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## Connections

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# Connections

Ralph J. Roesling

Memory is our connection with time and tradition.

Sincere architecture is conceived and constructed at a certain point in time, it has to do with a certain philosophical context, a certain epoch.

Within the great works of Architecture exists the cultural memory of the individual and society. In each project the consciousness of space, time and reality exists for that time. For example, the Gothic cathedrals have the irrational mystery and darkness of the Middle Ages with an emphasis on the symbolism of religion.

Another example is the ancient Chinese temples that represent a philosophy of man and nature as a unified whole. There is no distinction between building and garden space. Buildings are gardens. Gardens are buildings. Man exists in the world moving through sequences of nature.

My work, and hence my philosophy, is of the modern epoch. I cannot deny the heritage of the modern movement. This movement is still an inspiration for me because of its profound explorations of abstract ideas. Many of these ideas are about constructs of the metaphysical; different ways of looking at and experiencing reality. This perception, understanding, and interpretation of reality is the substance of thought and memory.

Architecture for me is about abstract and physical connections: connection with

the site, connection with the client, connection with thought and emotion. The most significant kind of architecture is that which makes a universal connection with every epoch. It speaks of the human condition just like the Greek plays and Shakespeare. This universal connection with time and memory grows out of a conceptual beginning that has nothing to do with circumstance, place, or time. A strong conceptual beginning comes from an understanding of human existence and emotion. Louis Kahn called this point of beginning "Volume Zero."

In my own work, my main purpose is to find meaning without the process of classification and analysis. This meaning is at work in the spontaneous and intuitive spirit.

The first encounter I had of this intuitive spirit was my first success with Chinese ink painting. I was painting a horse, a very spirited horse. I realized that the anatomy of a horse is very complex and difficult to draw in a convincing manner. I knew the spirit of the horse however, and was able to intuitively portray this essence of the animal. This was the "Volume Zero" for the painting of this horse. I remembered something about horse anatomy that was spontaneous and intuitive.

This intuitive spirit emerges through the process of establishing concepts. Form or composition emerges out of a realization of what can exist. Architecture cannot be satisfactorily conceived or described by systems that can be classified, analyzed,

or measured. This realization of what can exist is intuition. For me, Architecture exists in this realm of intuitive consciousness of existence.

*I express, I build, therefore I exist.*

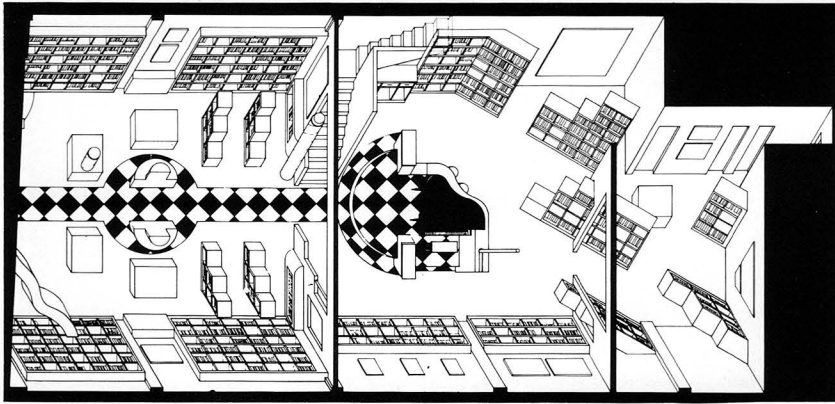
I believe that architectural philosophy has evolved beyond the pure rationalism and functionalism of the 1920's and has incorporated some of the contemporary ques-

tions and problems contemplated by philosophers. Why do I exist? What is the meaning of life?

My own philosophical interest has to do with the uniqueness of being alive as experienced through the senses of the individual, intuition being the most important and reliable of the senses. By creating, the intuition is exercised and reaffirmed as a sense.



