THE CREATIVE PROCESS

THE ENERGY PROCESS OF LIFE

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This Thesis Document is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the course requirements for Architectural Thesis ARCH
406 and the requirements for the degree: Bachelor of Architecture.

Building type- residential
Location of Project-Kyoto, Japan

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Published by the College of Architecture and Planning,
Ball State University Muncie Indiana 47306
Et l'ancienne maison,
Je sens sa rousse tiédeur
Vient des sens à l'esprit.

(And the old house
I feel its russet warmth
comes from the senses to the mind.)
Jean Wahl, Poèmes, p.23
Je dis ma Mère. Et c'est à vous que je pense, ô Maison!
Maison ses beaux étés obscurs de mon enfance.
(Melancolie)
O.V. de Milosz

(I say Mother. And my thoughts are of you, oh, House
House of the lovely dark summers of my childhood.)
(Melancholy)
About This Book

What is in this book is simply the record of footsteps of my journey. It is a journey I needed to take. It is a journey which might never come to an end.

I started my thesis over twenty five weeks ago. I am finally beginning to realize I am only at the starting line of my study. I have been trying to be disciplined and motivated. And I want readers to know that what lies in this book is more important as a record of the process I have gone through than as a portfolio of what I have produced.

Kuni Matsui April 6th, '88
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Introduction
"Vesta Coffee House"

One day I sat down at my desk in my room and opened up my sketch book. I started to doodle. I stopped the movement of my hand for just a moment to take a sip of coffee, and as I picked up the mug, I noticed the pleasant aroma of my coffee wafting out of my cup, filling up the room. My mind started to wander....

A door slid open and the sign on the door reading "Vesta Coffee House" disappeared smoothly behind dark tinted glass. I followed my friend into the coffee shop. The cool air inside felt refreshing. The room was a rather dark place except for a few spotlights shining on the framed posters on the wall. The room had a rather narrow, rectangular shape. My friend walked confidently towards a corner booth on the far side of the room, indicating she knew the place well. As she slid smoothly into the booth, I noticed a sign saying "reserved" had been placed on the table. Before I could say a word, one of the waiters approached us politely and told my friend we would have to find another table. With a little shy smile, my friend told me that she should have made a reservation. Nevertheless, without any difficulty, we found ourselves another table and ...

Even though we could not take the corner booth, my experience in that coffee house was a very pleasant one. As I took another sip of coffee, everything that happened in the Vesta Coffee House was recurring in my mind, vividly. I decided to draw a scene from memory, reproducing as best I could what I was "seeing" in my mind. Fifteen or twenty minutes later, I managed to draw the corner booth of the Vesta Coffee House. But to my disappointment, the drawing in front of me did not really mirror anything that I saw in my imagination. The drawing did not capture the same ambience of place as my mind's image did. My imagined coffee house was so much more vivid in my mind than on paper, and it still is. Why can't I externalize my imaginings? Or why can't I at least capture something significant from it in a drawing?
Imagery

1. Memory

The image of the Vesta Coffee House still comes back to me from time to time, even though I never intentionally recall it. An aroma of coffee, pleasant music, a friendly talk with my friend, and all those details at the café seem to be deeply engraved into my memory, for they come alive. However, I could not separate any of these elements from the space I was in. The memories in association with the Vesta Coffee House are somewhat similar to memories of my childhood. Before I can recall what happened or any of the elements of that past, I can recall a certain space, and I almost feel like I am back in that space. But all the memories I store do not function this way. In some cases, I would remember exactly what I said or what I did but none of these activities is associated with a certain "space."

