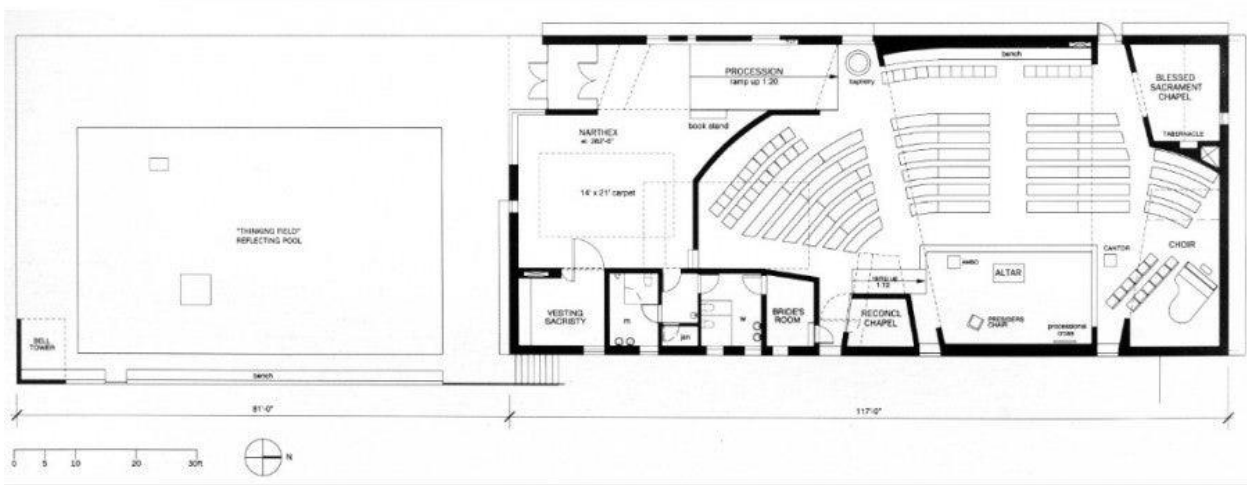


Image 4.4 Plan of Chapel of St Ignatius (Source: Blog by Park Young-woo)

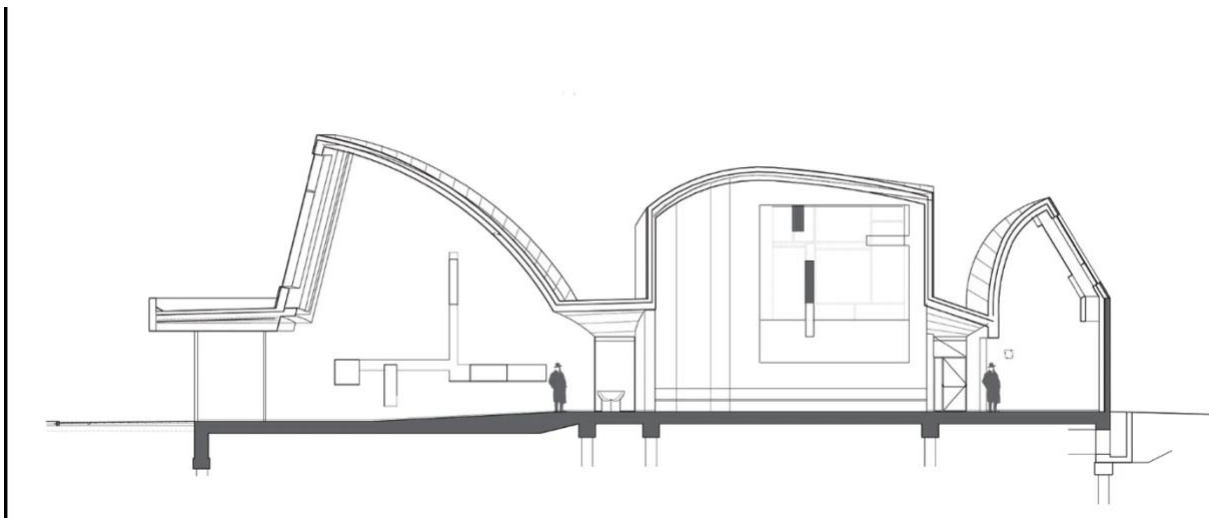


Image 4.5 Section at Procession March (Source: Steven Holl Architects)

## Symbolism and Sacred Typology Reinterpreted

The architecture of the Chapel is not iconographic but deeply symbolic. Instead of presenting sacred designs, or relying on traditional ecclesiastical motifs, the Chapel provides a place where the divine can be sensed through feeling and perception.

Sacred architecture, as Norberg-Schulz explains, should "gather the world" by establishing a center where the sky, earth, light and man commune.<sup>60</sup> Here, Holl's chapel does not create mere axis mundi; rather, it gathers these elements into a luminous field of sacredness where the experience becomes spirituality through presence alone.



Image 4.6 Diffused light from various colored lens fitted with glass (Source: Building Types Online)

## Structure and Construction

In terms of structure, the chapel is constructed of cast-in-place reinforced concrete. It has thick walls—some in some areas as thick as 18 inches (45 cm)—which function both structurally as load-bearing walls and spatially as enclosure for space. The thick walls provide thermal mass and a sense of ultimate permanence and serenity that are similar to the ancient sacral qualities of monolithic forms.<sup>61</sup>

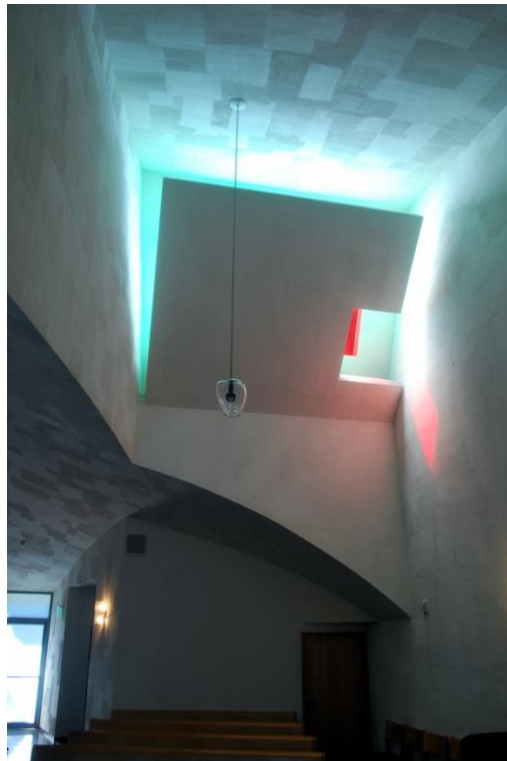
The roof consists of cast-in-place concrete roof slabs with "bottles of light" integrated from steel-reinforced light voids (light vessels), as the architect Steven Holl

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<sup>60</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 18.

<sup>61</sup> Steven Holl, *Chapel of St. Ignatius* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 22–25.

describes. These light vessels are not skylights where the roof has a single hole cut out of it; these light vessels each puncture the roof with a sculptural void consisting of steel framing and translucent glass or polycarbonate panels or coverings. Each light vessel is a load-bearing spatial event for further lateral resistance, and when light enters and diffuses the interior at different times of day as the sun moves across the sky, they have, ultimately, the qualities of light.



*Image 4.7 Tilt Up Method to construction of tilted colored lens windows (Source: Wikiarquitectura)*

The building of the chapel was completed using conventional formwork for the concrete walls and slabs. However, the complex form of each of the light vessels—largely asymmetrical, tilted and equipped with their own light filters—required unique custom fabricated steel subframes and formwork molds that were constructed to strict tolerances and meticulously aligned.<sup>62</sup> This process of constructing the chapel became a conversation between heavy and light: the concrete was poured with all its

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<sup>62</sup> Lori Ryker, *Mockbee Coker: Thought and Process* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995)

`imperfections', and the light structures were required to be `precise' and `clear'. This connection between massive structures (concrete) and lighter structures (steel) required detailed attention to the connection details between the two to account for differential movement between the two materials due to thermal expansion, according to structural engineer Guy Nordenson.<sup>63</sup> The mixture of heavy and light materials also reflected spiritual duality—the material presence of a grounded structure intersecting with the aspirations of a structure reaching for the sky.



*Image 4.8 Visible Colored lenses (Source: Steven Holl Architects)*

## **Material and Tactile Atmosphere**

The material selection reflects a monastic restraint but encourages sensual touch. The interior surfaces were finished using a hand applied ochre-toned stucco. Its tactile warmth provided an exciting counterpoint to the roughness of exposed concrete. The waxed concrete floor worked simultaneously like a mirror, capturing and

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<sup>63</sup> Guy Nordenson, "Light Bottles and Heavy Walls: Structural Reflections on the Chapel of St. Ignatius," *Engineering Architecture Journal* 12, no. 3 (1999)

reflecting light from the overhead volumes, and complementing the overall glow of the space.

The limited use of wood in the furnishings and doorways provides an organic warmth and human scale. Throughout the day, the colored glass filters embedded in the skylights provide different hues - amber, blue, green - that create a kaleidoscopic display of interaction as colored light plays within the interior. This simple material palette reflects Holl's conviction that clarity in material allows the viewer to experience materials more fully.

By presenting how the building stands - reflecting the bearing walls and hanger light vessels and the way material houses together - the chapel promotes a haptic connection between its occupants and building. The chapel facilitates an awareness of space, recognized in its tectonic expressions.



*Image 4.9 Kids experiencing the roughness of concrete (Source: Steven Holl Architects)*

## **Environmental and Sustainable Strategies**

The chapel was conceived long before sustainability was popularized, and it does however employ some passive environmental strategies that support its purpose. The concrete mass for thermal massing sustains a temperature for the interior environment. Skylights let daylight flood in, reducing the need for artificial lights. Operable windows with cross-ventilation paths allow for the natural ventilation of the building. These features not only fulfill the long-term environmental goals of the building plan but also embody the spiritual mission of the building: connecting its occupants with nature's changing rhythms.<sup>64</sup>

## Spatial Experience and Phenomenological Engagement

The chapel functions less as a static monument, but functions more as an evolving journey of perception that responds to perceivable time and now is influenced by changing weather, human experience, and the memory of visitations. The chapel provides a non-linear design that departs from the common longitudinal church plan, moving instead in a clear asymmetrical plan that permits a visitor to move naturally. The visitor experience begins with a low vestibule that gently invites the visitor into the nave, subtly leading the visitor longitudinally along a northeast-southwest orientation.

