Elements of a Chapel

Procession, Transition, Materiality
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By David Roland Connerley

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__Committee Chairperson__
Hunter Pittman

__Committee Member__
Donald Sunshine

__Committee Member__
Mario Cortes

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I would like to thank my family and friends for their support and understanding. I would also like to thank my committee members for their guidance, patience, and insight into my project.

In memory of my father DeLeroy Connerley.
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Traditionally the role of a Chapel is to offer society a place to worship, find solitude, sanctuary, spiritual enlightenment, religious fulfillment, and its inspiration. In an effort to reinforce and accentuate these experiences, this project explores the architectural concepts of procession, transition, and materiality of a Chapel.
Introduction

Traditionally, poets, scholars, and clergy have referred to chapels and churches as houses of God, houses of worship, and/or even metaphorically as a cosmic mountain that reaches from heaven to earth allowing spiritual communication and oneness with one's own God.

The metaphor is a correlation between the spiritual and the physical world, a connection between the mountains and the heavens, a sanctuary from all the inequities of the world. So how does an Architect integrate and choreograph these religious and spiritual relationships into a chapel's environment? How does a chapel communicate and inspire these relationships to its parishioner, and/or its community? Questions like these are at the heart and soul of every chapel.

In this project I attempt to create and convey the heart and soul of the chapel through the correlation of major and minor elements. The major element is procession. Webster's dictionary defines procession as the act of moving from one state to another state. In this project, I define procession as the chronological sequencing of individual elements along a given path that makes up the whole processional experience. The minor elements are those individual elements that are experienced along that path. More specifically, transitions, materiality, lighting, texturing, and sequencing are some of the minor elements that are experienced along the path. They are the essential elements that are blended and integrated into the chapel environment.

To create this holistic experience you must blend and/or activate any essential characteristics of the building sites, in essence you are creating a dialog and/or formal language between the processional path, the chapel and its environment. To do this you must interpret and understand the characteristic, natural dialog and any formal language that your building site provides.
For clarity and understanding of these terms let's take a moment and analyze the photograph of the majestic Swiss Alps. Right away you begin to understand just how this metaphoric correlation between the mountains and the heavens came to be. The mountains seem to reach out and embrace the sky. The mountain tops and/or edges becomes a stage (the blue line) that allows the sky to dance along its snow covered ridges, peaks, and valleys through out its daily ritual. The stage represents a transition, natural dialog, and formal language that exists between the mountains and the sky. The sky travels along the stage, experiencing its peaks, valleys, and ridges, and at the same time provides a dynamic back ground which gives clarity and depth to the mountains. This process is a natural symbiotic dialog between the mountains and the sky. One accentuates and depends on the other. The contour of the stage provides information about the formal language as well. The peaks, valleys, and ridges create a dynamic curvilinear relationship.
If we look at Mario Botta’s design of the chapel Monte Tamaro we can begin to see some of these transformational relationships taking place. By looking at the plan we see that it’s fairly apparent that the staircase at the beginning of the bridge is the first formal transition, the beginning of the procession path and dialog between the site and the building. As you travel down the processional path by crossing the bridge you get a spectacular view of the Swiss Alps, it is a celebration of dialog between the processional path, the building and the mountain view. Also the texture and materiality of the building (the stone) as well, allows you to become part of the mountain and/or mountain view itself. It makes the building and the processional path feel like you were walking up to the very edge of a cliff and then reverses direction and takes you down the side of the building to a more formal entrance of the chapel.
In the Thorn Crown chapel the processional path lies on the major axis and is completely secluded by the surrounding woods. The surrounding woods puts the processional path in compression as you traverse down the path and transition into the chapel. The stopping state of the procession is clearly the large rock outside at the end of the chapel which can be seen from within the chapel.
The project site is just east of Blacksburg about a mile past the corporate limits at the end of Clay Street where the blacktop turns to gravel as it passes through a small little wooded area. On the other side of the woods the road begins to stretch out to encounter the 270 to 360 degree mountain view. It offers its travelers a moment of solitude and reflection and is the beginning of the processional path. This is the same type of dialog and experience you get as you cross the bridge at Mounte Tamaro.
“Day dreaming beside a path of yellow sand as life flows by. What is more beautiful than the road?”
The parking lot is a stopping state for the road but only another transitional state in the processional path. Its the place where we begin to interact personally with that processional path, we get out of our cars and we walk the rest of the path. The path between the parking lot and the building is where you begin interacting more personally with the building procession. You begin to process the characteristics of the building, texture, color, mass, symbolism, height, and direction. It’s the invitation to the public.
Inspiration

Symbolically the hands represent unity between the religious, spiritual, and physical world. They also express power, unity, purity, elegance, and were inspirational in my project.
Symbolism

“...which lies open to lead us to God is Mary, via whom traveled to the lodge with us all.”
Formal language

The curvilinear relationship is the formal language that is expressed in these early photographs, models, and drawings of the project.
Curvilinear
Curvilinear
Mass and Materiality
Texture and Materiality
Symbolism and Entry

The entry is a transition in the processional path and an invitation to the public.
Main floor plan
Second floor plan
Seating Arrangement
Spatial Relationship
Curvilinear Structure and Relationships
Roof and Spatial Relationships
Roof Structure and Symbolism
The small high windows are designed to allow light to enter in and spread out through the sanctuary giving the front of the chapel its own presence, and becomes part of the processional stopping state. The windows are also located directly beneath the main cross section of the roof structure, in essence allowing it to float on incoming streams of light, and revealing the spiritual substructure.
Computer Models
Illustrations
12-13) Scottsburg United Methodist Church, 615 Honeyrun Pkwy, Scottsburg, In. 47170. Photographs taken by David Connerely.
15,16, Randolph-Macon Woman's College, Photographs taken by David Connerely.
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Bibliography


Vita

David Roland Connerley

Born: 10 February, 1956, Waterloo, Iowa

Education:

December 2002    Masters of Architecture from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
May 1992         Bachelor of Science in Computer Science from The University of Iowa.
May 1990         Associate of Arts from Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Work:


December 2002
Blacksburg, Virginia