The function of our memories seems very complex. However, If I can understand a little more about the particular memories which are associated with spaces, perhaps I can be more sensitive to the creation of a space. Perhaps I can even create a space which would become someone else's memory.
2. Perception

Point Shirley

From Water-Tower Hill to the brick prison
The shingle booms, bickering under
The sea's collapse.
Snowcakes break and welter. This year
The gritted wave leaps
The seawall and drops onto a bier
Of quahog chips,
Leaving a salty mash of ice to whiten

In my grandmother's sand yard. She is dead,
Whose laundry snapped and froze here, who
Kept house against
What the slutish, Rutted sea could do.
Squall waves once danced
Ship timbers in through the cellar window:
A thresh-tailed, lanced
Shark littered in the geranium bed-

Such collusion of mulish elements
She wore her broom straws to the nub.
Twenty years out
Of her hand; the house still hugs in each drab
Stucco socket
The purple egg-stones: from Great Head's knob
To the fill-in Gut
The sea in its cold gizzard ground those rounds.

Nobody wintering now behind
The planked-up windows where she set
Her wheat loaves
And apple cakes to cool. What is it
Survives, Grieves
So, over this battered, obstinate spit
Of gravel? The Waves'
Spewed relics clicker masses in the wind,
Gray waves the stub-necked eiders ride.
A labor of love, and that labor lost.
Steadily the sea
Eats at Point Shirley. She died blessed,
And I come by
Bones, bones only, pawed and tossed,
A dog-faced sea.
The sun sinks under Boston, bloody red.

I would get from these dry-papped stones
The milk your love instilled in them.
The black ducks dive.
And through your graciousness might stream,
And I contrive,
Grandmother, stones are nothing of home
To that spumiest dove.
Against both bar and tower the black sea runs.

Sylvia Plath
The Norton Introduction to Poetry, 1986

Why have I allowed the poet to speak for me? I am not concerned with what this poem "means." And I would not even try to explicate it. However, I want the reader to recall what was going through his mind as he read the poem. He might have tried to understand the "idea" behind the poem. Or he may have been trying to figure out where or what Point Shirley was. He might have even visualized the setting described by the poem, and indeed that is exactly what Plath has created -- The sensual details of common objects allow us to re-experience Plath's sentiments and to re-invent Point Shirley for ourselves.

"Poetry is only words" some might say. But it is more than just words. It is an experience of words. It can extend one's sense of what other people are like or one's awareness of personal feelings. Many poems are intimately concerned with feelings. They interact with the mind's eye, allowing us to recreate a world of imagery.
I think consciousness is like a storage bin of images. We know that the white stuff coming down from the sky is snow. We think of red as having properties of fire. We recognize objects in the physical world as images once past the senses. We perceive the physical world through the mind's eye. As a function of our consciousness, the formed images in our minds are laid over the present physical world (matter, or object) and then recognized. That is, we create a bridge between spirit and matter to understand, to know, and to experience.

Architecture is recognized or understood through mind-formed images, also. Experiencing a space and understanding it are not difficult tasks because the way to experience is through the imagination, a common function of the mind. We often say "That building looks like 'something'." Thus, we are already at a starting point of a process of imagination, even though we might not always recognize it. By this process, architecture goes beyond architecture as a way to create a physical structure. It reveals the way people live and how the way they live affects the structures in which they live. Experiencing a space in this process is beyond utility. It is an experience of our mind. It is just like poetry; architecture can become a dynamic workroom of imagination, if we only allow it to happen.

We cannot forget or leave out practical or technological aspects of architecture when we design. Actually, in the intellectual milieu today, technology and practicality are top priorities in the building design. That is, we sometimes overemphasize how a building works, how a building can be more functional, and how we should build it. I believe there is more to architecture than the utilitarian aspects.

We tend to leave out the imaginative aspects of designing in the buildings we make. In other words, we are not interested in the facts of habitation -- How people feel and what people do and how these affect the structures in which they live.
If we create things as tangible forms of our imaginative energy, we might be able to create a bridge between the physical world and the spirit. We might be able to create things which will communicate the ideas behind the design to more people without intellectualizing them. Communicating with objects is like a silent language.

The object is just like a poem as a verbalized form of feelings so that feelings of the poet can be shared with others while we ourselves begin to understand it. When words represent, express, and synthesize genuine human feelings, they can be vitally important. Sometimes, poetry captures exactly the shade of emotion that feels "just right" to the reader. Other times, it communicates to us in silent language and helps us understand or recognize or even recall.