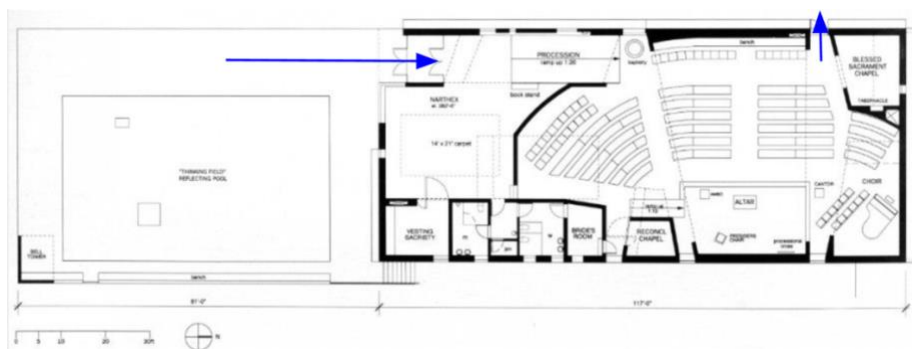


Image 4.10 Entrance is from South and Emergency Exit from West (Source: Author)

<sup>64</sup> Steven Holl, "Light as Spirit," in *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture*, ed. Steven Holl, Juhani Pallasmaa, and Alberto Pérez-Gómez (San Francisco: William Stout Publishers, 2006)

In this experience, the design does not depend on walls to introduce distinct liturgical areas. Rather, the light and the overall volume of space inform distinct areas for liturgical use. Light creates the space of the altar with warmth and a golden glow, while the baptismal font is created in the floor with a calm and soft blue glow. The area with the tabernacle nearby emanates a cooler, but softly amber warmth.

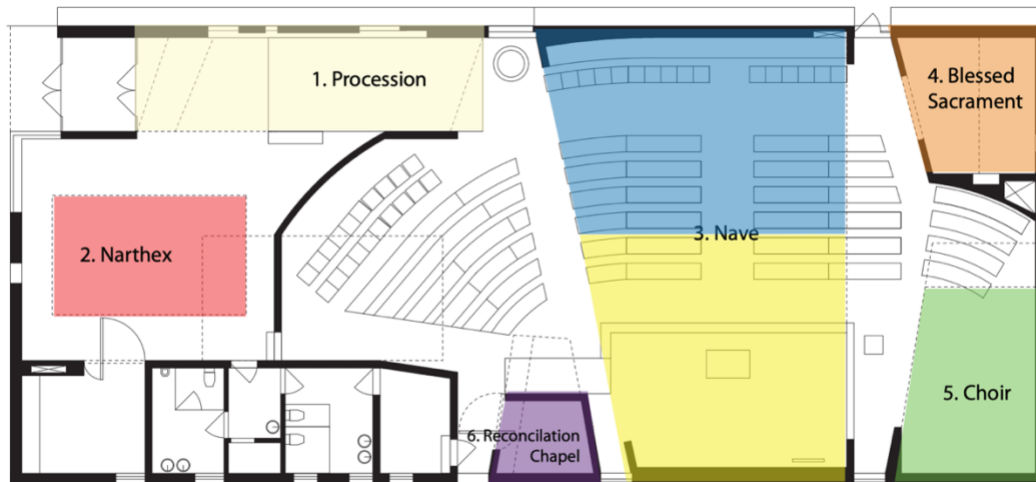


Image 4.11 Areas defined by light coming in through colored lens (Source: Simon Fraser University)

The multisensory experience—through sound, vision, touch and movement—can evoke the ideas of embodied cognition discussed by Pallasmaa and Merleau-Ponty. In the experience of moving into, though, and finally coming to rest in the space, the layers of meaning and sacredness gradually unpack themselves.

The chapel functions as a connector between the sacred and the secular, the inside and the outside, and a measure of light and dark. The chapel is a paradox—a heavy yet light structure, austere yet sensuous. This brings up the idea that meaning comes from lived experiences as opposed to form on its own.

### 4.3. Earth – Grounding in Mass and Memory

The thick concrete of the chapel offers a strong sense of quiet. The mass and texture of the insides walls has a lack of surface ornament, all feelings of enclosure

and interior thought are reinforced, as there are no distractions. Not only does the mass and materiality link the building into cave-like qualities of shelter, a place of introspection and safety, but resonates with Bachelard's poetic surrealism of the most fundamental spaces.

The connection extends even before, as guests have a slight descent into the dark vestibule by a thin threshold as soon as they enter. This feeling of physical grounded-ness gives slight spatial compression and pause, asking the visitor to release all outside notions of distraction, to a sacred time. The coolness of the concrete and softening sounds all catches to put space between time and daily lives and prepare the body for sacred experience.



*Image 4.12 Entrance vestibule followed by procession march (Source: Bustler)*

#### **4.4. Sky – Vessel of Light and Celestial Orientation**

Light is the primary medium which the sacred manifests itself. As Holl has asserted, "Light is the protagonist."<sup>65</sup> Every architectural object will respond differently to light, whether it diffuses light, collects it, directs it, saturates the space, or diffuses it into a gentle flicker. With this variability it is possible to generate enough variability in

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<sup>65</sup> Holl, *Chapel of St. Ignatius*, 12.

the building to allow the building to act as an instrument of mood that resonates with Merleau-Ponty conception of perception as relational and embodied.

The chapel's seven volumes of light act as architectural analogues to his celestial organs, each directed in a unique spatial direction and color. Their placements are aligned accordingly to their liturgical role as contemplated. For example, the golden-yellow aspect over the altar conveys a divine glow whilst the cooler hues over the baptismal area suggest motifs of cleansing and rebirth.<sup>66</sup>

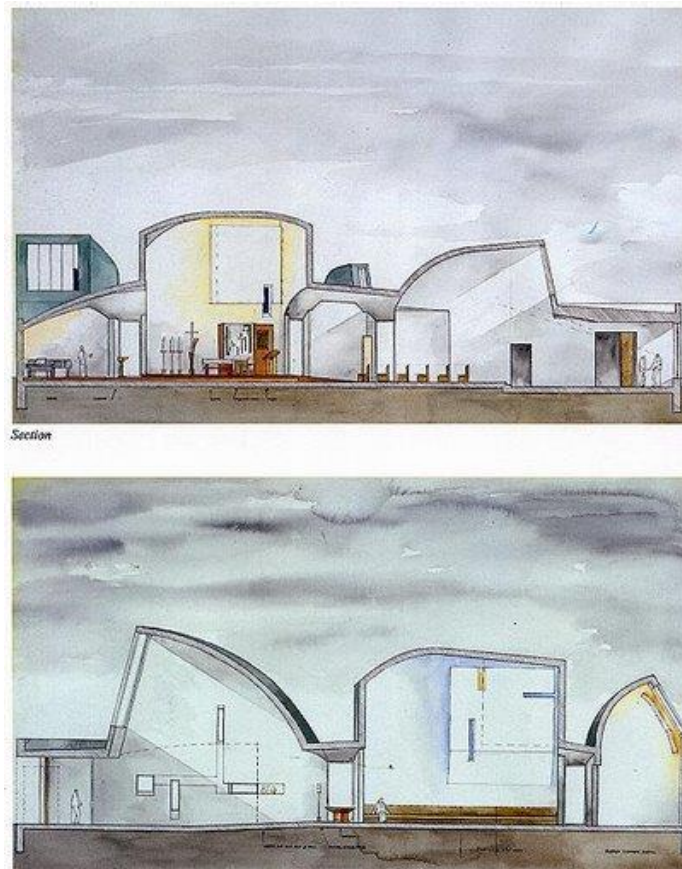


Image 4.13 Section from procession march - both sides (Source: Wikiarquitectura)

The shifting light represents more than to be illustrative, it entails a poetic quality. Rather than merely representing divinity, it can provide the conditions necessary to perceive divinity. The immaterial can take on a real embodied presence

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<sup>66</sup> Harry Francis Mallgrave, *The Architect's Brain: Neuroscience, Creativity, and Architecture* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 163.

that surrounds the body with density of presence. This captures the purpose of spatial sentience; the architecture activating our perception and enhancing awareness to lead us to change.

## 4.5. Water – Reflection and Echo

Even though pool is located near the chapel, water's effects can be deeply felt everywhere. The polished, waxed floor acts like a reflecting pool and catches the colored light above, so the configuration of the chapel is dreamlike and inverted. The acoustics of the chapel also can be watery, even when there are no obvious forms of water. Echoes of footsteps and echoing silence amplify the space, giving depth to emptiness.

Bachelard connected water with intimacy and reverie. These qualities can be found in this instance, but not through the body of water, but through visual reflections and audible reflections. The chapel becomes a kind of outer body that empty, and all the stored memories and emotions may coexist like still water collected in the pool of the unconscious.



*Image 4.14 Reflective flooring and play of light, illusion of water effect (Source: Reddit)*

## 4.6. Threshold – Sacred Atmosphere and Sentient Space

The threshold at the Chapel of St. Ignatius can symbolize more than a physical entry, it can represent a significant sensory and spiritual transition. Accessed on an indirect, winding approach, the entrance itself is slightly obscured from view, which heightens expectation. Entering rather begins in a dimly lit, narrow vestibule that invites reflection and the act of self-contemplation; luring the visitor into the dark first, and gently inviting them into the neatly lit, bright, main spatial body of the chapel.

The journey from the dark into brightness, from constriction in a narrow vestibule, to open space echo's Bachelard's description of threshold as distinct types of thresholds that adorn with intimacy<sup>67</sup>, or Norberg-Schulz's description of sacred architecture as possessing distinct transitions.<sup>68</sup> When visitors cross the threshold, or witness the transition, they feel they have moved into another atmospheric space, they became differently oriented and have a reframed perception of time. As tangible reality begins to shift, the envelopes of the chapel transition through the senses; experiencing phenomenological awakening and aligning their body and spirit to articulate the sacredness of interiority.

In this way, the threshold functions as a paradoxical zone; a barrier and bridge, welcoming visitors into a distinctly different experience. It is ineffectual to consider the threshold just an entrance or exit; thresholds are important moments of transformation and attunement.

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<sup>67</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 222.

<sup>68</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, 66–68.



*Image 4.15 Twilight zone of chapel - standing tall with a perfect reflection (Source: ArchEyes)*

## **4.7. Conclusion**

Steven Holl's Chapel of St. Ignatius exemplifies a sacred architecture that prioritizes phenomenological immediacy over symbolism. It showcases how, when thoughtfully arranged, elements like light, material, and movement can foster a profound experience of the sacred. Through its elemental interactions, the chapel invites visitors to connect with earth, sky, and light, stirring both the senses and the spirit.

This space doesn't impose its message; instead, it listens, embraces, and uncovers. It creates a sanctuary for silence, presence, and the inexpressible. Thus, the Chapel of St. Ignatius transcends being merely a place for worship—it becomes a haven for experiencing the sacred.

## Chapter 5 Water Temple, Awaji Island, Japan

*“You cannot simply insert the divine into a site—you must reveal it, draw it out from within the landscape itself.” – Tadao Ando<sup>69</sup>*

### 5.1. Stillness beneath the surface

The Water Temple (Honpuku-ji), located on Awaji Island and completed in 1991, is a notable example of an architectural work that establishes the sacred through an interpretively rich sensory experience. The project was commissioned by the Shingon Buddhist sect. The temple is described in its documents as a site for worship and ceremonial observance, but it also serves as a meditative passage through light, shadow, water, and stone. The simplicity of Ando's architectural approach is all-consuming and compelling, encouraging visitors to contemplate their sense of place, connectedness to nature, and to themselves through a practice of self-reflection and inwardness, in accordance with a Buddhist perspective.