Words and Music, San Diego, California: Interior

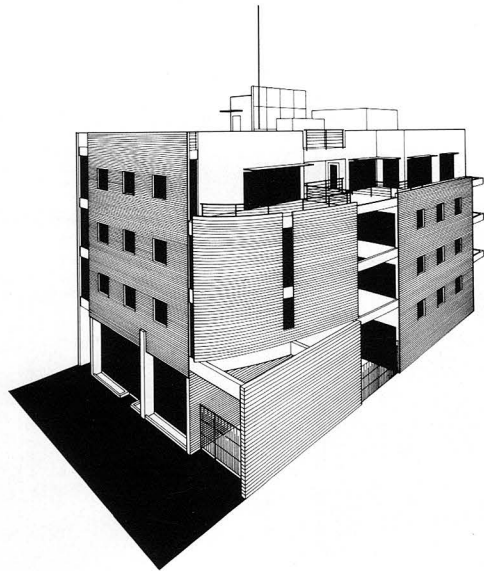


Words and Music, San Diego, California: Plan

An example of this philosophy is the use of simple contrast and juxtaposition in my work. This allows the senses to be used and appreciated. In Words and Music, a bookstore San Diego, I limited the pallet of materials and colors to mainly black, white and grey in order to enhance the perception of the books as objects of art. Within this bookstore there is a small performing arts stage and gallery space. By placing books, paintings, sculpture, and musical instruments within a gallery-like setting, the objects take on a different and more important meaning. The rhythm of space becomes an important design consideration because of the physical length of the space. The space is divided into three rooms, a formal entry or foyer, an in-

formal parlor space in the middle, and a dynamic gallery space in the rear. This spatial order was intuitive and derived spontaneously.

The influence of Japanese culture (my partner is Japanese) has enhanced this sensory philosophy with the concept of *ma* which has a loose translation in English. It has to do with the idea of meaningful intervals or spaces in-between. I like to think of it as the profound meaning of indefinite spaces. The ambiguity of boundaries that are porous to admit light. These indefinite spaces are similar to the white spaces of the Zen ink painting that your imagination and senses have to fill.



East West Design Complex, San Diego, California: Perspective

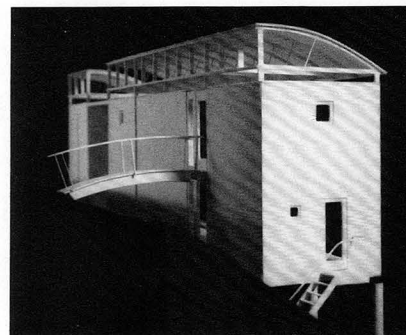
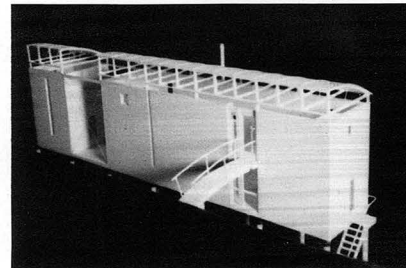
The East West Design Complex, an office building that my partner Kotaro Nakamura and I designed, is about these indefinite spaces and meaningful gaps between materials. Our concept was to create a feeling of lightness and transparency in a structure that, under normal conditions, is very massive. This infill office building is located in a neighborhood that has many massive brick and concrete structures. The apparent lightness of this structure will be very ironic. The use of materials is very honest and ironic. The brick veneer is treated as a light "skin" with a revealed edge to show the thinness. Material planes are separated and celebrated as screens as in a Japanese house. These screens are layered to achieve a quality of shadow on the primary facades. The building is organized around a center that is a void. This void tends to dematerialize and spill out to the sidewalk. This building expresses the irony and truth of living in contemporary society.

In a small cabin retreat for the mountains near San Diego, I was inspired by the concept of a vessel. The vessel is an elegant container. The cabin is a vessel that floats above the forest floor and fills with the light of the forest. This light that has been

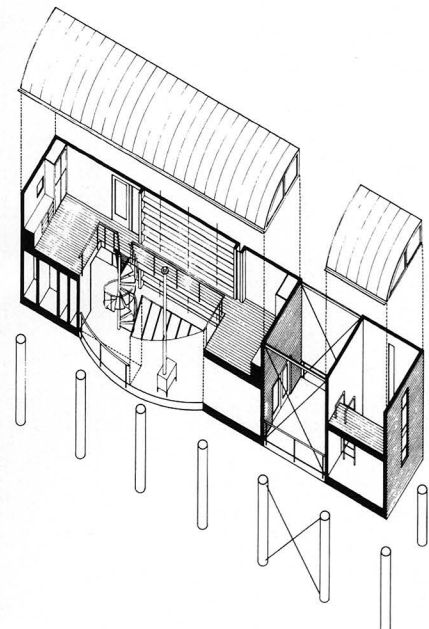
diffused by large pine trees pours into this tiny cabin through clerestory windows and slits that are orchestrated in order to create a meditative mood. The post and beam structure imparts a certain rhythm and character of light in the space.

The space of the cabin is one large volume with two sleeping lofts. The north wall of the interior is a large bookshelf. The small studio space of the deck is another room for painting and sculpting.

Architecture is like playing a metaphysical musical instrument. It takes a lifetime to make a contribution to the realm of architecture that underlies the physical and measurable presence.



Cabin Retreat, San Diego County, California: Models



Cabin Retreat, San Diego County, California: Axonometric