Architecture should be treated in the same manner. I find vernacular architecture very honest and beautiful, probably because the structure communicates with us in this silent language, and yet we recognize and understand. Perhaps, we all can use this language. As a maker, I am probably in search of this language, which I call the "creative process" or the "energy process."
3. The Creative Process

The creative process is a valid tool or conceptual aid for the design of man's environment. But before I can even try to use this, power of imagination in a design process, I need to have a clear understanding of what imagery is, and how we use the creative process in our lives.

I understand the "energy process" needs further clarification. For example, most people enjoy aesthetically one or two paintings which have touched the mind. In my case, those paintings which intrigue me are the paintings which force me to imagine more, to fill in missing parts. Such paintings might evoke images of my past or an imagination of my future. Sometimes I can put myself into a scene in the painting itself. I am the painting. At other times, I might place myself into a similar setting a room perhaps only through an image drawn from my memory. Experiencing paintings is an "experience" created in my mind. The world of imagery is a place where one can allow the mind to relax into it. Imagery is, in a real way, mental positioning.

How do we experience or perceive the physical, external world? It seems most images are memory traces of earlier perceptions.

Here is an operational definition of perception using sight as its vehicle. Let us suppose we glanced into a strange bedroom, one we had never seen before. If we were asked what was in the room, we would probably say that there was a bed. However, if we were asked to describe what the bed looks like, we would not remember much, because we did not actually see the bed but we had contact with the physical object (bed) in terms of association and perception. "Perception includes a complex set of phenomena that intervene between sensory stimulation and conscious awareness." (Silvano Arieti; Creativity: The Magic Synthesis, 1976)

Let's say you visited a town in a foreign country. What you actually experience there is only the
atmosphere or presence of the town. And what you actually see is only a fraction of the objects which have some connection with that atmosphere. And of those objects which you do see, you see only the surface. Thus, what you see is far from what is actually present in the physical world. We do not perceive space like a camera does. We cannot allow every stimulus to vie for our attention. We do not recognize the flux of the physical world. In a way, we might say that we do not know anything about what we see. However, we are aware of reality. We are creating a picture of the physical world inside us through these feelings and experience of atmosphere. The picture is real.

Experiencing a space is, in a way, like reading a text. When we read, what we perceive are letters, but what we conceive are names and meanings and images. What we can understand is only a fraction of the physical world to which we give meaning. We experience the meanings of the objects. So it can be said that we have contact with the physical world through our senses and our imaginations in the process of understanding the physical world. At the same time, the process of giving meaning to what we see isolates us somewhat from the physical world; this process of giving meaning and possessing understanding seems to work with not only the imagination but also with its earlier perceptions and memories. The effect is similar to that of when we do not understand a word if it is the first time we have encountered it.

Perception is one of the functions of our consciousness. However, another important function of our consciousness is imagination. We can look at Bracken Library, and we can recognize it as a building on the Ball State University campus. We also recognize that it is made of brick in a series of rectangular shapes. We are using the process of assigning meanings or names to what we perceive. We seldom stop conceptualizing at this stage of the process. In the case of the Library, we might connect the series of rectangular shapes with an image of
books on a shelf. That is, we may recognize certain objects through a symbolic process. In this process, the meanings we give to the objects are images. What we imagine is pictured in terms of something else familiar to us, and we are trying to think of one thing as if it were something else. In the case of the library, we have a memory or image of the books on the shelf, and we measure the similarity of the image with that of the new image.

By using symbols to create images, we can represent something else, something unfamiliar, even when it is not present. But our power of imagination includes more than that. One of the most important powers of imagination is its function of reflecting what is on one's mind like a mirror reflects one's image. The inner vision of our imagination clarifies things for us -- scenes, states of mind, ideas -- but at the same time our inner vision stimulates us also to remember how those pictures made us feel, and make us feel now. We gain a "felt" sense as well as an image.

As a maker of buildings, I would like to challenge the imagination of persons. Rather than requiring logic and reason to understand architecture, architecture and its maker should depend more upon the creation of pictures in the mind in order to make buildings meaningful, beyond utility.
Personal world

Phase I (Fall 1987).