*Image 5.1 Aerial View of Water Temple, Awaji Island, Japan (Source: HIC Arquitectra)*

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<sup>69</sup> Tadao Ando, *Tadao Ando: From Emptiness to Infinity*, dir. Mathias Frick (Germany: ArtHaus Musik, 2013).

The temple exemplifies the notion of spatial sentience by orchestrating a rich multisensory experience through elemental themes. The architectural elements do not so much impose a sense of the divine as they reveal it slowly, guiding visitors downwards through a labyrinth of material, elemental, and spiritual dimensions. The architecture here is dynamic, living through the layers of light shifting on surfaces, the soft touches of wind kissing the water, and the severe solidity of concrete in the earth.

## **5.2. Architectural Analysis**

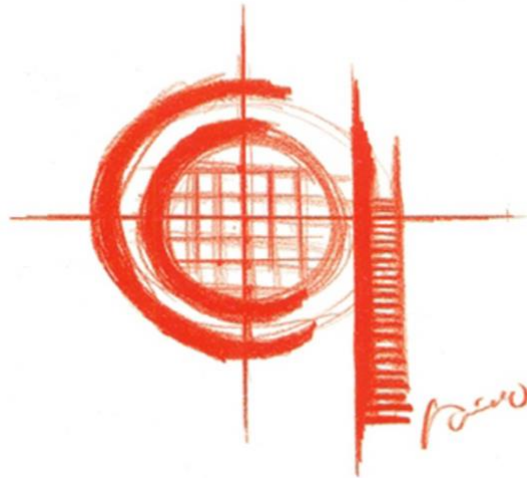
### **Formal Geometry and Concept Abstraction**

Initially, the Water Temple exemplifies a lesson in camouflage. It is not a conventional building in terms of its facade or architecture. The Water Temple is an enigmatic building made from a large elliptical lotus pond that hovers above the sacred space below. The water temple inverts the normative hierarchy that often determines form from function by obscuring rather than revealing the sacred space below; therefore, both a landscape and a threshold.

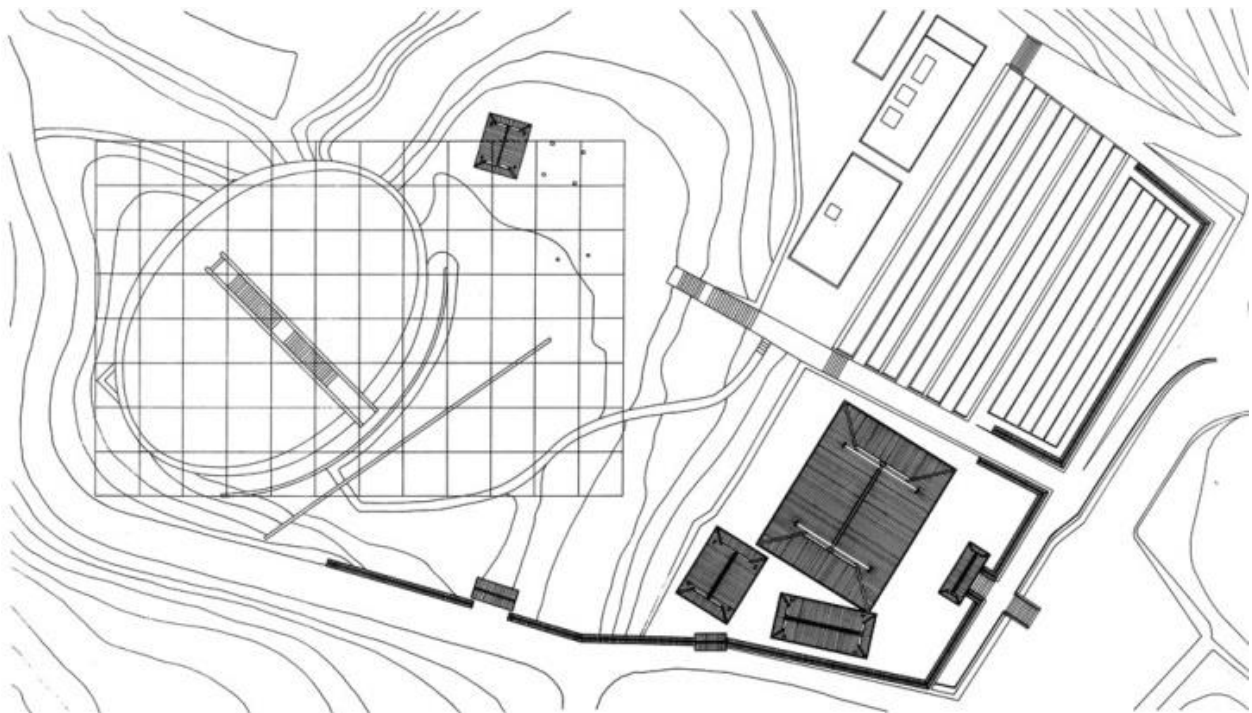
The approach begins with a curved concrete wall that disguises the pond at the rear. One enters via a symmetrical stair that is recessed into the pond's surface, masked within the stair's descent, providing the architectural incision. This axial entry within the water is a critical architectural maneuver, as the vertical descent is linked to the axis mundi and acts as a signifier of the symbolic experience into the depths of inner consciousness and sanctity.

The plan is organized around a central circular core containing the prayer hall; a curved corridor runs around this core deferring, and extending, the approach to the sanctum. The circumambulatory movement continues to maintain it as a contemplative move relative to the inner core similar to the variations of the routine ecclesiastical practice within *pradikshina*—the action of walking and standing in prayer. Such a path

recalls the Eastern religious procession of the circumambulation, but it equally suggests a Western sense of narrative anticipation and resolve.



*Image 5.2 Conceptual sketch for the Water Temple by Tadao Ando (Source: HIC Arquitectura)*



*Image 5.3 Site Plan of Water Temple (Source: Modern Architecture)*

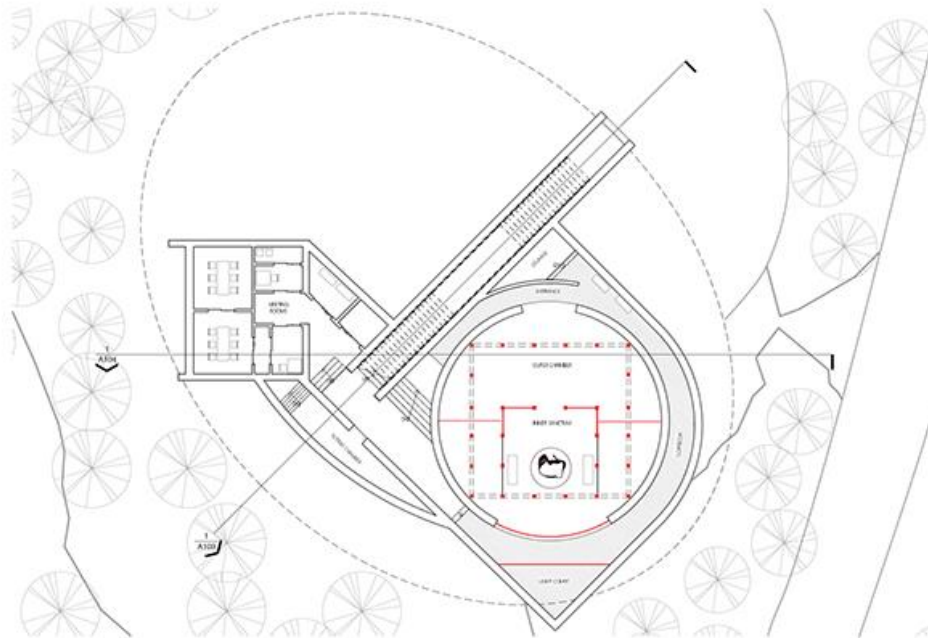


Image 5.4 Underground plan of Water Temple (Source: Bêhance)

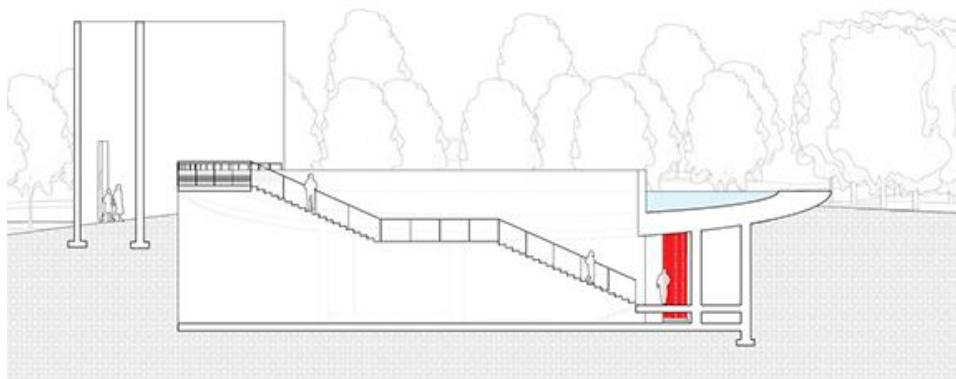


Image 5.5 Section from the staircase looking at the entrance to chamber (Source: Bêhance)

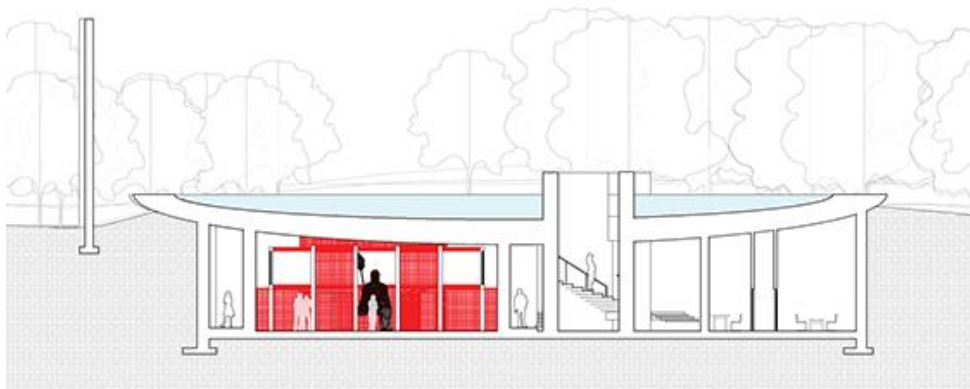


Image 5.6 Section from outer chamber looking at the Buddha (Source: Bêhance)

## Symbolism and Sacred Typology Reinterpreted

The architectural design has multiple levels of meaning. The elliptical shape of the lotus pond represents rebirth, and the circle or cycle of time as sustained in Buddhist cosmology. The downward journey into the earth exemplifies the inner directional movement away from the everyday and into the sacred. This understanding aligns with Gaston Bachelard's notion of verticality of sacred imagination since the act of descending brings us closer to our primordial selves, not just in metaphoric terms, and not unlike spaces we posit as cellars, caves or wombs.<sup>70</sup>



