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This book is no thesis.

Much of the work I did during my thesis year is in here of course. There are drawings and writings showing evidence of my design thinking over the last nine months. But according to the dictionary a thesis is a proposition put forth and supported. I have none. If anything I am more distrustful of any philosophy or position, my own included, than before I started.

It would be wonderful if I could claim that I had been trying to prove some anti-philosophy philosophy all along. But I can’t. I was even working with an actual big league philosophy, Taoism. I had a bibliography, summaries of prior research, and a statement of intent. When I went back to reread it recently it sounded more like a position paper than any kind of design intention.

I might still have had a workable thesis if I had demonstrated that Taoism had no place in architectural design. But I didn’t. It is the very notion of applying any outside idea to architecture that seems in doubt. I feel more perplexed, less certain, and stronger than ever before. I no longer feel capable of even accurately defining the problems, much less solving them. But I also no longer feel the need to reduce life to problems and solutions.

So having said that, the work is left alone. Whether or not I’m comfortable with letting it stand alone, that is what it must do. This really is not even a book, that seems to imply having set down with some big intentions, which I did not do. What follows is really more of an accumulation, thoughts and ideas that occurred to me over the last three quarters.

The drawings and writings are not precisely chronological and are certainly not complete. The text should not be read as explaining an adjacent drawing. Both are simply snapshots of work that seemed important to me.
Supposedly we start with man as the measure.
More often it is the bubble diagram and the plan. 
Great buildings rise from these bubbles
That’s okay
But how about starting with two columns
and the space between them
Maybe just how the sun shines on a wall
Or just the wall
Or the sun
Just a quiet place
One step away from the center
A soft chair
Place for my coffee cup
Morning light to shine in her hair
With a sunny corner to start a day.

What else is needed.

places of sanctuary, quiet, protected.

but also, places of commotion, activity, hustle and noise.

passages from one to another, so one can find their place.
I’m no Taoist
Certainly not Chinese
Hopelessly American
I eat junk food and watch bad TV
Ignore things important
Get shrill about things not
Architecture especially

But those old Chinese are whispering to me
About how things are done
Anything that matters
First and last you cut away the crap
Leave what matters
And walk away
The connection I see between Tao and Architecture
is reductivism
Doing away with the excess so the essence stands free

Life gets filled with the banal and the trivial
Our architecture concerned manipulations and arrangements
What seems to matter is mannerism and metaphors
Layers of "meaning" stacked one on the other
We call it richness

But wasn't there something back at the start
when a wall and a column held a roof
When a place that was not before
was
Became real

No references, no metaphors, no analogies
A particular place that wasn't
Is
Sometimes it seems to me that the greatest problem in trying to create a building in touch with the rest of the world is the very notion of building itself. We are so conditioned to being inside a building that we think in that mode even when we are undeniably outside of it. One part is outside, the other part is in.

By rejecting the notion of a building, the intent is to sever notions of inside and outside. In the hallways of this house one is undeniably not out of doors, but the constant parade of distinct places passing by (buildings if you will) gives the distinct feel of being outside looking in even as some of the places turn out to be exposed to the environment.
I don’t think it is a matter of pure form
or the orders of history
mannerist games
or the mechanics of structure
But something more than that
No
Something less
Primal
Decide what its really all about
It's about making a place for people in the world
The people part sounds like Chris Alexander
or some socio-architect
but that's not the point
The point is the world
It is a matter of the sun and sky.
The dirt beneath our feet and growing green things.
Our world.
But just as much it is a matter of brick and mortar,
steel and glass.
As Plato said we are not beasts of the field,
we are human.
Wanting and needing to dominate and control.

It is what is best and what is worst in us.
At our best we shape a part of our world,
making what is out of what was not.
With roofs and walls we shape a place uniquely human.

