A MIXED USE FACILITY
FOR ART AND
COMMERCE BASED
ON A STUDY OF
JAPANESE
ARCHITECTURE

a thesis by
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IDEA

The inspiration for this thesis began in the summer of 1992 with a month long visit to Japan. During this visit I had the opportunity to experience many fascinating works of architecture, both vernacular and architect designed. These works ranged from centuries old farm houses, temples and shrines, to recent commercial and residential structures. The cities that I visited are Tokyo, Yokohama, Fujisawa, Kawasaki, Kamakura, and Nikko. I experienced a variety of different folk structures in Kawasaki, especially the Minka (vernacular farmhouse). Nikko and Kamakura provided numerous examples of outstanding temples and shrines. My knowledge of contemporary architecture comes from works in Tokyo, Yokohama, and Fujisawa. Among these were works by Tadao Ando, Itsuko Hasegawa, Arata Isozaki, Fumihiko Maki, and Atsushi Kitagawara. This experience showed me the origins of the architecture being built today, and the discontinuities as well.

After returning to Indiana I saw a Rakugo (traditional art of story telling) performance by Shijaku Katsura. His three Indianapolis shows were sold out. The audience was a mix of several nationalities, professions, and ages. Many at this performance obviously used the occasion as an opportunity for meeting people and making business contacts. What a wonderful mix of individuals! The event was also sponsored by American companies. Why not build a facility that could bring other, less flexible forms of traditional Japanese theater, such as kabuki or noh, to Indiana?
The site was chosen for its central location in Indiana and Indianapolis. This site at the northeast corner of Washington and Illinois street. This site is in the heart of both the city and state, an appropriate place to experience art and interact with people. As well as being a prominent location, it also receives direct sunlight most of the day. The void framed by the adjacent structures implies a volume of a certain size, enough to fill the cavity without swallowing the adjacent buildings themselves. The interaction to take place here is urban in itself—a mix as well as a synthesis.
PROCESS

This investigation began with an examination of the traditional Japanese house. This focused on constructional and spiritual aspects. The spiritual connotations given to orientation and structure and the floating geometry of the plan were of particular interest.
Combined with my travel experiences and after reading In Praise of Shadows this image came to mind. The image was of a building of shadows and voids with mass that delicately touched the ground and extended into the sky. This was also inspired by Ando’s use of columns in his children’s museum in Himeji. No program had yet been defined, only notions of theater, court and entry.
I drew quick loose drawings in attempts to capture my intuitive notions about the spirit and composure of Japanese architecture. These are architectural gesture drawings. Trees, water, and shadow are integral to these structures.
One phenomenon I noticed about my mindset is that images of the overall structure appear again and again. This frontality I believe is not usually present in Japanese architecture. I need to let the interior spaces and plan grow to form the work, which would renders the walls more ephemeral. The exterior would then be unimpeded by such a nonsubstantial boundary.
These plans use the wall as a threshold between the conscious and unconscious realms of activities. The stairs and structure are shared unifying elements. The circles are trees incorporated into the building. The grid is shifted to break from the monotony of the city grid.
I try working in plan and model, attempting to let it grow in a less forced manner. This method was more productive after turning the model in directions I had not intended. Actually, Andy turned the model in directions I had not intended!
The program begins to take shape. Diagrams and sketches illustrate ideas about spirit, form, and the structure of this place.
Open, closed, solid, void, captured nature...
Various geometries, a concrete frame, glass, and proportions are considered. Vertical movement through the structure is critical.
Performance, program, experience, structure, movement...
These sketches seek to capture something that is both primitive and refined. This tension is present in both ancient and modern Japanese architecture.
Reflection, spirit, integration...
Terracing, layering, details...
Two opposing realms (art and commerce), wall as screen, ground and sky connection. A sense of mystery and non pronounced entries. The theater stair (for the performers) juts out over the side walk below. Retail below and roof garden above. Michele: "every floor could have a wonderful terrace, but that interior space could be quite brutal".
Another scheme designed to concentrate the building volume. This would increase the amount of light entering the core of the building as well as provide more open space at ground level. The idea of this proposition was to create a maze of shadow and color with episodes of sculpture, systems, light, and structure. Each of these elements were to be literally or visually framed. The noh stage is under the undulating, "unmaterial" roof.
Thoughts about transition, spirit and program. Some of Andy's thoughts about ground and sky connections, and using walls as screens.
Performance, repetition, scale and silhouette. A noh bridge must come from the west, and the sun is in the performers face.
This is the shape of Japan's National Noh Theater stage canopy. Could the same module of stage space be multiplied into a kabuki stage?
Metallic clouds screen the stairs. The concrete frame pierces this perforated boundary to support the clouds. A brief concept diagram.
Stairs, structure, circulation, clouds...
The program has been simplified, resulting in nine types of spaces. These consist of service spaces (mechanical, restrooms, storage), retail, office, conference, lobby (meeting), gallery, and noh space. The noh stage is a timber frame whose four posts mark the limits of a precisely proportioned cube of space, an abstract representation of our unconscious.
The structure is entered from the south through a garden of plantings, walls and columns. The facility can also be entered from the north by a stair over a shallow pool. This pool is in a dark space enclosed by the rough brick wall of the adjoining. One scheme of direction meanings I read gave north a dark/water deity connotation. The second floor is office space for J.A.S.I. (Japan America Society of Indiana). On this floor stairs begin that run the height of the building. These stairs lead to each floor and eventually to the theater. The third floor is conference space which could overflow into fourth floor lobby space. The next two levels are gallery space, another rung in the ascent from the retail space at street level. The top level is the theater space. This contrasts with the other levels in that it is enclosed horizontally and opened to the sky above. This is an interior realm, opened only to the dream like clouds overhead. The seating is curved to give the audience a better view of the stage and ramp. Behind the stage are the dressing rooms, the mirror room, and a triangular indoor garden. Floating screens overhead regulate the sunlight and stage lighting. The stage lighting is within the roof structure.
The east is a solid concentration of service spaces, which leave the majority each floor open to light and views. The noh space contradicts this horizontal vista and directs your attention to the stage.
This east/west section shows the repetition of the floors which lead to the theater above. The activities that occur on each floor are the primary elements of the transition in experienced of this place. The model shows the massing and transparency of this stage of my thesis.
conclusion

In hindsight, this semester of design studio has brought my own working methods and manner of thinking about space into question. I perceive Japanese architectural design as a process that grows organically from the inside out. This is evident in the intensity of the interior spaces, the repose of the plans, and the resultant unsubstantiality of the walls. Some of these buildings have no facades, only structure, roof, and floor. Facades often exist in the shadows of deep eaves, or the facade loses its solidity in its rich texture and limited fenestration and taut detailing. In the instances where this tradition is violated the exterior is treated with equal vigor as the intense interior. Human movement and visual interest, as well as texture, are other critical points of this methodology. In the future I hope my working methods and manner of thinking will be less exterior image oriented and grow naturally from experiential considerations.
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