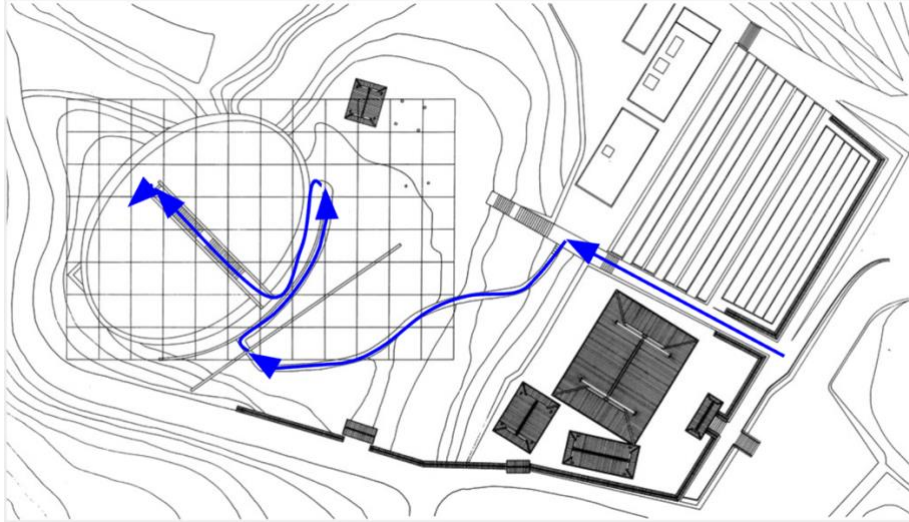
Image 5.7 Staircase for underground chamber (Source: HIC Arquitectura)

Ando's Architecture may be understood as representing "secular sacredness" where a dispositional state of sacredness is brought about by experiential rituals instead of traditionally iconic imaginings. The approach, descent, circumvention and arrival are cyclical representations of ancient rites of passage that sustain a phenomenology of existence, something Christian Norberg-Schulz describes in his work as "dwelling in existential space."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 18–21.

<sup>71</sup> Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1980), 5–11.



*Image 5.8 Procession on the site (Source: Author)*

At the fulcrum of the design exists a balance to bouncing opposites like: inside/outside, earth/sky, stasis/displacement, solid/liquid. And rather than an exercise of resolving these tensions, the retaining of opposites suggests this is a sacred level of dialectic in which experience is more significant than the prescribed found in a structural or theological schema.

## **Structure and Construction**

The spatial organization of the Water Temple demonstrates Tadao Ando's signature combination of minimalism and engineering precision. The temple, mostly made of reinforced concrete, was selected not only for its strength but also for its expressive potential. The sanctuary is topped with a lotus pond as a roof slab, with the patio pond being supported by an upper concrete retaining wall and slab system that must carry the water above and be resistant to water penetration and thermal movement.

Visitors access the temple via a balanced stairway that ultimately blends downwards, with the water surfacing beneath their feet. The stairway serves as both a

circulation element and as a significant structural stairwell, as retaining walls contain the surrounding hillside's lateral earth pressure.



*Image 5.9 Lotus Pond as roof slab (Source: Google Images by Tadao Higaki)*

The main hall is a circular enclosed concrete drum which is reinforced with both vertical and radial rebar to ensure a column-less space, allowing for a continuous and calming indoor space appropriate for contemplation and meditation, surrounded by reinforced concrete walls. The vermilion shoji screen of the prayer hall is non-load bearing and was added after casting the structure, in keeping with traditional details found in Japanese temple interiors.

Choosing materials for the waterproofing of the pond above the sanctuary happened with great care, including all the additives to the concrete, multiple membranes, and all surface treatments to minimize all forms of leakage. Drainage channels in the design managed excess water from overflow drains, and excess rainfall in the spring.

In sum, the construction represents Ando's "architecture as landscape" philosophy—an environment that emerges and disappears into the topography with minimal disruptions, whereby form and constructure elements merge with ritual and ambience.



*Image 5.10 Interweaving of structure and landscape (Source: Archiweb)*

## **Material and Tactile Atmosphere**

The Water Temple has a material palette that is purposefully minimal with regards to surface materials, limited to cast-in-place concrete, water, wood, and daylight. The matte concrete of Ando's was cast with a precision formwork and a specific mixture of aggregate and as a result has a silky smoothness that creates a soft tactile experience when one touches it and causes one to acknowledge its massiveness. This tactile silence generates an immediacy with the material and an opportunity for haptic intimacy aiding the meditative experience of the temple.

Water does not only have material characteristics, it also brings a sensory experience—coolness, movement, reflections—light and sound. It provides a visceral quality of stillness in the entirety of space together with the idea of stillness. As visitors descend the stairs into the upper-level prayer hall, temperature fluctuations are accompanied by changes in humidity and sound, marking the transition from the outside world to the interior intimate; sacred imagined worlds.

Inside the prayer hall, the warmer painted vermillion wood slats contrast that completely with the cold, grey concrete. The wood provides olfactory and visual richness and points visitors to their tradition, despite the modern abstraction.

As a whole, these values of the Water Temple create a tactile phenomenology—where surface, temperature, sound, and scent integrate themselves allowing for a more deeply embodied sacred experience.



*Image 5.11 Materials used in Water Temple (Source: Archiweb)*

## **Environmental and Sustainable Strategies**

Tadao Ando's Water Temple design is a heroic, yet humble and gracious form of environmental responsiveness and passive sustainable design. The temple is not shaped by high-tech systems but by an environment logic defined by its site and materials, and sense of directionality.

The lotus pond acts as a natural thermal buffer, moderating the direct sunlight in the prayer hall below, and helping to stabilize the room's temperature. The robust concrete walls act as thermal mass where heat is absorbed during the day, and when nighttime comes, the earth radiates it back out, this offers a stable micro-climate internally in the sanctuary.

Ventilation is performed passively, much like the Water Temple's mechanism of forming space within the walls, ventilation is limited to narrow slits and hidden openings that allow the self-forming space to continue; we can visualize the movement of air, naturally flowing to all surfaces. Built into the connection to the natural sloping ground of Awaji Island, the temple is set in the landscape reducing its visual and ecological footprint, while enlivening the geothermal stability of the earth.

The balanced design of light from above eliminated the need for artificial lighting during daytime hours; the openings were mathematically calculated to accommodate the needs of the prayer through the minimal glazing, and integrated along the southern side of the building, only offering glare when strongly angled toward the sun; essentially offering a soft, illuminated, localized experience. The building itself is a concrete body and a wood canopy; both gather from the local materials of the region, as a reduced supply chain and restrained environmental effects.



*Image 5.12 Fitted Vermillion Shoji Screen on south-west corner (Source: Reddit)*

## **Spatial Experience and Phenomenological Engagement**

The Water Temple embodies a phenomenological ritual, where movement becomes a kind of meditative practice and alters our understanding as we cross its

threshold. As Merleau-Ponty stated, "To perceive oneself is to be present to the world".<sup>72</sup> The kind of perception discussed here is active perception--not perceiving merely to recognize. As we descend the stairway, we experience compression in the visual field, soundscape, and bodily movement. Natural light diminishes, sounds diminish as they bounce off of concrete walls, and the nature of air changes. These are not merely compositional elements, but thresholds to experience - moments swaying and choreographed reveal the sacredness of thresholds.



Image 5.13 Walking down the stairs in between the pond (Source: Archiweb)

Upon arrival at the lower level, the path turns around a curved wall, surrounding the center of the temple, obscuring direct entry. The intention of architectural pause is to disrupt habitual movements, to draw upon what Pallasmaa describes as the "temporal extension of the moment."<sup>73</sup> The circular path disorients our orientation to space as our perception shifts; we become aware of our footfalls, our breath, and the shadows either side of us. The mind slows, the body recalibrates, here; the sacred is allowed to express time and space qualities of its rightful stature.

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<sup>72</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012), 371.

<sup>73</sup> Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, 3rd ed. (Chichester: Wiley, 2012), 70.

As visitors finally cross the threshold into the worship hall, stillness and symmetry greet them. This intimate space has a small altar located beneath a softly glowing canopy. With no exterior windows, only narrow slits allow fragmented light inside. The feel of the space is calm and enclosed, naturally inviting consciousness to turn inwards. The light coming through the walls is restrained, gently dancing along the walls, illuminating dust particles, and representing the divine as a subtle suggestion rather than a performance feature.



Image 5.14 Inner Chamber with Buddha Statue in the corner with natural light as backdrop (Source: Archiweb)

In this moment Ando achieves what Norberg-Schulz calls the architecture of dwelling—where dwellers are grounded in a place not only physically but also existentially.<sup>74</sup> The temple serves as a medium for transformation, moving the visitor from observing to sensing and changing their sense of separation towards participatory engagement.

### 5.3. Earth – Grounding and Enclosure

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<sup>74</sup> Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, 5–6.

Ando provides depth in the temple by "anchoring" it to the earth through selections of material and space. The downward descent towards the temple references a certain metaphysical anchoring; a kind of inner and downward journey similar to the Buddhist themes of self-effacement and humility. The heavy, textural concrete walls absorb light and sound, generating a negative space of silence and weight.

The circular Shoji Screen wall is a physical notion of boundary in addition to a symbolic gesture of containment (like a womb). While the connection between the temple and the earth is honored and respectful, it is also resisting. By excavating below the land, Ando allows architecture to grow upward from the space rather than merely lying on the surface of it.



*Image 5.15 Water Temple as integration of the landscape and growing up like surrounding trees (Source: Architettura Viva)*

## **5.4. Sky – Light and Temporal**

Although the temple's sanctuary is an enclosed inward-facing room, it allows a soft light to enter, indirectly, from the sky via carefully calibrated openings and other reflective body of water surfaces above the temple. This natural light enters almost a

separate element to the structure; it is softened, muted, and diffused into a calm and ether-like light with some measure of transcendence. During the daylight hours, as the day and seasons change, there is a subtly woven interface of light and space, allowing for temporality to fracture the interior space into a sense of temporal presence.

The play of light and dark, often established by the distant sky, the pond below, the concrete structures of the temple, and the wooden slats of the ceiling, created an augmented experience of space including a spiritual context of relational understanding with regard to space's already ethereal nature. Even though the sky was mediated rather than shown, it can still be said there was some measure of relationship aspect to the temple that softened and broadened the experience for worshippers to find space to feel the sky above, but only to emerge back into the enclosed and intimate womb of the existing temple.



*Image 5.16 Light as divine being - highlighting Buddha statue (Source: HIC Arquitectura)*

## **5.5. Water – Reflection and Connection**

Water is significant in the temple's conception both visually and symbolically. The elliptical lotus pond, suspended above the sacred core, acts as both threshold and veil – a threshold in that it covers that which feet may not touch, while simultaneously

creating contemplation via the image reflections and the sounds of motion. The surface of the water is a prominent player in creating a sensory experience of the architecture – the stillness and reflectivity mirrors that of the sky, the motion from slight ripples help to illuminate the walls and stairs, and the sound of falling water creates a meditative calm across space.

Here, and in Buddhism more broadly, water has connotations of purification, impermanence, and flux. It represents a liminal space – neither material nor immaterial – that negotiates between earth and sky and the shift from the ordinary world to the sacred. The act of stepping into the water is indicative of entering sacred space and shifts the user's experience from a shared sensory environment to a shared psychological experience.