A place from where we can understand the rest.
Humanity is not at the center of the world
But you should be at the center of yours
unashamedly

The world will carry on without us
without you
Should the apocalypse rain down from our sky
the cosmos will be unshaken
the world itself will heal in time past comprehension

So if you see yourself at the center
you'll be wrong
But the world will recover
And you might start to feel things matter
The lace work of frost on a winters window
a warm wash of morning sun

They matter because they are the metre and rhyme
that make poetry of your world

So then you
not them or they
but you
through no sense of duty or honor
only loving this unique and beautiful world that is yours

Will never allow a destruction or casual harm
to happen on your world
All orders Intertwine

None supreme
none extraneous

As we are of the earth
the earth is of us
I think about architecture
about drawing
and what they mean to building

There is a suspicion I have
that a Taoist architect
is a carpenter with a bag of nails and a saw
Absolute order means little to me
Anarchy even less

But an order that's on the ropes
now that's alive

Has the system fallen apart
is it going to
Or does it speak of something beyond our comprehension
One must be disinterested, accept that a sound is a sound and a man is man, give up illusions about ideas of order, expressions of sentiment, and all the rest of our inherited aesthetic claptrap.

The highest purpose is to have no purpose at all. This puts one in accord with nature, in her manner of operation.

Everyone is in the best seat.

Everything we do is music.

Theatre takes place all the time, wherever one is. And art simply facilitates persuading one this is the case.

They [I Ching] told me to continue what I was doing and to spread joy and revolution.

John Cage
(musician)
Order is
Order is as order does

Only the unsayable is really worth saying
And all that jazz
I like this room.
My hearts unmoved by the world's drift.
I sit facing the tree outside:
West: north: east the shadow shifts.

Anonymous Chinese author
How should we spend our few days of life.

As undeniably mortal beings isn’t that what we are really asking about when we dedicate expensive resources and our precious little time to building something.

Insuring our survival, solving the problem if you will, requires so little. Gaining comfort is such a miniscule goal, who among us could honestly say they would choose to be comfortable for a day instead of cold and hungry for a year.

Life itself is all that is precious, nothing else. Luxury can easily be discarded if the alternative is being more alive. So the act of building speaks of life, indeed it could say nothing else, but what does it say. Function and purpose? These speak of brushing your teeth and TV dinners. Can a building not speak of poetry.

Shouldn’t every place that is constructed at the expense of months and years of people’s lives cause us to pause; make us suck in our breath in wonder and see that we are not merely living. But alive.
Sometimes I feel like I'm falling backwards. The more I try to understand the less I know. I've been trying so hard to have all those pieces I do mean something. And they all seem to mean so little. I finally did a model out of spite. An artifact. No meaning given, none intended. Shallow, superficial, and skin deep.

It is probably one of the best pieces I've done. It has some of the notions of light and mass that I wanted to explore earlier, but there is no philosophy to it at all. A given piece went here because it fit better than it did over there. Pure reaction.
A while ago I wrote that I imagined the ancient Chinese whispering to me, "cut away the crap and leave what matters"

But I didn't understand, I was thinking of old orders and fake wood. Post this and neo that. All the architectural frills that cover a design with empty calories. That wasn't it though, being beneath contempt it wasn't worthy of their comment.

The crap was life.

Of course architecture is about life, but not the layers of culture that we lay over our lives. It's about drama or philosophy. It's not frozen music.

Architecture speaks of something totally apart from these other arts, yet so deep it can't easily be seen apart from the rest of our existence.

After we strip away the theory, philosophy, memory, and emotion what is left is a place to be.
The problem with talking about architecture is one of expressing the sub verbal levels of experience. A person in space in time. Not abstract space or relative time, but here and now. That sun is not 93 million miles away, it is brushing my cheek right here where I stand.

To talk about architecture is to twist reason into making sense of the irrational.
What is architecture
It is all the things people claim it to be
It is the mean little shops on the strip
It is elegant engineering and fine craftsmanship
It is the poetry some seek

What is writing, literature
It is the office memo
It is the newspaper article
It is poetry

Stories can be told
Traditions passed on
It can explain our lives

Then someone like Faulkner
Makes it even larger
If not larger than life
then at least so large
that life must expand to contain it

That is what architecture could be
Architecture should not deal with reality

It should expand it
We have no art.
We do everything
as well as we can

Margret Mead quoting the Balinese