This phase of my thesis study is composed of a series of exercises. In order to understand how our imagination, perception, and memory work, I have tried to externalize images triggered by memory. I thought that if I could externalize these images in some tangible form, I could convey that the imagery in association with memory is a very important source of our understanding the physical, external world. I approached this study from an extremely personal point of view. However, I am also searching for some universality in imagery which can be used as a tool for design.
1. Imagery study

My imagery study started with the Vesta Coffee House. I am still in the midst of a process of assembling my thoughts using this image study. This book is only to help readers and perhaps myself understand the process. I do not intend to be conclusive about the creative process, but if I can sort through and assemble my thoughts using imagery as a guide, perhaps I will understand, perhaps readers will understand, the nature of creativity through the use of imagery.
Images are extrapolations of what I think. I am not interested in the objects I produce or the formed images themselves, but I am very concerned with what I think and what readers think. These images are the externalized icons to be interpreted. In a way, they are sort of replacements for writing.

Oct. 4,'87
kuni matsui
Box I
2. Box I

Box I started from an image -- my memory of the entry space of my old house. I lived in that house till I was fifteen years old. I have many memories associated with this entry space. I hope the viewers can experience this space according to their own earlier experiences, even though they cannot share personal memories of my old house and its entry space.
Box II
3. Box II

When I went home to Japan last summer, I visited one of the temples in Nara. The minute I entered this temple, I felt very calm. I do not remember hearing all the noisy grade school kids who seemed to be visiting the temple for a field trip.

I remember the very special quality of light filtering in through the grid pattern of the window openings, and I enjoyed the smell of incense very much. I said to myself, "It is great to be Japanese."
Box III
4. *Box III*

I have sorted through a series of images associated with my childhood to create this box. This box is to represent the function of our imagination, our perception, and our memories.
Journey to Another World

Phase II  (Winter 1987)

After I collected images associated with memory, I made three boxes in order to communicate with readers by means of those images. I wanted these three images to be the media between me and the viewers' memories or between the viewers and my memories. I offer these images to an audience not in terms of what I remember but rather with what my viewers remember. But are those images really communicating with people in the way which I said they were? I came to a halt. I felt I needed to try something else. But what? And how?

Thus Phase II started, without a particular direction. The Creative force or the energy of experience propelled itself in its own direction, which then became mine.
One of the images I collected in Phase I drew much attention from fellow students in my studio. Many people asked me what that image was or what was beyond the opening in the picture. Since Art gave me that image, I did not "know" what it was or where it came from. I was attracted to the image, myself. I was wondering where that image was and I, too, was curious as to what was beyond the opening. I allowed my imagination to come into play and found out what was beyond the opening, myself. I called this project "Dwelling".

"Dwelling" started as a two-week sketch problem, but it occupied me for an entire quarter. With the project, "Dwelling", I tried to establish that there is an imaginative process operating or incubating at the same time we are attempting to create an architectural artifact or solve an imaginative problem.
1. In Idea or In Reality?

We all own the power to create things in our minds; that power is called imagination. I believe this power is a common function of our minds. For example, when we are in a space (a place), when we see or feel things, our imagination is busy at work. Thus do we experience the physical world.

Architecturally, when we experience a space, each element in that space creates its own independent association with our imagination. In other words, we all make associations with reality by recalling memories; memories are stored and also awakened to our conscious minds by those entities we touch or see.

I have presented the images in Phase I, hoping that I could make readers experience a space by tapping into what they remember. Now, can we make a space which could become our memory by reversing the process I mentioned above? How can we make an utilitarian artifact which "means" beyond its utility?
2. Dwelling

There was a land where nothing lay -- all was space. As the people touched the earth, architecture took form and evolved until the energies of the people were exhausted and the earth reclaimed architecture...

About the People

The people lived each moment for what it was. They did not plan their future, and they remained spontaneous, like children. Every moment of their lives became an event. In a way, their life was made up of a series of events. So the dwelling was the place of an event for them. It was a place that we might consider a special place. But for them, dwelling was a place where they simply lived.