This interaction with water, as an element, brings dynamism to architecture and can be experienced as organic or participatory. Ample moments become available with the reflection of sky transacting with the earthbound structure by being above what exists and true as a manifestation of an ideal. The temple simultaneously sustains its role as initiator and intermediary across its correlated relationships.



*Image 5.17 Water as both a symbolic and literal statement (Source: WordPress)*

## 5.6. Threshold – Sacred Atmosphere and Sentient Space

The physical journey of the Water Temple is primarily premised on the threshold, a transitional area in which visitors depart from the quotidian into a sacred space. The threshold is much more than a spatial edge. The threshold represents an aspect of a psychological and sensory passage where visitors are transported into another moment, which connects them to the spirituality imbued in the Water Temple. The structural designs and rules of wayfinding created the threshold—most importantly the descending staircase under the lotus pond.

As visitors descend, they are metaphorically crossing a perceptive threshold. The reflecting surface of the water above acts as a fog, creating a veil between the sanctuary and the world above. The atmosphere of the threshold alters the psychological experience of the space; expectations heighten, and the inward direction of attention is increased. The transition represents a sacred space: an atmosphere defined by stillness, reverence, and heightened awareness of bodily presence. The cool, tangible texture of concrete, the sounds of silence, and soft diffused light all facilitate a moment of multiple tracks of attention simultaneously aligning within the subtleties of presence and place.



*Image 5.18 Intertwining of elements as a whole (Source: When in Tokyo)*

## 5.7. Conclusion

The Water Temple has a distinct modernist architectural form and an interesting representation of spirituality. With its separate and well-crafted materiality, elemental simplicity, and progression through space, Ando encourages the user to not just be reflective visually but to reflect existentially too. The building is "sacred" for the user not by obvious iconography, but through sensation and experience—the careful choreography of descent, the permanence or fleeting of light, or the slow reveal of the form. This is an excellent representation of how architecture can embody lived experience without being symbolic.

# Chapter 6 Reflection & Synthesis

*“The elements are not outside us. We live by them, through them, and within them.” - Author*

## 6.1. Elemental Dialogue

Sacred architecture is more than its physical form, but an architecture of presence that invites reverence, reflection, and relationship to the ineffable. Transcendence does not only arise from the use of symbolism, but from sensitive composition of space, matter, light, and the natural order.

In turning to the elemental triad of earth, sky, and water, we examine how these buildings inherently relate to the physical world in a spiritual-ethical way. Not merely the environmental backdrop of the building, the elements serve as architectural vehicles of the sacred - rooting visitors in the space of symbols while using the poetics of light to encourage reflection and transformative processes. Each of the building positions a unique spatial story within the identified phenomenological themes of this study - multisensory, temporality, atmosphere, threshold, while drawing on their significant cultural and spiritual narratives.

This synthesis positions architecture as an important agent of sacrality - not as a mere backdrop for the sacred, but as integrally involved in it.

## 6.2. Earth – Grounding the Sacred

In sacred architecture, the earth is more than merely the earth for our buildings. It is a crucial medium, in which we experience a relationship with stability, orientation, and our grounding sense of shelter. To be grounded means to be englobed by the present and the world around you. This world provides support and nurturing in relation to our relationships, memories, and experiences associated to the earth.

## Lotus Temple, New Delhi, India

The Lotus Temple elegantly makes its case for a connection to the earth in both its architecture and the landscape surrounding it. It is located in a large garden in the middle of the crowded city of New Delhi and provides respite with a refreshing change with the concrete, soil, trees, and stone surrounding it. Visitors arrive from a long straight path with lawns on both sides and nine reflecting pools along the way, which serves as a slow portal into the sacred space. This is a significant journey to experience that is connected to the natural environment, and that invites a slowing of time, able to prepare both the body and the mind for a more profound experience.

In its architecture the temple arises from a podium in the earth, and the relatively massive concrete substructure is concealed below the earth. The temple itself has petal-like shells made of white Makrana marble that create the appearance of floating or blooming, yet they are anchored by an engineered concrete grid that attaches it back to the earth. There is a delightful tension in the heaviness and lightness and rootedness and elevation creating an enveloping paradox of grounded transcendence.

The radial geometry in the design relates to an axis mundi, a vertical connector between the heavens and the earth; the visitor moves from the path through garden pools into the central hall and perhaps experiences what Bachelard might refer to as a "cosmic rooting."<sup>75</sup> A rooting deep felt in both landscape and spirit.

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<sup>75</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 217



*Image 6.1 Lotus Temple as continuation of Earth (Source: Incredible India)*

## **Chapel of St. Ignatius, Seattle, USA**

The Chapel of St. Ignatius distinctively emphasizes materiality. The chapel has thick, textured concrete walls that give it a strong solidity and weight. The density of material becomes part of the sacred experience, producing a sense of enclosure and stasis that encourages a deeper connection with the nature of being. While the form is asymmetrical and sculptural as it rises unevenly from the ground, its part-to-whole relationship generates a gentle slope downward toward the sanctuary inside, attuning together bodily movement and spiritual focus.

In a sense, the act of enclosure facilitates a type of grounding in this experience. The textured materials have rough, grainy edges that play with light and shadow that extends what Juhani Pallasmaa describes as the "haptic realm" of architecture.<sup>76</sup> This experience is magnified by the heavy thresholds, and deep window wells of the chapel that frame views of the exterior world, suggesting that one has retreated inward instead of expanding outward.

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<sup>76</sup> Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 10



*Image 6.2 Chapel of St Ignatius showcases concrete as both grounding and freeing material (Source: Bluffton University)*

## **Water Temple, Awaji Island, Japan**

The Water Temple amend the earth from a substructure to an element of spiritual transformation. Upon arrival, the visitor will enjoy a calm lotus pond on a circular deck. A path—a stair stepped down the center of the pond—leads you down, and into the earth. Going down carries a significant image and a powerful experience. It offers sensations associated with humility and reflection and signifies a loss of horizon that is connected to the experience of inner peace.

The meditation hall below is entirely constructed of concrete - smooth, plain, and quiet. The light is sparse upon entrance, to create a space that, in Bachelard's terms, "gathers the unconscious"—like a womb, a tomb, or a sacrament of cave.<sup>77</sup> This underground space is geometrically uninteresting but acoustically quiet, heightening awareness of breath, steps, and silence. The visitor, here, is not just in the earth, they are conversing with it.

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<sup>77</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 183



*Image 6.3 Last view of the outside world before descending down/inwards (Source: Archiweb)*

### **6.3. Sky – Light as Divine Presence**

If earthly contexts anchor the sacred, the sky opens it up to transcendence. Light is often the way this transcendence is made visible in sacred architecture. It is a non-material architecture, forming a space through rhythm, orientation, and ephemerality.

#### **Lotus Temple, New Delhi, India**

At the Lotus Temple, light is soft and ambient, diffusing evenly within the space. It filters in through the gaps between the curved marble petals and a central oculus located at the top of the dome. The oculus does not draw the eye to the top like traditional domes; rather, it lets light lightly drizzle down as an enveloping atmosphere of peace. It is a hallowed space without decoration or religious icons that helps elevate light as the primary threshold for sacredness, filling the room with a peaceful glow.

The choice of marble is employed as a reflective and as a light glowing material greatly enhances this effect, too. The temple appears shiny even in shadow. The atmosphere conveys much of what Tanizaki expressed regarding traditional Japanese

architecture: "the dimness, the shadow, the softness of light," which prepares the visitor for introspection rather than spectacle.<sup>78</sup>



*Image 6.4 Light filters into the central hall through the skylights in the same way as the lotus flower (Source: CultureNOW)*

## **Chapel of St. Ignatius, Seattle, USA**

Holl's chapel elegantly deals with light in a manner both strategic and symbolic. The seven "bottles of light" manipulate and cast colored daylight into different parts of the interior; each bottle represents a different spiritual theme. For example, the sanctuary was fitted out with warm golden light, the Blessed Sacrament chapel with soft blue light, and the processional areas with vivid red and green light. Here, light is transformed into a liturgy itself.

The colored volumes serve a practical role in arranging a spatial experience and an emotional experience for visitors as they arrive. Holl's concept of light as a "liquid medium" conforms to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach, whereby

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<sup>78</sup> Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, 11

perception is fluid, temporal, and rooted in experience.<sup>79</sup> Over the course of a day, time passes, light changes, moods change, and perceptions of space change.



Image 6.5 *Dramatics in the Chapel with light as protagonist & material as supporting character* (Source: Park Young-Woo)

## Water Temple, Awaji Island, Japan

In the Water Temple, light is more often characterized by its absence (its contrast) than the light itself. Descending into the meditation hall immerses visitors in shadow. Sunlight is only introduced on rare occasions through slots in the concrete wall, when sunlight filters into the large entry door and through small openings on opaque windows. The main light source is the reflected glow of the water high above, which is out of sight but something we can feel.

This great dynamic of dark and foreshadowing light creates an experience of spaciousness and stillness. Tanizaki's sense of the "beauty of shadows" is clear here: the sacredness of the experience is arising not from bright light, but from the careful shaping of darkness.<sup>80</sup> Ando's manipulation of contrast does not create something

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<sup>79</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 267

<sup>80</sup> Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, 17

beautiful; instead, it provides the experience of inner clarity, where light life is the sign of looking within.



*Image 6.6 Defused natural light with focus on vermillion wood panel (Source: Japan Experience)*

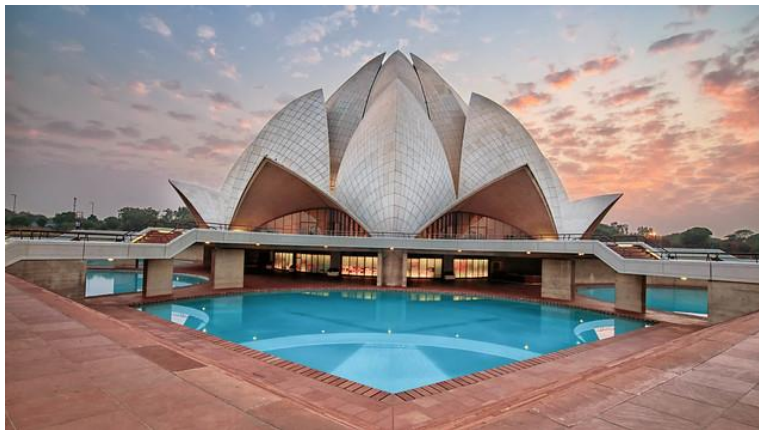
## **6.4. Water – Reflection and Transformation**

The earth grounds our bodies, and the sky elevates our souls. Water, however, is the mediator between the body and the soul. Water is the bridge between the two. Water moves, flows, transforms and becomes a dynamic, liquid element of sacred architecture. Water invites reflection and is life-giving to stillness. Water also mediates between the physical and non-physical.

### **Lotus Temple, New Delhi, India**

Water is a critical piece of reflection and ambiance at the Lotus Temple. The nine surrounding pools representing the nine-fold symmetry of the temple are not just functional; they provide reflective surface and cooling relief from the environment. In both cases, the pools allow the temple to be reflected while at the same time providing a buffer from the urban environment, taking the architecture back to the land while calming the spirit.

