

Healing Architecture: Experiencing Continuity of 'The One'

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Introduction

It is through an architectural experience of the interconnectedness of all things that a state of consciousness and healing emerges from us all, allowing each of us to experience the continuity of 'The One.' The One can be experienced architecturally through space, but also through the spaces in-between. By bringing together phenomenology and Shamanism we can create a process (a ceremony), an experience (a change) and an outcome (a healing) to engage us on all layers and levels.

Presenting the Shamanic Healing Ceremony

In his *Eyes of the Skin*, Juhani Pallasmaa explains that “[w]e are in constant dialogue and interaction with the environment, to the degree that it is impossible to detach the image of the self from its spatial and situational existence.”¹ With intention, architecture that is healing can engage our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual awareness, returning us to a state of interconnectedness, reminding us of our situational existence. Shamanically, it is known as the experiential journey from one point to another, the outcome of which has measurable change.² In *The Thinking Hand*, Pallasmaa states: the “impact of architecture does not derive from a formal or aesthetic game; it arises from experiences of an authentic sense of life. Architecture does not invent meaning; it can move us only if it is capable of touching something buried deep in our embodied memories.”³ This presentation, taking the form of a Shamanic healing ceremony—one designed for a healed outcome in the individual and collective body—allows participants to experience the continuity of The One, an authentic sense of life, through collective engagement.

Exploring The One

Pete Bernard, Midewin and Medicine Man describes The One through Traditional Algonquin Shamanism as everything, everyone, and anything; it is consciousness itself.⁴ Our consciousness, and therefore, our existentialism, is how we relate to ourselves, to life itself, and how we create our reality. In the field of Architecture, phenomenologists describe The One in many ways; Peter Zumthor calls it “coherence,” he states: “when they are coherent. That is when everything refers to everything else and it is impossible to remove a single thing without destroying the whole.”⁵ Pallasmaa defines The One as: “the ultimate meaning of any building is beyond architecture; it directs our consciousness back to the world and towards our own sense of self and being.”⁶ Considering The One, we can see that healing architecture is so much more than programmatically relevant buildings such as hospitals, health care facilities, and spaces

¹ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes Of The Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 64.

² Pete Bernard, “Earning the Light Professional Shamanism (Medicine Work) Training Program” (lecture, The 8th Fire School of Shamanism, Edmonton, AB, March 4, 2016 – December 2, 2018).

³ Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 136.

⁴ Bernard, “Earning the Light.”

⁵ Peter Zumthor, *Atmospheres: Architecture Environments – Surrounding Objects* (Basel: Birkhauser, 2006), 69.

⁶ Pallasmaa, *The Eyes Of The Skin*, 11.

dedicated to well being in the Western sense. Healing architecture can be anything: a part to the whole, it can be an object such as door handle or a pavillion; it can connect one space to another, such as a passageway, a room, a threshold, or a bridge; it can be an exterior experience, such as a landscape or garden. Similarly, it is not limited in terms of typology: healing architecture can take the form of a home, office, or even the city. The One is everything. As such, healing architecture is inclusive to all scales, typologies, and programs.

The Opportunity of a Healing Architecture

Healing architecture implements the interconnectedness of all things through the spatial expression of what is called the 'in-between.' In Kisho Kurokawa's *The Philosophy of Symbiosis*, he describes the in-between as contradiction in cohesion.⁷ In this philosophy, the in-between is not an us versus them, rather an us and them, or more profoundly, an us/them. It is always both, the part must be expressed within the whole—you can't have one without the other. Healing architecture and the in-between share these dualities: light/shadow, inside/outside, above/below, 2-dimensional/3-dimensional, man/nature, and freedom/system. In *Atmospheres*, Zumthor describes these dualities as "between composure and seduction," "tension between interior and exterior," "the light on things," and "architecture as surroundings."⁸ For example, the implementation of light/shadow considers materiality, orientation, heat, views, texture, intensity, scalability, and even sound, as somewhat implied sensitivities to designing any space. Yet, it is the desired, healed outcome of these dualities that leads the way towards how we would experience such a space. The in-between can be described as the formal, material, and therefore physical aspects of a space, and in another, it is the actual space that is created in-between us and a physicality. It is everything else that engages us in every other way, in which the physical cannot.

To engage sight, smell, taste, and sound, as well as the haptic, gravitational, and kinesthetic senses, while also engaging them through the in-between, in the in-between, is what creates healing architecture. With intentionality, this sensory engagement is experienced physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Wakening us in the present moment, when spacetime collapses, reminding us that we are a part of everything that we are engaging with, as we can act upon the in-between, as much as it acts upon us. Bernard emphasizes: "this is when the illusion that we are separate from each other, that we are separate from all things, now dissipates."⁹ "My perception is [therefore] not a sum of visual, tactile, and audible givens: I perceive in a total way with my whole being; I grasp a unique structure of the thing, a unique way of being, which speaks to all my senses at once."¹⁰

Combining Phenomenology with Shamanism

By combining phenomenology with Shamanism the space is not only a subjective experience designed for our elicitation, the space is a ceremony with an intent towards change, and a healed outcome. As the practice of Shamanism can be applied to anything and everything, without limitation, taking a Shamanic approach to healing architecture explains how we can design working with the relationship of cause/effect and conscious/unconscious, both of which are in-betweens.¹¹ With cause and effect, Bernard teaches: "it is knowing that you can design the cause to achieve your effect—you can create a healed outcome within the cause to get the effect you

⁷ Kisho Kurokawa, *The Philosophy of Symbiosis* (London: Academy Editions, 1994).

⁸ Zumthor, *Atmospheres*, 41, 45, 57, 63.

⁹ Bernard, "Earning the Light."

¹⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense: Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1964), 48.

¹¹ Bernard, "Earning the Light."

want/need.¹² Designing with consciousness and unconsciousness is to understand the relationship of response and reaction, while utilizing your own consciousness to create. Furthermore, Bernard states: "this is knowing your reality is what you perceive, and understanding that you can change everything by the way you look at it."¹³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty emphasizes, "It is through our bodies as living centres of intentionality... that we choose our world and the world chooses us."¹⁴ You are building not only architecture, but the consciousness of that architecture, a 'structure' of consciousness that reinforces itself. In healing architecture your cause, your consciousness, and everything you do is infused into the space and all of the things that exist within it.

Conclusion

Healing architecture, both in its design (input) and its engagement (output) is about creating a culture of consciousness. Healing architecture is Shamanism; it is not only the experience of oneself in a 'healing space', it is also the acknowledgment of the continuation of oneself in that 'space.' It is knowing that every word, thought, feeling, emotion has a 'design'—a form—and an impact on the outcome. Therefore, every action is done with intent and meaning towards a healed outcome. In reference of Merleau-Ponty, Pallasmaa states: "The task of architecture is 'to make visible how the world touches us.'"¹⁵ The One is fundamental to our understanding of the interconnectedness of all things and to know ourselves in all things.¹⁶ To experience this architecturally allows the space we inhabit to truly touch us. And when we do, architecture's healed outcome is one of Continuity. This allows for the exploration of healing architecture through experiencing continuity of The One and through building a consciousness with a healed outcome, not only individually, but also collectively.

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¹² Bernard, "Earning the Light."

¹³ Bernard, "Earning the Light."

¹⁴ Pallasmaa, *The Eyes Of The Skin*, 40.

¹⁵ Pallasmaa, *The Thinking Hand*, 128.

¹⁶ Bernard, "Earning the Light."