Light played a very important role in their lives. Light played on their dwelling walls creating events of shadow and composition. The people simply lived alongside nature. They did not try to control her, but they simply welcomed her. They developed an appropriate technology which helped them to build other dwellings which expressed themselves in terms of the Nature from which they were formed.

kuni Dec. '87
What do you see?

Let your imagination come into play!
3. Mental Positioning

Is there really an imaginative process which I call the "creative process" occurring or operating at the same time that we are attempting to create an architectural artifact? With the "Dwelling," I attempted to create an entity from an image constructed with very little "real" information. I call this process of making, a "mental positioning." Imagine that it works like this: Let's say you have just seen a painting which portrays a corner of a room for the first time. Now you are asked to paint or reproduce the same corner of the room. Only you have to imagine yourself standing in the room with the painting, few yards away from the spot where the artist was standing while he painted that corner of the room. So you are to paint as if you have seen more of the area of the room. You have to "fill in" what is not there using your imagination.

When I started phase II of my thesis, "mental positioning" seemed like quite a different process from the process I experienced in Phase I. I attempted to externalize images in association with memory so that these images could in turn associate themselves with our imagination. However, as I gained a better understanding of the imagination and the imaginative process, these two processes started to intertwine, becoming mutually interdependent.

Imagery helps us to see and understand the physical world. When we experience a space, by means of images, it becomes a part of our imagination. That is, even though the image is a mental representation of the physical world, at a certain point the image can be experienced, thus, the image becomes reality. The images are very subjective, because only the person whose mind evokes the image can actually experience it. However, if the image could be externalized in some way, it could be experienced by others through their own earlier perceptions and memories.

After I made three boxes in Phase I, I realized that
each image represented only a portion of a space or a specific space; in my mind’s eye, the image included much more than what was there. Each image evokes another. Box II, the image of a temple showed only a corner of the temple. However, this image of the corner of the temple associates itself with other images outside of the temple, in my mind. Images shift very quickly. So it can be said that experiencing a space by means of images is a similar process to the process of making that I call "mental positioning."
Let's take a break!
I hope you will enjoy Mabel's great dessert.

CRUST
2 1/2 c. Crushed Pretzels
3/4 c. Melted Butter
3 tbs. Sugar
Bake till Brown 400 F 15 min

FILLING
1 - 8 oz Cream Cheese
1 - 8 oz Cool Whip
1 egg beaten
Mix all till creamy

TOPPING
1 lg pkg Jello
2 c. Boiling water
Cool and when syrupy, cover the top.
My Old House

Phase III (spring 1988)

In Phase III, I tackled an exercise project using the process of making which evolved from Phase I and Phase II of my thesis study. I decided to design a house on a lot where my old house once stood. Since I had been working with images and their association with my memory, it seemed logical to try out my design process using a personal level project.
1. *Package of Space*

When you feel comfortable in a space, you are contained in an invisible box. As long as you are in this box, you will feel protected and you are free to daydream. So let your imagination work.

Today, in our world, we can find almost anything packaged for us. "Package of space" is my attempt to pack spaces into boxes together with the feelings associated with these spaces.
2. House 9

This house design is based on my personal experiences. It is idiosyncratic by all means. However, because of the uniqueness of the design process, I hope others can experience my house according to their own earlier experiences or memories. So please listen to that little voice and let your imagination come into play.
A Client Speaks Out

Three years ago, my father gave up the idea of moving back to the northern part of Kyoto where he grew up. He decided to enliven his post-retirement life by rebuilding his worn out wooden house; and I was expected to live with my parents in the near future, not because of immediate necessity but for moral support. I must take care of the aging couple; for an only child who has been away for several years, family bonds work this way in Japan.