The surface of the water serves as a reflection of the sky, the clouds and sun above, resulting in the merging of above and below. This merging, which includes and below, creates a paradoxical visual that strengthens the Bahá'í principle of unity. Visitors walking around or along the pools often stop to contemplate the captivating moment. In these moments of reflection, Pallasmaa notes, "the act of reflection in architecture allows the self to be refolded back into the world, to feel one's existence as a continuum to nature."<sup>81</sup>



*Image 6.7 Reflection and stillness depicted in one of the pools (Source: Anil Vohra)*

## **Chapel of St. Ignatius, Seattle, USA**

Whereas the Chapel of St. Ignatius has a reflection pool at its entrance; the idea of water is expressed metaphorically. This occurs through the chapel's flowing ceiling, flowing spatial sequences, and colored light that behave like refracted waveforms. Steven Holl describes this building in vivid detail when he calls it "seven bottles of light in a stone box." Where light acts as a liquid, animated and flowing around the space.

The stained and colored glass filters transform the natural light into vibrant, chromatic atmospheres, their rippling surface capturing the sensory ambiguity of

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<sup>81</sup> Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 32

water—either transparent or opaque, still, or moving. Therefore, even though the water is literally present; the experience of water is phenomenological and felt through the modulation of time, light, and rhythm.



*Image 6.8 Natural light as vibrant, chromatic making texture seems like rippled effect of water (Source: Steven Holl Architects)*

## **Water Temple, Awaji Island, Japan**

Water serves as both a surface and a substance, acting as the central element that organizes Ando's Water Temple. The journey begins at the lotus pond—still and circular, evoking a sense of the sublime. As visitors step over the dividing stair, they leave the surface of the water behind, embarking on a descent that is not just physical but also deeply symbolic—a purification and a crossing of a threshold.

Inside the subterranean meditation chamber, the essence of water lingers. Though it is no longer visible, its presence is felt above, gently impressing upon the silence below. This experience unfolds in duality: one is beneath water without being submerged, surrounded by earth yet feeling an uplifting lightness. The space enacts a transformative ritual, echoing Bachelard's words: "immersion in water is a return to the source; it erases time and renews being."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 29



*Image 6.9 Concrete stairs bisecting the Lotus Pond leading to stillness beneath (Source: Archiweb)*

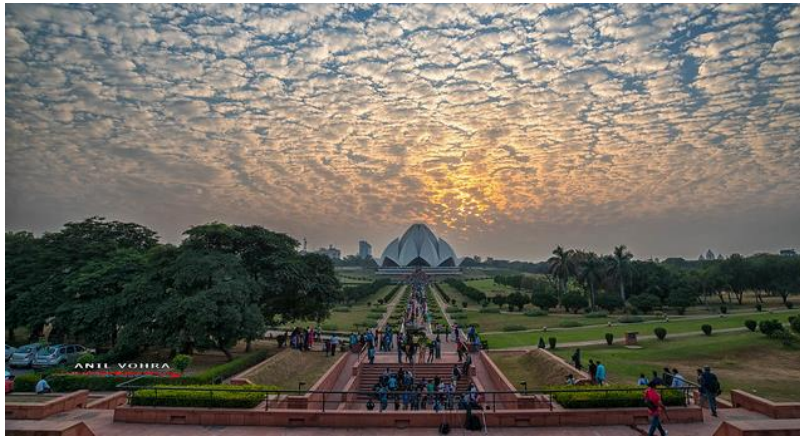
## **6.5. Threshold – Sacred Atmosphere and Sentient Space**

The experience of sacred architecture is often most keenly distinguished in its thresholds, those transitional spaces where the material world gives way to the intangible. These passages, whether physical, sensory, or symbolic, establish sacredness not simply as a destination, but as a state of awareness. Within the context of sacred architecture, thresholds do not only join different areas together but amplify our perception and understanding.

### **Lotus Temple, New Delhi, India**

The approach to the Lotus Temple is conceived as a gradual unfolding of space. Upon arrival at the main gate, visitors progressively walk along a beautifully landscaped path, transitioning through layers of landscaped gardens, to reach the central blossom. The winding nature of the approach is meant to be both a threshold, in time and space. The meandering way encourages visitors to slow down and quiet their minds. As the form of the temple begins to emerge behind the trees, and the reflective pools of water give depth to the temple structure, a sense of anticipation builds.

Once inside, the sense of vastness in the inner sanctum is all consuming. The soft white light and soundless air creates a wonderfully different atmosphere. The movement from noise of the outer world to the inner silence. Movement to stillness. Presence. The architecture does provide a framework for belief, rather it solidifies a sense of presence.



*Image 6.10 Walking to the Lotus Temple at Dusk (Source: Anil Vohra)*

## **Chapel of St. Ignatius, Seattle, USA**

At the Chapel of St. Ignatius, entry is processional. The unassuming facade does not prepare one for the experience inside. When one enters through the narthex, they enter an ambiguous semi-darkness where light is the means of directional navigation. Each light "bottle" represents a specific temporal and spatial boundary. Light enters beyond the glass through various openings of amber, blue and green, reflecting the qualities of time.

These colors also produced moody atmospheric zones. The warm bobbing amber could produce a feeling of sacred intimacy; blue light would produce more reflective thought. The chapel can express its own traversing life characterized as responsive and active, not in the traditional sense of motion, but in the quality of movement determined by subtly moving variations. The sacred experience is not

drawn to a singular attention, but representations are dispersed across the space to inform the larger collective liturgical experience.



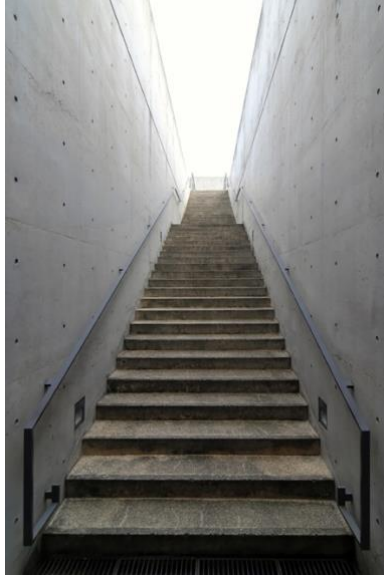
*Image 6.11 Twilight zone of Chapel of St Ignatius (Source: WordPress blog)*

## **Water Temple, Awaji Island, Japan**

The Water Temple is perhaps one of the most visceral demonstrations of architectural thresholds. On the descent into the ground, with a divided lotus pond, the thresholds symbolize immersion into oneself. The more one goes down the stairwell, the narrower the view of the sky is, until only memory of the water above remains.

This transition from light to darkness, from surface to the depths, leads to an underground sanctuary where one experiences the sacred as a sense of deep stillness. The sanctuary allows one to immerse oneself—not just in the spatial realm but the essence of one's being.

In that context, the temple acts on many levels as a sentient vessel. It does not possess intelligence; it possesses the ability to be sensitive. It embraces visitors into a state of losing their everyday self and engaging with what is maybe the sacred—not merely in consciousness or activated sight, but through a perception as it was mediated through this state of being.



*Image 6.12 Sky as last memory before entering the temple (Source: Archiweb)*

## **6.6. Synthesis – Elemental Dialogue of the Sacred**

Through the examination of each of these architectural studies, we find that sacred experiences do not necessarily occur with the overt use of religious iconography, but rather with the deftness with space, light, materials, and elements is designed. Each of the Lotus Temple, the Chapel of St. Ignatius, and the Water Temple journeys toward the sacred in its own way while providing access to nature.

The ground generates a feeling of the earth, which is shown in the Lotus Temple's raised podium, while it is also anchored into the ground; the Chapel of St. Ignatius has a robust concrete wall; and the Water Temple is a stepped descent to below the ground. The sky is expressed through light in all its forms, whether it is represented in the Lotus Temple's inviting light, the Chapel's apocalyptic rays of light, or the Water Temple's ephemeral glow. Water is also a mirror, metaphor, and medium that carries the sacred beyond sight, pushes for reflection, and signals change.

Collectively, they represent what Pallasmaa describes as an "architecture of the senses"—a space that doesn't demand belief but encourages reverence, through the

ways we physically and perceptually relate to it.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, Merleau-Ponty explains that perception isn't a simple act of observation, but rather a complex action towards what is being perceived.<sup>84</sup> These buildings serve as a site of that kind of action: a quiet stroll, a thoughtful gaze into the light, a mindful breath in the presence of water.

Finally, the sacred experience in architecture is contained not in what is said or represented as material form, but in what is actually experienced. It lives in that balance between our humanity and the elemental forces that shape for us. These three case studies have shown us that at its deepest point, architecture is not just a port in the storm of the world; it is a way back to the world—an awareness, a humility, and a change.

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<sup>83</sup> Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 36

<sup>84</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 247

# Chapter 7 Towards the Phenomenology of Sacred

*“To experience the sacred is not merely to see or to inhabit, but to feel space awaken something within—a stillness, a resonance, a remembering of our place in the greater whole.” - Author*

## 7.1. Reframing Sacred Architecture

The thesis explores the idea that sacredness in architecture does not appear as a metaphorical ornament, as part of liturgical design, or culturally derived from denominational notions. Rather, it appears from the essential phenomenological relationships between the body, space, and elemental forces. Based on the work of Merleau-Ponty, Pallasmaa, Bachelard, Tanizaki, and Norberg-Schulz, sacred architecture is regarded as a lived and embodied experience consisting of perceptual meaning that is not necessarily imposed but instead is revealed through the act of perception.

From this account of sacredness, it is viewed less as a theological notion, and more as a spatially mediated experience that evokes a heightened awareness originating in silence, light, material sense, movement, and memory.

## 7.2. Insights from Architectural Studies

### Lotus Temple – Universal Silence and Aesthetic Purity

Designed by Fariborz Sahba, the Lotus Temple in New Delhi is an impressive architectural manifestation of the universal spiritual impulse to create a sacred space for all religions without being affixed to a religion. The organic, symmetrical form of the temple has metaphorical meaning across cultures and is analogous to the lotus flower that it is modeled on. However, its sacredness is not purely about form, but rather about how the space is composed. Visitors embark on an experiential journey through

the stillness of the space which incorporates nine elegant pools and gardens, that all leads up to the magnificent, white marble and vaulted petals that seem to embrace the sky, which all culminate in the stillness of the prayer hall when one enters.

For example, sacred space does not have to be performative: it embraces an experiential sensation. There are no altars, no statues, and no formal rituals; rather, one experiences a sacred emptiness; a space that is silent but resonates with architectural and spiritual triage. This idea aligns with Tanizaki's conception of murk and shrub, where "the absence of ornament is ornamental."<sup>85</sup> The Lotus Temple does not shout its sense of sacredness; it allows that sense to reveal itself quietly in its stillness.

### **Chapel of St Ignatius – Light as Liturgy**

Steven Holl's Chapel of St. Ignatius probes sacredness through the engaging characteristics of light and dynamic spatial experience. Each of the seven volumes of light, better known as "bottles of light," acknowledge important liturgical seasons or spiritual themes, with changing colors throughout the day. The interplay of solid forms and empty spaces, together with the movement of light and shadow, lead to an architecture that speaks to emotion through memory, rhythm, and change.

Here, the sacred is not expressed through overt theologically rich content, rather the chapel is intensely phenomenological. Light makes colorful impressions of itself on surfaces, sound exists in the ambiguity of a curved ceiling, and the unique way space is asymmetrical and space invites movement is a catalyst for reflection. As Bachelard puts it, sacred experiences or sacred spaces "are not sites for the quotidian, but reminders of immensity."<sup>86</sup> Layers of experience in the chapel open up moments of

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<sup>85</sup> Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, 21

<sup>86</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 201

sacred subjectivity: spaces experience the everyday differently and are in service of spiritual life.

## **Water Temple – Descent into Stillness**

Tadao Ando's Water Temple in Awaji is an exemplary showcase of architecture that relates profoundly to rituals, movement, and the experience of elemental immersion. As visitors arrive, they are drawn to a large reflecting pool from which they descend down a hidden staircase through the water's surface into a disorienting, underground hall also made of raw concrete. The experience of moving through the temple is a journey from light to dark, from open to enclosed, mimicking the inward journey of prayer and spirit.

This descent is not merely moving through space, it is moving through the exploration of existence itself. Within this movement is a key movement of awareness; a move to the awareness of being and also a move inwards. The temple does not call on you to devote, rather it offers a space to contemplate. This approach is distinctly resonant with Merleau-Ponty's assertion that "the body is our general medium for having a world."<sup>87</sup> In this case, architecture becomes a medium for re-engaging one's own being while being in the fabric of space and time.

### **7.3. Threshold and Sentient Space**

In considering all three architectural studies the threshold has been an important element, both architecturally and experientially. The threshold is more than just a boundary; it is a liminal space— a space of stasis, transience, and mutation. In the case of the Lotus Temple, the threshold is the entryway to the central dome, whilst

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<sup>87</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 146

the central vestibule narrows in Holl's chapel, and the pathway at the Water Temple is submerged. The threshold is a spatial and experiential designation that indicates a change in sensory and spiritual engagement.

Likewise, sentient space develops within these thresholds. This is not architecture as stillness, but rather architecture responsive to human spatio-temporal dynamics, engaged with light, sound and silence. The structure of these environments seems to sense the visitors' presence, reflecting that presence in different ways: a minor shift in temperature, a change in light, or the resonance of one's own breath. According to Bachelard, these spaces contain "intimate immensity", the expanse of which is found in a moment of quiet intimacy or familiarity.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, the threshold has both literal and symbolic significance: it is a crossing from one physical space to another physical space and one permeability into new levels of perception and awareness.

## 7.4. Reclaiming the Sacred in Architecture

The contemporary built environment often lacks the rich symbolism and experiential depth that sacred architecture used to provide. In many instances, architecture has become disconnected from nature, the human body, and collective memory. The architectural studies examined in this thesis aim to restore a sense of sacredness by reestablishing connections to essential elements—such as water, light, shadow, silence, and the rhythmic passage of time throughout the day.

These spaces do not seek to moralize or preach; instead, they invite contemplation and reflection. They create opportunities for inner stillness and help us recalibrate our perceptions. They convey that sacredness is not solely confined to

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<sup>88</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 183

religious venues but can be discovered through thoughtful spatial design. In this way, sacred architecture transforms from being merely a vessel for belief into a catalyst for being present.

This thesis argues that sacredness is not restricted to churches, temples, or mosques. It can also be found in a library, a garden, a courtyard, or even a quiet room—anywhere architecture encourages us to slow down, engage our senses, and explore our inner selves.

## **7.5. Final Reflections**

Experiencing the sacred in architecture involves more than simply form and function; it offers us space where it seems as if the space listens and resonates, where the sacred is not defined by symbols but rather shaped by our quality of being in the space – how it feels to be moved, calm, uplifted, or grounded.

It is the contention of this thesis that sacred architecture develops only when consciously designed to exceed beyond utility - spatial design developed to realize deeper inner experiences, through the use of light, sound, texture and rhythm derived from memory, all of which are capable of drawing the participant back into a state of heightened awareness.

Ultimately, it is not about the materials (stone, wood or water), but rather how these materials intersect and are mediated to link us to one another, the earth, and the indefinable. And in a time of fragmentation, let us not forget the promise of our spaces, not simply to house us, but to raise and sanctify the potential of our experiences.

# List of Images:

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Lotus Temple, New Delhi, India

Source: Baha'i World News Service. "Baha'i Temple in India continues to receive awards and recognitions." *Baha'i World News Service*, 5 Dec. 2000.

### 1.2 Chapel of St Ignatius, Seattle, USA

Source: Florian, Maria-Cristina. "Steven Holl's Chapel of St. Ignatius in Seattle Receives AIA's Twenty-Five Year Award." *ArchDaily*, 29 June 2022.

### 1.3 Water Temple, Awaji Island, Japan

Source: HIC Arquitectura. "Tadao Ando > Water Temple." *HIC Arquitectura*, 9 Nov. 2023.

## Chapter 3: Lotus Temple, New Delhi, India

### 3.1 Aerial View of Lotus Temple, New Delhi, India

Source: Incredible Asia. "Baha'i House of Worship: The Lotus Temple Experience." *Incredible Asia*, January 16, 2024. <https://incredibleasia.org/lotus-temple/>

### 3.2 Sketches of Lotus Temple by Fariborz Sabha

Source: WikiArquitectura. n.d. *Lotus Temple – Bahá'í House of Worship*. <https://en.wikiarquitectura.com/building/lotus-temple-bahai-house-of-worship>.

### 3.3 Site Plan of Lotus Temple, New Delhi, India

Source: Bahga, Sarbjit. "Lotus Temple: A Symbol of Excellence in Modern Indian Architecture." *World Architecture Community*, May 29, 2017. [https://worldarchitecture.org/articles/cvcmg/lotus\\_temple\\_a\\_symbol\\_of\\_excellence\\_in\\_modern\\_indian\\_architecture.html](https://worldarchitecture.org/articles/cvcmg/lotus_temple_a_symbol_of_excellence_in_modern_indian_architecture.html).

### 3.4 Plan of the House of Worship.

Source: Bahga, Sarbjit. "Lotus Temple: A Symbol of Excellence in Modern Indian Architecture." *World Architecture Community*, May 29, 2017. [https://worldarchitecture.org/articles/cvcmg/lotus\\_temple\\_a\\_symbol\\_of\\_excellence\\_in\\_modern\\_indian\\_architecture.html](https://worldarchitecture.org/articles/cvcmg/lotus_temple_a_symbol_of_excellence_in_modern_indian_architecture.html).

### 3.5 Section of House of Worship.

Source: Bahga, Sarbjit. "Lotus Temple: A Symbol of Excellence in Modern Indian Architecture." *World Architecture Community*, May 29, 2017. [https://worldarchitecture.org/articles/cvcmg/lotus\\_temple\\_a\\_symbol\\_of\\_excellence\\_in\\_modern\\_indian\\_architecture.html](https://worldarchitecture.org/articles/cvcmg/lotus_temple_a_symbol_of_excellence_in_modern_indian_architecture.html).

### 3.6 Ninefold geometry depicting mandal

- Source: Rajasthan Tours & Drivers. "Lotus Temple (Baha'i House of Worship), Delhi." *Rajasthan Tours & Drivers*. <https://www.rajasthandriver.com/tourist-attractions/delhi/lotus-temple>
- 3.7. *Section showing interior dome*  
Source: Sujith, G.S. "The Lotus Temple / Baha'i Temple, Delhi." *ARCHITECTURE STUDENT'S CORNER (blog)*, June 12, 2012. <https://arkistudentscorner.blogspot.com/2012/06/lotus-temple-bahai-temple-delhi.html>
- 3.8. *Oculus and surrounding vents*  
Source: Sujith, G.S. "The Lotus Temple / Baha'i Temple, Delhi." *ARCHITECTURE STUDENT'S CORNER (blog)*, June 12, 2012. <https://arkistudentscorner.blogspot.com/2012/06/lotus-temple-bahai-temple-delhi.html>
- 3.9. *Inner fold between petal installed with glass for light*  
Source: Bahá'í House of Worship. "Architecture." 2023  
<https://bahaihouseofworship.in/architecture/>.
- 3.10. *Procession on Lotus Temple*  
Source: Author
- 3.11. *Raised platform and bridges*  
Source: Apna Yatra. "Lotus Temple Delhi: Timings, History, Entry Fee, Images, Location." *Apna Yatra*, July 7, 2023. <https://apnayatra.com/lotus-temple-delhi/>
- 3.12. *Lotus Temple with City as a backdrop*  
Source: Bahá'í House of Worship. "Architecture." 2023  
<https://bahaihouseofworship.in/architecture/>.
- 3.13. *Oculus as main focus and no ornamentation*  
Source: Sachin Dutta. "The Baha'i House of Worship, Popularly Known As The Lotus Temple." *Pinterest (social media post)*. <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/847943436085552492/>
- 3.14. *Diffused light inside the dome as the protagonist*  
Source: Bahá'í House of Worship. "Architecture." 2023  
<https://bahaihouseofworship.in/architecture/>.
- 3.15. *Reflection of Lotus Temple in one of the Pools*  
Source: PandoTrip. "The Lotus Temple: A Blossom of Inspiring Architecture in India." *PandoTrip*, 2022. <https://www.pandotrip.com/the-lotus-temple-a-blossom-of-inspiring-architecture-in-india-12784/>
- 3.16. *Interwoven elements at twilight*  
Source: Getty Images. "Lotus Temple, New Delhi" [video collection]. Getty Images published various dates (e.g., Time-lapse POV of a visitor published approx. 9.8 years ago).  
<https://www.gettyimages.in/videos/lotus-temple-new-delhi>

### 3.17. *Lotus Temple at Dawn - the ultimate in between*

Source: Ultimate Passport (Tumblr blog). "Lotus Temple – Delhi, India: A holy place of worship for followers of the Bahá'í Faith." *Ultimate Passport*, July 6, 2016. <https://ultimate-passport.tumblr.com/post/146971672217/lotus-temple-delhi-india-a-holy-place-of>

## Chapter 4: Chapel of St. Ignatius, Seattle, USA

### 4.1. *Aerial View of Chapel of St Ignatius, Seattle, USA*

Source: Minner, Kelly. "AD Classics: Chapel of St. Ignatius / Steven Holl Architects." *ArchDaily*. March 1, 2011. <https://www.archdaily.com/115855/ad-classics-chapel-of-st-ignatius-steven-holl-architects>

### 4.2. *Concept by Steven Holl*

Source: Steven Holl Architects. "Chapel of St. Ignatius." <https://www.stevenholl.com/project/st-ignatius-chapel/>.

### 4.3. *Chapel of St Ignatius marked on site plan of Seattle University*

Source: Minner, Kelly. "AD Classics: Chapel of St. Ignatius / Steven Holl Architects." *ArchDaily*. March 1, 2011. <https://www.archdaily.com/115855/ad-classics-chapel-of-st-ignatius-steven-holl-architects>

### 4.4. *Plan of Chapel of St Ignatius*

**Source:** Park Young-Woo. "Chapel of St. Ignatius, Seattle by Steven Holl, 1997." *Blog Naver*, Dec, 29, 2019. <https://m.blog.naver.com/ywpark5293/221753213026>

### 4.5. *Section at Procession March*

Source: Steven Holl Architects. "Chapel of St. Ignatius." <https://www.stevenholl.com/project/st-ignatius-chapel/>.