My mother will also be retiring in a few years. She will spend more time teaching flower arrangement and tea ceremony, which she enjoys very much, after her retirement. All members of my family, including my future wife love dogs. And I want my kids to grow up with the same kind of experiences I had with my family and my old house.
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**Program (Personal)**

2 Bed rooms: For my parents
   For myself

1 Flower Arrangement Room
   (Guest room with Tatami)

**Program (Cultural)**

1 Bed room: per couple
1 Bed room: per elders
   (When two families live together)

1 Guest room
   (A main room which is reserved for the
    special purposes such as formal
    meetings)

Kitchen/Dining room
   (Accessible to the back of the house)
   (Our dog will be allowed in the area visible from a dining room.)
   (A dining room serves similar role as a living room in American families in many cases)

Bathrooms

Atelier: (Studio space for my dad, Ritsy, and myself)

Guest Room: General use
House 9

Data
Location: Ukyo-Ku Kyoto Japan
Site Area: 242.32 sq m
Package of Space: Entry
Package of space: Atelier
Package of Space: Flower Arrangement room
Package of Space: Kitchen
Package of Space: Bathroom
Package of space: Upstairs
House 9: sections
Imagination


Although the imaginative process is not by any means the only approach to the design or manipulation of man's environment, it is the one of the most important approach. I believe that the imaginative process is also the most often used process in making things; It is "making" in its broadest sense, even though we are not always aware of the process. It is an easy task for us to use such a process of making because the imaginative process is relies on the most common functions of our minds; imagination, perception, and memory. Thus, we all have the power to create because the imaginative process which I call the "creative process," is the energy process of life at work. We just have to listen to ourselves, and then let the process begin.

I have arrived at the conclusion of this book, and I would like to remind the readers of the importance of the creative process in the design of utilitarian artifacts by pointing out how the creative process might continue to work in our lives.

For example, when children play, no matter what it is, they often assume different characters or personalities. For example, imagine that a little girl is playing with her dolls. She might be re-creating a scene from what has happened in her family the night before, or she might be creating a scene from the life of a movie star. She might even be acting out what she "sees" in the present as her future. No matter what she might be doing, her imagination is making her experience what is no longer present. A simple case like that of a child playing involves all the operational steps of the creative process. As she plays with her dolls, the child is experiencing her own created space through her use of imagery. She imagines rooms in detail as she places her doll in a doll
house. She is going through a process of making, or "mental positioning." I think we all go through this process of making in everyday life to a great extent. Even when we watch T.V. we are putting ourselves into the space of that talking box through the images we see. Since making of buildings involves the manipulation of man's environment, I understand that it is dangerous to assume all these processes are the same as that can be used for the design process, but there is certainly some other yet related function of them.

I will have finished my thesis study upon the completion of this book, my journey in search of my design process has only begun. Throughout the year, I have been drawing upon imagery, perception, and memory in order to reclaim the keen mind's eye of a child. I have been trying to gain a better understanding of how my mind works. And in this process of discovery, I believe I have raised more questions than I have answered. But I believe that if I can discipline myself to keep searching for my design process, someday I can make a building as a utilitarian artifact, which also implies something beyond utility.
Paintings
Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the many indescribable moments and my many encounters with people which make my life worth living. Many people made my thesis and this book possible. The advice and criticism I received throughout the year from Professor Art Schaller are always valuable and encouraging. As well, I am grateful to those people who helped me with my blossoming thesis study in very specific ways: To Sheri Daniel for offering pertinent suggestions throughout the year. To Nina Marshall for helping me explore my thesis by means of oil paintings. To Mrs. Melinda Adams who helped me with my English and also shared her opinions, I am grateful beyond my ability to express it.

Special thanks are due to my friends: Robert Miller who gave me moral support as my best roommate; To Mablel Adcock for giving me her great dessert recipe; Margaret Cole, Charity Stewart, Angela Knoble, Gregg Clawson, April Hensley, and all my other unnamed friends who helped me get through school, my thanks to all of you.

Finally, I am especially grateful to my parents who supported me throughout my school years and gave me so many wonderful memories which made my thesis possible. It was Ritsuko Sakuma who took me to the Vesta Coffee House" which inspired my thesis; In everything, she is inspiration and support, and to her I dedicate this book.

Kunihiiko Matsui
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