### 4.6. *Diffused light from various colored lens fitted with glass*

Source: Stegers, Rudolf. "Chapel of St. Ignatius." *Building Types Online*, Birkhäuser Verlag, 2021. [https://bdt.degruyter.com/entry/bdt\\_08\\_023/](https://bdt.degruyter.com/entry/bdt_08_023/)

### 4.7. *Tilt Up Method to construction of tilted colored lens windows*

Source: WikiArquitectura. "St. Ignatius Chapel." <https://en.wikiarquitectura.com/building/st-ignatius-chapel/>.

### 4.8. *Visible Colored lenses*

Source: Steven Holl Architects. "Chapel of St. Ignatius." <https://www.stevenholl.com/project/st-ignatius-chapel/>.

4.9. *Kids experiencing the roughness of concrete*

Source: Steven Holl Architects. "Chapel of St. Ignatius." <https://www.stevenholl.com/project/st-ignatius-chapel/>.

4.10. *Entrance is from South and Emergency Exit from West*

Source: Author

4.11. *Areas defined by light coming in through colored*

Source: B. Hêng. "Chapel of St. Ignatius." *IAT 233 Presentation*, Simon Fraser University. <https://www.sfu.ca/~bheng/IAT%20233/Presentation.pdf>

4.12. *Entrance vestibule followed by procession march*

Source: Niland, Josh. "Steven Holl's Vibrant Chapel of St. Ignatius Is the 2022 AIA Twenty-Five-Year Award Winner." *Bustler*, June 28, 2022.

4.13. *Section from procession march - both sides*

Source: WikiArquitectura. "St. Ignatius Chapel." <https://en.wikiarquitectura.com/building/st-ignatius-chapel/>.

4.14. *Reflective flooring and play of light, illusion of water effect*

Source: Reddit user MinkCote. "Seattle's most architecturally significant building?" *r/Seattle*, March 2025. [https://www.reddit.com/r/Seattle/comments/1iwkspj/seattles\\_most\\_architecturally\\_significant\\_building/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Seattle/comments/1iwkspj/seattles_most_architecturally_significant_building/)

4.15. *Twilight zone of chapel - standing tall with a perfect reflection*

Source: ArchEyes Team. "The Chapel of St. Ignatius by Steven Holl: Sculpting Light and Spirit." *ArchEyes*, November 18, 2024. [https://archeyes.com/the-chapel-of-st-ignatius-by-steven-holl-sculpting-light-and-spirit/:contentReference\[oaicite:3\]{index=3}](https://archeyes.com/the-chapel-of-st-ignatius-by-steven-holl-sculpting-light-and-spirit/:contentReference[oaicite:3]{index=3})

## Chapter 5: Water Temple, Awaji Island, Japan

5.1. *Aerial View of Water Temple, Awaji Island, Japan*

Source: HIC Arquitectura. "Tadao Ando > Water Temple." November 9, 2023. <https://hicarquitectura.com/2023/11/tadao-ando-water-temple/>.

5.2. *Conceptual sketch for the Water Temple by Tadao Ando*

Source: HIC Arquitectura. "Tadao Ando > Water Temple." November 9, 2023. <https://hicarquitectura.com/2023/11/tadao-ando-water-temple/>.

5.3. *Site Plan of Water Temple*

Source: Pengyunxiang. "Water Temple (Shingonshu Honpukuji) / Tadao Ando, 1991." *Modern Architecture: A Visual Lexicon*. University of Hong Kong, Department of Architecture. Published October 4, 2017. <https://visuallexicon.wordpress.com/2017/10/04/water-temple-tadao-ando/>.

5.4. *Underground plan of Water Temple*

Source: Yang, Xiaoyu. "Water Temple." *Bēhance*, September 11, 2016. <https://www.behance.net/gallery/42715619/Water-Temple>

5.5. *Section from the staircase looking at the entrance to chamber*

Source: Yang, Xiaoyu. "Water Temple." *Bēhance*, September 11, 2016. <https://www.behance.net/gallery/42715619/Water-Temple>

5.6. *Section from outer chamber looking at the Buddha*

Source: Yang, Xiaoyu. "Water Temple." *Bēhance*, September 11, 2016. <https://www.behance.net/gallery/42715619/Water-Temple>

5.7. *Staircase for underground chamber*

Source: HIC Arquitectura. "Tadao Ando > Water Temple." November 9, 2023. <https://hicarquitectura.com/2023/11/tadao-ando-water-temple/>.

5.8. *Procession on the site*

Source: Author

5.9. *Lotus pond as roof slab*

Source: Higaki, Tadao. "Water Temple, Japan". *Google Images*, 2021.

5.10. *Interweaving of structure and landscape*

Source: Archiweb. "Water Temple – Shingonshu Honpukuji." *Archiweb*. <https://www.archiweb.cz/en/b/vodni-chram-shingonshu-honpukuji>

5.11. *Materials used in Water Temple*

Source: Archiweb. "Water Temple – Shingonshu Honpukuji." *Archiweb*. <https://www.archiweb.cz/en/b/vodni-chram-shingonshu-honpukuji>

5.12. *Fitted Vermillion Shoji Screen on south-west corner*

Source: Reddit user Redjeni. "Water Temple, Awaji, Japan by Tadao Ando [1280x720]." *r/ArchitecturePorn*, 2012. [https://www.reddit.com/r/ArchitecturePorn/comments/13memb/water\\_temple\\_awaji\\_japan\\_by\\_tadao\\_ando\\_1280x720/](https://www.reddit.com/r/ArchitecturePorn/comments/13memb/water_temple_awaji_japan_by_tadao_ando_1280x720/)

5.13. *Walking down the stairs in between the pond*

Source: Archiweb. "Water Temple – Shingonshu Honpukuji." *Archiweb*. <https://www.archiweb.cz/en/b/vodni-chram-shingonshu-honpukuji>

- 5.14. *Inner Chamber with Buddha Statue in the corner with natural light as backdrop*  
 Source: Archiweb. "Water Temple – Shingonshu Honpukuji." Archiweb.  
<https://www.archiweb.cz/en/b/vodni-chram-shingonshu-honpukuji>
- 5.15. *Water Temple as integration of the landscape - growing up like surrounding trees*  
 Source: Arquitectura Viva. "Water Temple – Shingonshu Honpukuji." Arquitectura Viva.  
<https://arquitecturaviva.com/works/templo-del-agua-higashiura>
- 5.16. *Light as divine being - highlighting Buddha statue*  
 Source: HIC Arquitectura. "Tadao Ando > Water Temple." November 9, 2023.  
<https://hicarquitectura.com/2023/11/tadao-ando-water-temple/>
- 5.17. *Water as both a symbolic and literal statement*  
 Source: Follow the Water (WordPress blog). "A Water Temple in Japan." *Follow the Water*, July 1, 2014. <https://followwater.wordpress.com/2014/07/01/a-water-temple-in-japan/comment-page-1/#comments>
- 5.18. *Intertwining of elements as a whole*  
 Source: When in Tokyo. "Awaji Architecture Island Guide." *When in Tokyo*.  
<https://whenin.tokyo/Awaji-Architecture-Island-Guide>

## Chapter 6: Reflection & Synthesis

- 6.1. *Lotus Temple as continuation of Earth*  
 Source: Incredible India. "The Lotus Temple." *Incredible India*.  
<https://www.incredibleindia.gov.in/en/delhi/delhi/lotus-temple>
- 6.2. *Chapel of St Ignatius showcases concrete as both grounding and freeing material*  
 Source: Sullivan, Mary Ann. "Images of the Chapel of St. Ignatius, Seattle University, by Steven Holl." *Bluffton University Digital Imaging Project*, 2008.  
<https://homepages.bluffton.edu/~sullivanm/washington/seattle/chapel/holl.html>
- 6.3. *Last view of the outside world before descending down/inwards*  
 Source: Archiweb. "Water Temple – Shingonshu Honpukuji." Archiweb.  
<https://www.archiweb.cz/en/b/vodni-chram-shingonshu-honpukuji>
- 6.4. *Light filters into the central hall through the skylights in the same way as the lotus flower*  
 Source: CultureNOW. "Lotus Temple." *CultureNOW – Museum Without Walls*.  
<https://culturenow.org/site/fed925e7-b6c0-4fb2-88ea-c4f15747bee8>

- 6.5. *Dramatics in the Chapel with light as protagonist & material as supporting character*  
Source: Park Young-Woo. *Screen shot 2012-02-11 at 1.14.26 PM.png*, image file, IAT 233 “Chapel of St. Ignatius” presentation, Simon Fraser University, February 11, 2012. <https://www.sfu.ca/~bheng/IAT%20233/chapel/Screen%20shot%202012-02-11%20at%201.14.26%20PM.png>
- 6.6. *Defused natural light with focus on vermillion wood panel*  
Source: Japan Experience. “Honpukuji Temple Water Temple: A Modern Architectural Marvel on Awaji Island.” *Japan Experience*, May 22, 2024. <https://www.japan-experience.com/all-about-japan/kobe/temples-and-shrines-in-japan/honpukuji-temple-water-temple-a-modern-architectural-marvel-on-awaji-island>
- 6.7. *Reflection and stillness depicted in one of the pools*  
Source: Vohra, Anil. “Lotus Temple – Revisited.” *Anil Vohra Photography* (WordPress blog), October 31, 2015. <https://anilvohraphotography.wordpress.com/2015/10/31/lotus-temple/>
- 6.8. *Natural light as vibrant, chromatic making texture seems like rippled effect of water*  
Source: Steven Holl Architects. “Interior View (South)” *Chapel of St. Ignatius*, Seattle University, 1997. <https://www.stevenholl.com/project/st-ignatius-chapel/>
- 6.9. *Concrete stairs bisecting the Lotus Pond leading to stillness beneath*  
Source: Archiweb. “Water Temple – Shingonshu Honpukuji.” *Archiweb*. <https://www.archiweb.cz/en/b/vodni-chram-shingonshu-honpukuji>
- 6.10. *Walking to the Lotus Temple at Dusk*  
Source: Vohra, Anil. “Lotus Temple – Revisited.” *Anil Vohra Photography* (WordPress blog), October 31, 2015. <https://anilvohraphotography.wordpress.com/2015/10/31/lotus-temple/>
- 6.11. *Twilight zone of Chapel of St Ignatius*  
Source: St Ignatius Chapel (WordPress blog). “St Ignatius Chapel” [photograph], uploaded 2012–2021. [https://stignaitus.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/8149197235\\_62e27a5873\\_b.jpg](https://stignaitus.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/8149197235_62e27a5873_b.jpg)
- 6.12. *Sky as last memory before entering the temple*  
Source: Archiweb. “Water Temple – Shingonshu Honpukuji.” *Archiweb*. <https://www.archiweb.cz/en/b/vodni-chram-shingonshu-honpukuji>

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